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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 13:15]

World Day Against the Death Penalty

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The first item of business is a members' business debate on a motion in the name of Bill Kidd, on world day against the death penalty. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. Before Mr Kidd rises, I note that I anticipate that seven other members will speak in the debate. We must conclude by 2 o'clock, so I am afraid that speeches in the open debate must be no longer than four minutes.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises World Day Against the Death Penalty 2019 on 10 October; considers that the death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights; notes that Amnesty International's most recent annual report on the death penalty recorded at least 690 executions in 20 countries in 2018, a decrease of 31% compared with 2017, which is the lowest number of executions recorded by Amnesty International in the last decade; further notes that most executions took place in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam in that order; welcomes news that Amnesty International's overall assessment of the use of the death penalty in 2018 indicates that the global trend is towards its abolition, despite regressive steps from a small number of countries; notes the statement from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in October 2018 calling for all nations to abolish the practice of executions, and stands against the death penalty in all circumstances.

13:15

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank my colleagues who will contribute to the debate and the Minister for Older People and Equalities, Christina McKelvie, who will respond on behalf of the Scottish Government.

World day against the death penalty was marked on 10 October 2019. We were unable to hold the debate on that date, unfortunately, but I am pleased to bring it to the chamber today.

World day against the death penalty was launched in 2003 by the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, in which many international human rights groups are represented. It was founded to strengthen the international fight against the death penalty and has the goal of abolition. I am glad that members are here today to add their voices and thoughts to that ambition.

Although many strides have been taken since the United Nation's adoption of the universal human rights charter, the fundamental right to life still has to be fought for around the world.

Out of the 193 member states of the United Nations and 198 countries in the world, 142 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice, including 106 states that have abolished the death penalty for all crimes. Eight countries have now abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes only, with exceptions for crimes that are committed in times of war. Twenty-eight countries could be considered abolitionist in practice, having not held an execution for the past 10 years—they are believed to have a policy or established practice of not carrying out executions.

The work of Amnesty International should be highlighted in today's debate. Aside from its political advocacy, the organisation's efforts in international record keeping ensures that states are kept accountable and that debates such as this are grounded in facts. Amnesty's records show that 56 countries use the death penalty.

Organisations such as Amnesty are essential to the functioning of democracies around the world, as they are key in keeping institutions accountable, which is the height of importance for issues such as the death penalty and the operation of justice systems.

In the past year, 20 countries have carried out executions. In 2018, the top five countries for the number of executions were China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Iraq. In that period, 690 verifiable executions were recorded. That figure excludes cases that Amnesty could not confirm, but the organisation estimates that the number of executions in China in 2018 was in the thousands. China does not release any figures on executions, as figures pertaining to the death penalty remain a state secret.

It is clear from the figures that the death penalty is still widely used as a punishment around the world. It is used not only for capital crimes, such as murder and terrorism, but for other purposes, such as discrimination and the suppression of political opinion and groups of people, as well as the suppression of individuals on the grounds of their sexuality, religious belief, race or ethnicity, or their advocacy of human rights or, specifically, women's rights.

The death penalty also disproportionately affects members of vulnerable groups who cannot afford experienced defence attorneys to advocate on their behalf.

There are cases of children being given the death penalty, which is particularly abhorrent. To be clear, the use of the death penalty against juvenile offenders is against international law. The

1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1969 American convention on human rights and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child all ossify that. However, Amnesty understands that, currently, there are juvenile offenders who are under sentence of death in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and South Sudan. In addition, in 2018, Iran executed at least seven people, and South Sudan at least one person, for crimes that were committed while they were under the age of 18. This year, Iran executed two 17-year-old cousins, Mehdi and Amin. Both were arrested at the age of 15 and went through what might be considered an unfair trial.

Whether in the name of the people or in the name of the regime, the taking of life by the state is the ultimate abuse of human rights.

According to Amnesty International, China is the world's most prolific executioner and, as I said, the real number of state executions in 2018 could be thousands higher than the confirmed number of 690. Although China is estimated to have executed thousands last year, there is no exact figure.

Right now, we are seeing a battle for democracy and the independence of judicial system in Hong Kong. We are also seeing many news reports of the mistreatment of different ethnicities in the west of China, notably the Uyghur people. Credible estimates suggest that 1 million Uyghur people are being held in camps. Human rights activists continually disappear and religious belief is suppressed. For example, in China, Christianity has grown from 3 million believers in the 1980s to an estimated 100 million in 2018. Despite that, Human Rights Watch reports that the Chinese Government crackdown on churches has intensified in Henan province from 2018 to 2019, with authorities demolishing dozens of church buildings and crosses, preventing gatherings in house churches and confiscating Bibles.

In all those cases of human rights abuses, there is great cause for concern and an international response to the political suppression, disappearances of individuals and executions that are taking place.

In times such as these, and as we recognise world death penalty day, it is clear that the role of human rights organisations such as Amnesty International UK is essential to the functioning of any democracy.

I ask my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament to join Amnesty International in calling on states to abolish the death penalty and to uphold human rights across the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Eight members want to speak so we are up against the wire.

Members must understand that they can speak for four minutes only.

13:22

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The death penalty is cruel, inhumane, degrading and a violation of human rights.

I thank my colleague Bill Kidd for bringing this important debate to the chamber and for all the work that he does for peace and justice.

I am also grateful to organisations around the world that are fighting every day for change. I would like to give a special mention to Reprieve, which I had the pleasure of meeting at the beginning of the month. Combined with public pressure, its work on the front line and in investigating cases, tracking down evidence and witnesses and taking court action works. It has had an enormous impact and has saved more than 400 prisoners who were facing the death sentence.

Every day, people are put to death in countries around the world. The so-called crimes that are punished by execution can include homosexuality, adultery and blasphemy.

We could have a whole other debate on blasphemy, but I want to acknowledge that, even though the blasphemy laws are not used in modern Scotland, I support the calls from the international movement to end all blasphemy laws around the world, including in Scotland.

Every single day, people are put to death in countries around the world. In Pakistan, hundreds have been hanged, including young people and those who are mentally ill. In Egypt, activists and journalists face death sentences, and of course in the USA—that great friend of Britain's—there are states that use untested combinations of misused medicines to kill prisoners, while passing secrecy laws to hide their tracks. That is cruel, inhumane, degrading and a violation of human rights.

Authoritarian regimes regularly use the death penalty to silence those who dare to oppose them, and I want to provide a snapshot of one of them. For more than a decade, Saudi Arabia has had the dishonour of being one of the five worst executing countries in the world. With more than 300 people put to death in the past two years, there are no signs that the situation is getting any better.

Convictions in Saudi Arabia death penalty cases often rely on confessions—false confessions that are coerced through torture. Those sentenced to death then suffer the further indignity of being executed in public. Execution methods in Saudi Arabia include beheading, stoning and crucifixion. That is cruel, inhumane, degrading and a violation of human rights.

Reprieve has raised concerns that United Kingdom funding and training for Saudi security bodies could be contributing to human rights abuses, including the death penalty. According to Reprieve, British police have trained their Saudi counterparts in investigation techniques that could lead to the arrest, torture and sentencing to death of protesters. My understanding is that concerns have been raised that the proper safeguards are not being taken in those projects. It would be helpful if, when she sums up the debate, the minister could confirm whether, in any situation globally, Police Scotland is sharing its expertise on proper safeguards being in place. After all, one of the values that is expressed by our Scottish force is to ensure that its

“actions and policing operations respect the human rights of all peoples and officers”.

Sadly, that value is not yet universal globally.

13:25

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to recognise world day against the death penalty and thank Bill Kidd for bringing the debate to the chamber.

In 1950, the European convention on human rights was adopted by the Council of Europe. The convention established that members would commit to a certain standard of behaviour and the protection of basic rights and freedoms for all people, regardless of race, sex, nationality or any other identifier. Those rights embody our society’s key values, such as fairness, dignity, equality and respect. Our human rights are a means of protection for us all, but especially for those who are discriminated against and abused. Those rights enable us to speak up and to change our society for the better.

The right to life is one of the many fundamental human rights that are set out in the convention. It is our most prized and dearly protected right, and one that cannot be taken lightly in any circumstance.

As a ratifying member of the convention on human rights, the UK has made a legal commitment to abide by the standards that are set out in the convention. It is our duty to ensure that the rights of all our citizens are respected and protected. The UK’s elimination of capital punishment protects the human rights not only of Scots, but of all who live in and visit Scotland. No matter the nationality of an offender in our nation, they are given a guarantee that their human rights will not be infringed by our judicial system.

Unfortunately, Scots are not afforded the same protection of their human rights while abroad. For example, in 2017, Amnesty International reported that there were 25 British nationals on death row

across the world. In many such cases, both past and present, the British Government does what it can to intervene on behalf of its citizens. The British Government not only provides legal counsel, but makes direct pleas for clemency on behalf of nationals on death row. However, such measures do not ensure that the sentence will be commuted by the detaining country, as the ultimate decision is out of the UK’s hands. Elimination of the death penalty by all countries would ensure that there no longer needs to be that narrative. Scots would be assured of their claim to that fundamental human right without the need for Government intervention.

I do not believe that we can have such a small, centred perspective and that we should focus only on Scottish human rights. We are part of a global community and therefore we should be aware of, and do our part to protect, human rights on a global scale.

Amnesty International reported that there have been 20 known executing countries in the past 10 years. The 20 countries that still use the death penalty represent a small proportion of the 195 countries that are recognised by the UN, which is welcome news. Unfortunately, that is not the whole story. Those 20 countries have an impact on a staggering number of individuals and their rights—their total combined population makes up approximately 35 per cent of the world’s population. That means that 35 per cent of people still face the possibility of a state-endorsed violation of their fundamental human rights. They are subject to the reality that the death penalty is possible even for minor crimes, and they are confronted with the irrevocable nature of the death penalty and its subsequent abuse.

We are privileged to live in a country in which that is not our daily reality. Our fundamental human rights, and the fairness, dignity and equality that they embody, are fully protected. Much has been done to ensure that other countries allow their citizens the same level of respect and protection, but there is still much to do. I hope that we can do our part to help make their reality a better and brighter one.

13:29

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): As other members have done, I congratulate Bill Kidd on securing this important debate on the pressing issue of human rights. I also thank my intern, Claire, who joined me last week, whom I asked to look at the subject and write my speaking notes for me.

Despite Scotland being at the forefront of the movement to abolish the death penalty, we should not forget that it was practised in our country until

relatively recently. The last execution on Scottish soil was that of Henry John Burnett in 1963, and—as was just referred to—it took until 1998 for the death penalty to be fully abolished under the European convention on human rights. Although we can be proud that injustice of that kind no longer occurs in Scotland, we must not fall into complacency, as we are not yet all free from the threat of the death penalty.

Opposition to the death penalty is based not only on the fact that it is a denial of human rights, but on the fact that it sets a precedent for a more broadly vindictive society. The continued existence of capital punishment forces us to ask what sort of society we wish to live in, and what sort of society we wish to help others to live in. The utilisation of the death penalty creates an authoritarian, brutal and regressive atmosphere that seeps into every part of life.

We must aim for our democracies to set an example to countries that are not democracies of how we should value compassionate justice and choose rehabilitation over retribution. Rehabilitation is difficult if the person who needs to be rehabilitated has been executed.

Such priorities are not about being weak on crime; in fact, they better equip us to reduce it. It is no coincidence that states that still employ the death penalty have higher murder rates than those that uphold the human rights of their citizens. The argument that it provides a deterrent is simply not borne out by the evidence from countries that are—or claim to be—democracies in which the death penalty is still part of the criminal justice system.

Today's motion cites the trend towards the abolition of the death penalty. We heard that two thirds of countries have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice. The tide is turning against the death penalty, as more countries choose to reject such an outright denial and termination of human rights.

In 2018, Burkina Faso's National Assembly abolished the death penalty, making it the latest of many countries to move away from capital punishment. The European Union has been at the forefront of the fight against the death penalty; not only does it ban it in all member states, but it is the largest donor to anti-death-penalty campaigns. In 2007, it declared 10 October as European day against the death penalty. We in Scotland, and in the UK, share that commitment to protect and ensure the rights of all our citizens.

Although progress is being made every year, as many colleagues referred to, at least 20 countries carried out executions in 2018. As we look to the future, we should rightfully acknowledge, through the motion, the firm support of Scotland—of which

we, as a Parliament, are a part—for the abolition of the death penalty.

I hope that we continue to take the time to recognise world day against the death penalty. Let us continue to promote and uphold human rights around the world as we push to eliminate such a cruel punishment from existence.

13:33

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I, too, thank Bill Kidd for lodging this important motion and for achieving today's debate. The words that are inscribed on the mace that sits in this chamber are compassion, wisdom, justice and integrity. Those are the founding ideals of this Parliament; they are ideals that we all take seriously and which must be central to any debate on the death penalty.

Human rights are the foundation of our shared values of fairness, respect, equality and dignity, and they apply to everyone.

In 1948, when the United Nations unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it proclaimed every individual's right to life and stated that nobody should be subject to cruel or degrading punishment. There is no justification for respecting some of those rights but not the most fundamental, which is the right to life.

In February this year, in a message to the seventh world congress against the death penalty, Pope Francis affirmed that

“the dignity of the person is not lost even if he has committed the worst of the crimes. No one can take his life and deprive him of the opportunity to embrace again the community he hurt and made suffer”.

I believe that we must also refuse to facilitate extradition to countries that still endorse capital punishment.

Supporters of the death penalty often talk about it in an abstract way, but we should never forget that it is state-authorised killing. The methods—beheading, electrocution, hanging, lethal injection of chemicals or shooting—are barbaric, and the weight of the death penalty is carried disproportionately by the poor and by racial, ethnic or religious minorities, who are often denied proper legal representation.

The unseen victims—children whose parents have been sentenced to death or executed—were rightly highlighted in the world day against the death penalty this year. The notion that actions relating to children must be in

“the best interests of the child”

is now enshrined in various human rights conventions, and that must also be considered.

Politicians and others who support capital punishment often fail to confront the real causes of crime, such as poverty and inequality. The political use of the death penalty is common in countries in which members of the judiciary may be elected. As such, they adopt hard-line positions to win votes.

Our argument against the death penalty must be part of the conversation about how we propose to make communities safe while respecting the human rights of all. Justice should be available for all, regardless of economic status. Unless Governments are willing to allocate proper resources to fight poverty and inequality, our communities will never be safe. Prisons are often ineffective in rehabilitating, and reoffending rates are high.

Here at home, our judicial system continues to imprison vulnerable women, as opposed to society investing in the services that are needed to provide an alternative.

I go back to why the death penalty should never again have a place in our justice system. It is irrevocable, and no court system in the world has not been guilty of terrible miscarriages of justice. We all know the long list of such miscarriages of justice in our own country—the Guildford four and the Birmingham six come to mind. As Stewart Stevenson said, there is no evidence that capital punishment works as a deterrent.

The debate has provided a welcome opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to add its voice to the voices of all those who spoke out so clearly on the world day against the death penalty on 10 October. Once again, I thank Bill Kidd for lodging the motion.

13:38

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Bill Kidd on securing the debate.

Like other members who have spoken, I strongly oppose the death penalty. That is because I believe that no one has the right to take a human life.

It is a grim thought that in 2019, every four hours, people around the world are executed. That includes innocent people such as political activists, journalists, human rights lawyers and gay people. In some theocratic regimes, conducting an extramarital relationship can result in execution.

The figure also includes people who have been convicted of serious crimes. In many cases, the justice and penal systems under which they were convicted and imprisoned can be deeply flawed and inhumane, and sometimes such people wait for a long time for the awful sentence to be carried out. International law now recognises that the

mental trauma from impending death and lengthy incarceration causes mental health deterioration—that is known as the death row phenomenon. Developing international jurisprudence says that that in itself constitutes cruel, inhumane or degrading punishment, which is prohibited by international law under article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that the death penalty can be used only in very restricted circumstances. That has provided a framework for some countries to move away from mandatory executions to giving individualised consideration to a convicted person's character record and circumstances.

However, it is clear that individualised consideration is compromised for many people who have a mental illness or an intellectual disability. Customary international law prohibits the execution of mentally ill people and people with severe intellectual disabilities, and the UN Commission on Human Rights has adopted several resolutions that urge all states not to execute any such person, but some countries continue to convict them. Why should they not do so? Mentally ill people and people with intellectual disabilities are much more likely to confess to crimes that they did not commit. Such defendants are much less likely to be able to meaningfully assist their lawyers and are more likely to be poor, to present as hostile and to be perceived as lacking in remorse. Crucially, there is little data to tell us how many such people are executed globally, because of the dearth of qualified mental health professionals in executing countries. Individuals are not assessed properly in those penal systems, and mental illness and intellectual disabilities are not documented.

Such spectacular systemic prejudice against people with mental illness or intellectual disabilities in executing countries must be amplified in the debate, particularly given that recent analysis shows that there has been an increase in the use of the death penalty around the world. In 2018, four executions took place in Belarus, which were the first executions in the region since 2005. The number of executions has tripled in Japan, and there has been an overall increase across the Asian Pacific region. In Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, there has been an 89 per cent increase in the number of executions, and federal executions in the US resumed in 2019.

Here in Scotland, the death penalty was abolished in 1969, but there is no room for complacency. A 2019 poll revealed that 41 per cent of Scots favour the reintroduction of the death penalty, and there has been a rise in pro-death penalty support in the UK since the EU referendum in 2016, which is extremely worrying.

The death penalty is cruel, inhuman, degrading and a violation of the inherent right to life. In my view, it is wrong, per se, which is why I am very pleased to have spoken in the debate and that Bill Kidd secured it.

13:42

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):

I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests in relation to my long-standing membership of Amnesty International.

I join others in congratulating Bill Kidd on securing the motion. I do not think that anything has been lost by the fact that the debate did not take place on the day for which it was scheduled, because many communities around the world face the trauma of the death penalty every day.

Bill Kidd's work on promoting nuclear disarmament and peace has been mentioned. The word "deterrence" is often used. Stewart Stevenson talked about effectiveness, and we know that having nuclear weapons is not a deterrence against terrorist acts, just as we know that a state that sanctions violence against its citizens is likely to face high levels of violence.

In the brief time that I have, I will focus on young people. The use of the death penalty for crimes that are committed by people who are younger than 18 is prohibited under international law, yet it takes place. Setting aside the abhorrent act itself, its significance goes beyond the number of deaths, and we must call into question the respect for international law of states that use the death penalty.

I am grateful to Amnesty International for its briefing. Since 1990, Amnesty International has documented 145 executions of children in 10 countries—China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Sudan, the USA and Yemen. Several of those countries have now changed their laws in that regard.

Recently, I saw someone post on Facebook about the celebrated case of George Junius Stinney Jnr, with which some people will be familiar. He was a boy whose conviction was overturned 70 years after he was fried in a chair, holding a Bible. I have been described as a man with no faith, in that I do not adhere to any organised religion. However, I struggle to accept that there is any theological basis for taking someone's life. During my childhood, I was brought up in a household that was religious, and it strikes me as important that two wrongs do not make a right.

Of course there is an obligation to provide public protection but, as others have said, the people

who have found themselves vulnerable in countries with the death penalty are from very select and much-maligned groups of people. The young man to whom I referred was a black boy who was wrongly convicted of killing two young white girls in a state in America. I think that we can all reasonably safely say that, had the background of the individuals been changed, it is unlikely that a white child would have received the death penalty. "Deterrence" is not an appropriate word to use. Often, as others have said, capital punishment has been carried out as a result of a lack of legal representation because people have not been best placed to inform their legal advisers, and often torture has brought about false confessions.

What can we do about it? We must send a clear signal about the kind of society that we want, and there have been some excellent contributions here. I know that when she speaks, the Minister for Older People and Equalities will not say, "This is not anything to do with us; it is international affairs," because on previous occasions, the Scottish Government has made representations to countries where there have been significant human rights abuses. That is one way that we can do it. Of course, we can lead by example, as Maurice Corry said, and do our very best to provide the very highest standard of human rights on the planet.

13:46

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank Bill Kidd for initiating this debate. I will state clearly that I unreservedly endorse Amnesty International's statement that it opposes

"the death penalty in all cases without exception regardless of the nature of the crime".

I note from its briefing that Amnesty has found it difficult in several countries to get actual numbers of death sentences that have been carried out.

I also condemn countries including North Korea, where, it is understood, prisoners are intentionally worked or starved to death, and China, where there is evidence of organ harvesting—prisoners being deliberately killed for their organs.

I endorse members' comments that capital punishment does not work and is, of course, irreversible. However, I will take a slightly different direction from others by making some comments from a faith perspective. A number of faiths have scriptures that appear to support the death penalty for certain crimes—Christianity, Judaism and Islam among them. However, on closer examination, we see that the Christian faith has both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The former, which is similar to Jewish scripture, includes provision for the death penalty. However,

when Jesus was questioned about some of those Old Testament teachings, he said that they had been allowed because of our hardness of heart, and that he now expected a higher standard. He taught that we should be ready to forgive our enemies, including people who have done terrible things to us. Following that kind of teaching, even some survivors of the Holocaust were able to forgive their prison guards and persecutors. Many of us would find that hard to comprehend.

We often hear people say that all that they want is justice. However, that can easily slip into wanting revenge, such as, "I lost my child through murder, so that family should lose theirs, too." That attitude is, in many ways, understandable, but we do not want our justice system to be like that.

Another angle of Christian teaching is that people can change. In the Bible, we read of Paul, who had been heavily involved in persecuting Christians, who happened also to be Jews. at that time. God met him and changed his whole perspective: he confessed his sin, sought forgiveness and was given new life. At that point, he had metaphorically died from his old life and had been presented with a new one as a free gift.

That is a key reason why I am opposed to the death penalty. Even if someone is hugely evil and has carried out murder or other horrendous crimes, they can change. If we end their life as a punishment—it can be argued that they might deserve that—we remove the opportunity for them to change.

I welcome today's debate. I deplore use of the death penalty and hope that we will see a continuing reduction in its use throughout the world.

13:49

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I thank Bill Kidd for this important debate. The notion that someone who has taken a life deserves the loss of their own life might seem to be a fair balance of justice. However, over my lifetime—from the time of capital punishment to there being no death penalty for murder—I have witnessed miscarriages of justice that have proved to be the opposite of quid pro quo.

One of the most harrowing cases that shatters the myth of fair justice is that of Stefan Kiszko, who was arrested and found guilty of the rape and murder of a 12-year-old child. Mr Kiszko was 23 when that crime was carried out. I well remember the case and the fact that, like many other people, I was mighty relieved that the courts jailed Mr Kiszko for that particularly horrendous crime.

Seventeen years later, Mr Kiszko was taken from prison to hospital with a fairly serious illness that required him to undergo a full and thorough examination. Mr Kiszko had been convicted mainly on the basis that his sperm had been left on the victim's clothing. However, the medical examination discovered that Mr Kiszko, due to his lack of male paraphernalia, did not have, and had never had, the capacity to rape somebody or to produce any sperm. When he was charged, he was aged 23, with the mental and emotional age of a 12-year-old. Had the death penalty been available, that totally innocent person, who in real terms was a child, would have been executed and no one would have been any the wiser. He would have gone.

Mr Kiszko was released when he was 43. Only two people had been convinced that he was innocent—his mother and his lawyer, both of whom had stood by him throughout, right to the end. If anyone still believes in the death sentence after being made aware of that case, I feel only sorrow for them. Unfortunately, Mr Kiszko died 18 months after being released, and was quickly followed by his mother, so neither of them got the benefit of the £500,000 that the state paid because of its errors.

Use of the death sentence had ended just seven years prior to that murder case. Throughout the country, there was much pressure to bring back the death sentence, based on that single case. If Mr Kiszko had been executed, the state would have murdered a completely innocent person who, in real terms, was a child.

As they say in court, I rest my case.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank members for keeping to their time. I call Christina McKelvie to close the debate. You have until 2 o'clock, minister.

13:52

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): I thank Bill Kidd for bringing the motion to Parliament for debate. I know that the debate was originally to have taken place on 10 October and was delayed. However, every day is a day to focus our attention on the issue, so we are right to debate it today. I thank Bill Kidd for all his work to raise awareness not just of this issue but of all the other issues on which he has mentored me and been an inspiration to me.

The Scottish Government strongly opposes the death penalty in all circumstances, as a matter of fundamental principle. I say that at the outset in order to make our Government's position absolutely clear. The death penalty is barbaric and inhumane, and is a grievous violation of human rights. Treatment before and during execution in

itself amounts to inhumane and degrading treatment. Joan McAlpine raised the issue of the impact on people who are waiting on death row, which is the usual term that is used.

There is clear evidence from around the world that the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society are disproportionately affected by the death penalty. Bill Kidd, Ruth Maguire, Alex Rowley and Joan McAlpine all highlighted that, but it was most powerfully highlighted in the testimony that we just heard from Gil Paterson, in his words about Stefan Kiszko. We should never forget that name when we talk about the push in some places to bring back the death penalty.

The rights to life and to freedom from torture are protected by the European convention on human rights, under EU law, and by United Nations treaties. The Scottish Government calls on all states to follow the lead of the UK, the EU, the Council of Europe and Scotland. It is time to outlaw the death penalty in every situation.

Many members have highlighted the important work of Amnesty International. In a report that it published in April, it confirmed that, in 2018, 690 executions took place across 20 countries. We are not sure whether that is the real number, but it is the number that Amnesty could get. It is the lowest number that Amnesty has recorded in the past decade, and although we welcome that progress, it is still 690 too many. Sadly, some countries have increased their use of the death penalty, and the number of death sentences remains almost the same as it was in the previous year.

We heard powerful testimony from Bill Kidd about the propensity of some countries to continue child executions, and about the impact on everyone involved.

Nevertheless, campaigning by human rights organisations is making a difference. In 1977, when Amnesty started its work, only 16 countries had totally abolished the death penalty. Now, 106 countries—more than half the world's countries—have abolished it completely and more than two-thirds are either abolitionist in law or have not carried out an execution in the past 10 years. We should highlight that progress, while remaining mindful that there is always more work to do.

The rights to life and to freedom from torture and from inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment are bare minimums that we should expect from every country. The abolition of gross human rights abuses such as the death penalty establishes a basic threshold of decency, as we have heard from members, but such action is a bare minimum.

Stewart Stevenson and Alex Rowley said that compassion should be paramount in everything that we do in our justice system. Everyone has a

right to live, certainly, but more than that, everyone has a right to live with dignity. That broad approach is shared by the UN's Committee Against Torture, whose remit goes beyond a narrow focus on conditions in detention to include violence against women and girls, human trafficking and hate crime—areas in which the Scottish Government is taking decisive and world-leading action.

The right to live with dignity means the full realisation of all human rights for all people, equally—not just in Scotland, but across all nations. Alex Rowley reminded us of the words of Pope Francis. Dignity is important in everything that we do.

Members will be aware that the Scottish Government has established a national task force for human rights leadership, of which I am delighted to be a member. We met for the first time just last month and agreed our remit to develop legislation for a human rights framework for Scotland, which will bring internationally recognised human rights into our domestic law. That work really is about leadership. It is about demonstrating that Scotland not only meets its own obligations, but helps to set international standards from which everyone can benefit. I hope that the co-ordinated approach will make a difference.

I reassure John Finnie that our progress towards incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as his valuable and welcome work on the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Bill, which will soon become an act, send a clear message to the rest of the world that we are a global leader.

Ruth Maguire made an important point about police training, specifically in Saudi Arabia. Police Scotland's international activity supports building mutually beneficial partnerships with law enforcement agencies overseas. The training that Ruth Maguire spoke about occurred in 2011, in Scotland, and focused solely on advanced driver and road policing forensic-investigator training programmes. Such activity is in line with the Scottish Government's international framework, which talks about Scotland

“sharing our knowledge, skills and technical expertise for global good”.

I reassure her that the Scottish Government, as a good global citizen, is committed to securing democracy, the rule of law and human rights across the world.

We expect Police Scotland to carry out due diligence as a matter of course, and to exercise sound judgment in its overseas dealings. The Scottish Government ensures that due diligence has been carried out to assess the human rights

credentials of the individuals, organisations or Governments overseas with whom we engage, and we expect other public bodies to take similar account of human rights considerations.

All overseas training that Police Scotland provides undergoes a human rights risk assessment, and Police Scotland ensures that ethics, values, equality and human rights are interwoven throughout all training. We take work into countries that maybe need to hear explanations, in that regard. Police Scotland has not conducted any police training in Saudi Arabia and has no plans to deliver any police training in Saudi Arabia. I hope that that reassures Ruth Maguire.

I will close, Presiding Officer, and meet your deadline on point. The Scottish Government encourages all states to join the general trend towards moratoriums on executions. Indeed, we call on all states to take action within their jurisdictions to entirely abolish the death penalty for any reason.

The debate has provided an important opportunity to record the Scottish Parliament's views and its condemnation of any and every use of the death penalty. Let us all add our voices to the international campaign to end that barbaric punishment and to outlaw its use in every circumstance and in every nation of the world.

Portfolio Question Time

Finance, Economy and Fair Work

United Kingdom Budget (Cancellation)

14:00

1. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the UK Government regarding the impact on Scotland of the cancellation of the 2019 UK budget. (S5O-03703)

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): The Scottish Government learned about the cancellation of the United Kingdom budget through the media. The calling of a general election means that a new UK budget date will not be known until December at the earliest.

Without the UK tax announcements and the tax, social security and economic forecasts that are produced for a UK budget, we will not have clarity on the funding available for public services in Scotland in 2020-21. The delay and uncertainty unreasonably constrain our ability to plan future spending and the associated time for parliamentary scrutiny.

Gil Paterson: Although the UK Government departments, as a result of the October spending round, have been given certainty on their budgets for next year, the Scottish Government, along with its counterpart in Wales, still lacks the certainty that it requires in order to set its budget. What can the minister do in that regard? It is not just custom and practice that have been abandoned; the Tories have compromised the basis of funding Scotland's public services and setting out the Government's tax plans and have damaged this Parliament's ability to scrutinise tax and spending plans ahead of the new tax year.

Kate Forbes: Gil Paterson is right. The UK Government has compromised the ability of the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament to deliver certainty for public spending next year. The UK block grant adjustment counts for more than 40 per cent of the Scottish fiscal resource budget. We still do not know when the UK budget will be announced. That makes it difficult to plan the timing of the Scottish budget. A later budget means less time for the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise spending plans. We all agree that that is unsatisfactory and that it is the fault of the UK Government. We will continue to do everything we can to progress the Scottish budget and protect the interests of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): I have supplementary questions from three members. The questions should not be too long.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Being a fair-minded person, the minister will be happy to acknowledge that all parties called for a December general election, with the consequence that we now see for the budget process. We do not know who will be in government after 12 December, so any spending commitments that were made up to that date might or might not be carried forward. Will she acknowledge that the Scottish National Party MPs in Westminster must take their share of responsibility for the position that we are in?

Kate Forbes: Being a fair member in return, Murdo Fraser will understand that the issue faces not just the Scottish Government but all members in the chamber who believe in scrutiny. Because the UK position has changed significantly with the announcement of the general election, the Scottish Government has to consider its approach to the budget. We will continue to engage with Parliament and the Scottish Fiscal Commission in relation to the options that are available to us.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Given the fact that, at the start of devolution, simpler budgets used to have something like four months of scrutiny, we are now in a tight, constrained process. We do not yet know whether there will be a UK budget before the next Brexit cliff-edge date at the end of January.

In that circumstance, would it be helpful for the Scottish representatives in this Parliament of the two parties that are likely to form the next UK Government to write to their Treasury counterparts and insist that their parties commit now that the UK budget will be no later than the first week of January?

Kate Forbes: Indeed: the earlier the budget is set at a UK level, the quicker we can get on and set our own budget. It is in the interests of not just the Government but all members of the Parliament to have maximum time for scrutiny. To that end, as always, if members of the two main UK parties could put pressure on their respective counterparts in Westminster to ensure that we have as much certainty as possible on when the budget is, that would be in everybody's interests.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will be aware that the delay to the Scottish budget will have a knock-on effect on other bodies such as local government and voluntary organisations. What contingencies is she putting in place to ensure that they can continue to deliver their services and that they will be adequately funded to do so?

Kate Forbes: I recognise the pressures on other bodies that depend on Scottish Government funding. We have various options available to take the budget through—we would like to do that as quickly and early as possible. It is in the interests of the Parliament that we engage as much as possible, including with the Scottish Fiscal Commission, to find the best approach in the circumstances that have been forced on us by the UK Government.

Michelin Site (Dundee)

2. Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress on the future of the Michelin site in Dundee, in light of the first anniversary of the announcement to close it in 2020. (S5O-03704)

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): Earlier today, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work attended the latest meeting of the Michelin Dundee action group, comprising Michelin and a range of national and local public sector bodies and the trade unions.

Michelin's commitment to the long-term future of the site is evident, and we are clear that the Scottish Government and its partners must at least match that. That is why we have announced a joint funding package of £60 million, together with Michelin, to deliver our shared vision for the Michelin Scotland innovation park over the next 10 years. The park will attract companies, research institutions and a highly skilled workforce. We want Scotland to lead the way in developing and manufacturing the technologies of the future, and the park will be vital in helping us achieve that.

Shona Robison: I welcome the fantastic announcement of the £60 million investment by the partners—Michelin, the Scottish Government and Dundee City Council. Will the minister join me in welcoming the launch of the new branding for the Michelin Scotland innovation park, which I attended this morning? The branding is absolutely fantastic. Will he also pay tribute to the Michelin workforce, without whom none of that could have happened? They have played a key role in securing the investment in the site.

Finally, how much has the United Kingdom Government offered to contribute towards this important project?

Jamie Hepburn: I join Shona Robison in welcoming the fact that the branding for the park is now available. We want the park to be very visible, and having some outward-facing branding is an important part of that.

I, too, pay tribute to the workforce at Michelin. They have been outstanding throughout the

process. As soon as the news about the future of the plant was announced, their clear determination was to secure a future for the site and for the city of Dundee. Working with them, that is exactly what we have been able to do.

The UK Government has not contributed any funding towards the Michelin Scotland innovation park. Derek Mackay has written to Andrea Leadsom, seeking a commitment to fund specific projects for the park, and we await a response with interest.

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): It is good to hear of those recent developments, but it is a pity that it took the loss of 800 jobs to get the Scottish Government to begin to think about those innovative opportunities.

What action has been taken to shake up Scottish Enterprise, such that the Scottish Government does not sleepwalk into losing 800 crown-jewel manufacturing jobs again?

Jamie Hepburn: What an utterly miserly response to the news that we, together with Michelin, have ensured investment of £60 million into the city of Dundee to secure the future of the Michelin site. We might think that Mr Bowman, as a member who represents North East Scotland, would welcome that news, but he has failed to do so, and I am sure that the people of Dundee will reflect on that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 was withdrawn; question 4 was not lodged.

Independence (Economic Impact)

5. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to publish an assessment of the possible economic impact on Scotland of it leaving the United Kingdom. (S5O-03707)

The Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation (Ivan McKee): In this year's programme for government, the Scottish Government committed to updating the plans that it made for an independent Scotland in advance of the 2014 referendum. Currently, the greatest threat to the Scottish economy is presented by Brexit. Last week, we published a further "Scotland's Place in Europe" paper, assessing the revised withdrawal agreement and political declaration. The paper highlights the damage that will be done to Scotland should the UK leave the European Union under the deal and underscores the importance of allowing the people of Scotland the opportunity to choose their own future.

Anas Sarwar: The Scottish Government was right to publish its economic impact assessment of Brexit, because it would damage our economy, cost jobs and cause cuts to our public services.

However, we cannot defeat chaos with more chaos. We share a border with England, we trade more with the rest of the UK than we do with the rest of the world combined, and our nations have been intertwined for 300 years.

We should not let any nationalist ideology damage the interests of Scotland; that is why I support the UK staying in the European Union and Scotland staying in the UK. If the minister genuinely believes in standing up for Scotland's interests, why does he not do the same?

Ivan McKee: I am not sure where to start with that.

As I said, the Scottish Government has committed to updating the economic impact assessment in advance of any future referendum, which is exactly what we will do. That will be very different from what was done in the UK in advance of the EU referendum, when all we had was a slogan painted on the side of a bus. The member might care to look at the work of the Sustainable Growth Commission or at the situation in which many of our small, independent neighbours in Europe find themselves. Because such nations have the ability to make their own economic decisions and decide their own futures on the basis of what is best for their economies, they have gone from strength to strength—unlike Scotland, which has suffered because it has been part of the union.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Scottish Government's website publishes the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland figures, which show that Scotland has a fiscal deficit of £12.6 billion. It describes those figures as being

"produced in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics ... free of political interference"

and providing a reasonable basis for assessing Scotland's stand-alone fiscal position. Does the minister agree with that description?

Ivan McKee: Yes, I do. However, as the member will understand, the GERS figures also reflect Scotland's current position as part of the union. He will also understand that if Scotland were given the opportunity to make its own economic decisions as an independent country, its economic position would be very different from the one that it currently suffers because it is part of the union. Further, he will be aware that the work of the Sustainable Growth Commission, which tracks Scotland's deficit reduction over time, has predicted that our deficit reduction will reduce to below the level that is required by international norms. We are currently progressing in advance of that reduction and doing better than the Sustainable Growth Commission predicted when its work was published two years ago.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie)

(SNP): Can the minister explain how it is possible for Scotland to have a deficit when we cannot borrow any money, and how, if the Government does not spend up to the limit that it has, we could then lose the right to govern this country?

Ivan McKee: As the member has correctly identified, the Scottish Government's borrowing powers are severely restricted and it has to manage within the budget that is allocated to it, which it balances on an on-going basis—unlike the UK Government, which runs up significant deficits.

As I indicated, the GERS figures reflect the notional position that Scotland would be in were all those numbers allocated to its accounts. However, as I also said, they reflect the position in which Scotland finds itself as part of the union and not the one that it would find itself in as an independent country, which, like other such countries, could make economic and fiscal decisions to suit its own economy and population.

**Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
(Financial Powers)**

6. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has made any suggestions regarding additional financial powers that it seeks during the remainder of the parliamentary session. (S5O-03708)

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): We are committed to making local taxation more progressive while improving the financial accountability of local government. We are delivering our commitments on local tax reform, which will deliver the most significant financial empowerment of local authorities since devolution. COSLA has made no specific suggestions, including in its submission to our local governance review, for additional financial powers since we made those commitments in January of this year.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the minister for that reply. COSLA has certainly made a number of suggestions to the Local Government and Communities Committee on the need for additional powers. Does the minister agree that it is incumbent on any organisation that makes representations to ministers or committees for additional funding to at least suggest where such funding should come from, saying whether it should be through transfers from other areas of the Scottish budget and, if so, how much should be transferred, or through additional taxation, in which case it should say on whom that taxation should fall and to what extent?

Kate Forbes: The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work has made it

clear to COSLA that we will consider specific proposals that it may have. We have made good progress in empowering local authorities financially in relation to a discretionary local tax on tourism, as well as the devolution to local authorities of non-domestic rates empty property relief.

However, at the end of the day, the member is quite right. It is the responsibility of all parties that request additional funding, including those in this room, to identify where else in the budget they believe it should come from and, if it would involve additional tax-raising powers, who the taxes should fall on and to what extent.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Given the existing pressures on local government, which I know the minister is aware of—they include inflation, promises and wage settlements—will she ensure that there is proper funding for new Government initiatives? For those areas in which the Scottish Government has ring fenced investment for local authorities, will she commit to that funding?

Kate Forbes: As part of our budget process this year, we will obviously engage with COSLA on the financial settlement for the coming year. Separately from that, in relation to the fiscal framework and the funding settlement, I am leading work to develop a rules-based framework for local government funding, which would be introduced in the next session of Parliament, and that work is being taken forward in partnership with COSLA.

On all matters of future funding, including for local government and particularly with the prospect of a three-year funding settlement, the UK position has changed significantly following the announcement of a general election on 12 December, and that uncertainty over our budget date flows into some of the commitments around long-term funding plans.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Patrick Harvie to make his supplementary question short.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Does the minister accept that the small, independent northern European countries that Scotland likes to compare itself to do not hoard power at the centre but give not only tax powers but powers over land value capture, energy, public transport services, housing and much else to the local level? Does she accept that the power of local government in those countries to transform communities is awesome? Why should Scotland not expect that strong, creative tier of local government, which we are so lacking at the moment?

Kate Forbes: That is why we jointly launched the local governance review with COSLA—to ensure that Scotland's diverse communities and

different places have greater control and influence over the decisions that affect them most. The reforms that we announced in January delivered the most significant financial empowerment of local authorities since devolution.

We know that there is further to go, and that is why I mentioned in my answer to the previous member that work is being done on a rules-based framework. We recognise that more control should be held at a local level and we continue to work with members in the Parliament to ensure that it is.

Scottish Growth Scheme

7. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much funding it and Scottish Enterprise have provided to companies as part of the £500 million Scottish growth scheme. (S50-03709)

The Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation (Ivan McKee): The Scottish Government is committed to unlocking private sector investment for businesses through a variety of mechanisms. The Scottish growth scheme uses public sector investment to lever the private sector and aims to unlock up to £500 million of investment for Scottish small and medium-sized enterprises. To 30 September 2019, some £160 million had been invested under the Scottish growth scheme, which has supported 262 businesses. That has been enabled through investments totalling £24.1 million from Scottish Enterprise and £3.5 million from the Scottish Government.

The current uncertainty in the economy has likely had an impact on demand for funding, with recent research indicating that firms are putting off investment as they await the outcome of Brexit.

Annie Wells: Nicola Sturgeon stood in this very chamber and said that she would deliver a £500 million vote of confidence in Scottish businesses. As we have just heard, the truth is very different. Why should anyone believe a word that this SNP Government says when it said that it would deliver £500 million but did not mean anything close to that?

Ivan McKee: I think that Annie Wells—this is surprising for a Conservative member—fails to understand what this is all about. It is about the Scottish Government using its economic power to unlock private sector investment by looking for barriers that exist in the system and supporting the removal of those blockages to unlock that private sector investment into Scottish SMEs. It is about lubricating the wheels to make the private sector do what it should and can do to support Scottish businesses.

The £500 million to be put into businesses to which the member refers is not Government

money; it includes unlocking all the private sector investment to enable that investment to go into SMEs in order to support them to grow and develop in the current situation. The current uncertainty in the economy is what is causing the lack of demand for businesses. That investment is there, and businesses that want to come forward and take advantage of the funding are very welcome to do so.

If the member is aware of any businesses that would like to do that, I ask her to encourage them to come forward. The blockage is the result not of a lack of Government support to lubricate the private sector and unlock private sector investment, but of a lack of businesses coming forward to take advantage of the offer from the Scottish Government that is on the table.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8, in the name of Gail Ross, was not lodged.

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

Non-native Invasive Species

1. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it tackles non-native invasive species. (S50-03711)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government is working with a range of partners to minimise the negative impacts that are caused by invasive non-native species in Scotland. The focus is on preventing their release and spread, and on responding quickly when necessary. There are three parts to our strategy: first, to prevent the release and spread of non-native species, focusing on areas where they can cause damage to native species and habitats and to economic interests; secondly, to ensure a rapid response to new populations of non-native species; and thirdly, to apply effective control and eradication measures where they are needed.

Finlay Carson: Yesterday, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee highlighted multiple strong concerns about progress on the Scottish Government's climate change adaptation programme. Water quality in almost half of Scottish rivers is poor and not improving, and pressures on freshwater habitats from non-native invasive species are increasing, which suggests that the current targets and actions may not be sufficient to address the rising risk. Even with excellent work that is being done by organisations such as the Galloway Fisheries Trust and the River Cree Hatchery and Habitat Trust, more needs to be done to ensure a fit-for-purpose—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Get to your question please, Mr Carson.

Finlay Carson: More needs to be done to find a model to attack the problem on a catchment basis. What is the Government doing to address the shortcomings in the current funding schemes?

Mairi Gougeon: We recognise how important it is to tackle invasive non-native species because of the threats that they pose to our biodiversity. They are estimated to cost us in the region of £250 million a year in Scotland, so it is a massive challenge. I agree that we have always to strive to do more to try to tackle invasive non-native species.

One such project that is under way in the north of Scotland is the Scottish invasive species initiative, which is a four-year project on river catchments. I went to visit the project on the South Esk in my constituency this year, and met the project manager and the project officer. To give members an idea of some of the figures involved in that project, 342 volunteers took part in it last year, 736km of giant hogweed was treated and 195 volunteers helped to monitor mink rafts. Part of the secret of tackling the issue is working with communities and volunteers and trying to encourage as much of that work as possible. We are also working with Scottish Natural Heritage to look at a more strategic approach to how we tackle invasive plant species. I would be happy to get back to the member with more detail on that.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Will exiting the European Union damage our ability to prevent invasive alien species from arriving in Scotland?

Mairi Gougeon: Invasive non-native species, by their very nature, do not respect national boundaries. That is why we aim to work collaboratively with EU countries where we can after Brexit. However, leaving the EU will limit our ability to get species on to the EU-wide lists that guarantee co-operation and collaboration with other European countries, and it will reduce our capacity to prevent the spread and establishment of species that can damage our biodiversity as well as our economy.

Shell and Forestry and Land Scotland Partnership (Carbon Credits)

2. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how many carbon credits will be generated for Shell as part of its partnership with Forestry and Land Scotland. (S5O-03712)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): The five-year work programme that has been developed by Forestry and Land Scotland will enable Shell to

claim up to 250,000 carbon units over the next 100 years through the creation of new woodlands and the restoration of degraded peatlands in and on Scotland's national forests and land. All carbon units will be validated and verified under the woodland carbon code and the peatland code, as appropriate.

Alison Johnstone: There is little in the public domain from the Scottish Government on that partnership. Perhaps the Scottish Government is—understandably—uncomfortable about taking money from one of the world's largest polluters. However, Shell itself is boasting that the deal is worth £5 million and suggests that it will allow drivers to offset their fuel purchases. Can the minister confirm whether the sale of carbon credits from the public estate to fossil fuel corporations is now Government policy and whether any further deals are being discussed?

Mairi Gougeon: We come at the issue from a perspective that is fundamentally different from that of the member. The project does not change any of our ambitions or the work that we hope to do. We have the most ambitious climate change targets in the world, but we must recognise that we cannot cease production of oil overnight and just import problems from elsewhere. We have a just transition commission to help us to achieve the transition to a low-carbon economy. In the meantime, partnerships and initiatives like the one with Shell are vital and will continue to be so in our transition work. Such projects do not change the work that we have to do or alter any of our targets, but they help us to sequester more carbon from the atmosphere in the meantime.

Flood Resilience Plans

3. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on flood resilience plans ahead of winter. (S5O-03713)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): It is important to remember that flooding can happen at any time, so we work closely with our partners to promote flood preparedness and build community resilience throughout the year. We have also increased to £190,000 this year our funding to the Scottish Flood Forum, which provides vital support before, during and after flooding to communities across Scotland. I encourage those who are at risk of flooding to keep informed by signing up to receive flood alerts and warnings through the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's floodline service.

Gillian Martin: Yesterday, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee heard from the Committee on Climate Change that flood mitigation plans and infrastructure

development need to plan for a scenario of an increase in global temperatures of 3° to 4°. Is the Government's climate change adaptation plan working on that assumption? Is it planning for the effects of climate change, to which Scotland does not contribute but other places in the world do, taking place across all Government portfolios?

Roseanna Cunningham: The five-year programme to help Scotland prepare for the impacts of climate change that was introduced to Parliament on 23 September addresses the priority risks for Scotland and follows advice provided by the Committee on Climate Change. The programme will work across a range of policy areas, including conducting an economic assessment of flood risk, and undertaking research into recovery from extreme weather events and climate impacts on social care. Obviously, a huge range of planning and housing issues are also affected. The work on planning for the effects of climate change therefore ranges over a significant number of portfolios.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If we keep supplementary questions short, we will get through all the questions.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Is the Scottish Government in dialogue with local authorities, Scottish Water and communities to take forward action to support sustainable urban drainage systems and an assessment of the development of urban creep in order to help minimise the effect of future flood incidents and develop community resilience?

Roseanna Cunningham: That dialogue is almost constant. My officials, SEPA and local authorities are in constant conversation about those issues, because we are very conscious that more than one thing impacts flooding. Flooding is an understood consequence of climate change, but human activities that are not related to climate change can nevertheless exacerbate flooding and need to be addressed, too.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): In the winter of 2015, after severe flooding, the First Minister committed to help my home town of Newton Stewart. However, it is only through the community's incredible resilience and determination that the main street is returning to normal. Despite the First Minister's promise four years ago, no flood prevention measures have been taken.

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

Finlay Carson: Can the cabinet secretary give my constituents in Newton Stewart a commitment that the Scottish Government will deliver on the First Minister's commitment to the people of Newton Stewart?

Roseanna Cunningham: This Scottish Government has spent more and done more on flood protection than any previous Government. That has been brought about by an overall strategic approach to the issue that is agreed with local authorities, which is on-going. I invite Finlay Carson to indicate directly to me, if not to his local authority, what the local authority's representations have been. I will be happy to engage with him on that.

Pollution Management (Tarbolton)

4. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address issues regarding pollution management at the Tarbolton landfill site. (S5O-03714)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Legal duties regarding the management and condition of the site are the responsibility of the owner or operator. In this case, legal obligations under the permit are on-going and rest with the official receiver, which is the liquidator of the company.

Although the official receiver currently remains responsible for site management, Scottish Environment Protection Agency officers continue to undertake an intensive programme of monitoring. Nevertheless, SEPA has arranged for scoping work to be done to establish the likely costs and practicalities of options for management and mitigation works at the site.

Brian Whittle: The cabinet secretary will be aware that I have raised the issue several times in the chamber, because it is raised at every surgery that I hold. The four-year-old twins of a constituent of mine are now not permitted to play outside; they report that they can smell pollutants on their clothes. I have sent video evidence indicating that the situation is terrible and is getting worse. Is not it time that the Scottish Government stepped in to make the site safe for the health of people in the surrounding area? It could then seek to establish responsibility and seek recompense.

Roseanna Cunningham: I entirely appreciate how horrific the situation is for the people who are most directly affected by it and I have discussed the issue with Brian Whittle.

I have outlined where the legal responsibilities currently lie. The solution is not as simple as us stepping in and taking over—notwithstanding that we are the Government—because we have to act legally.

I am conscious that work has been done by SEPA very recently. SEPA is there on the ground as the Government agency that is monitoring and working on the issue. I know that it is concerned

about the additional remedial work that has to be done before it can continue its work. I confirm that that will be funded in the immediate future, so I very much hope that there will be progress.

However, that does not remove from the equation the fact that the site is in private ownership and is in the hands of the liquidator. It is a tricky situation, which I know Brian Whittle understands. I also know that he is—quite rightly—concerned about the impact on local people, as are we all.

Farms (Emissions and Carbon Sequestration Data)

5. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on improving farm-level emissions and carbon sequestration data. (S5O-03715)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): We know that our farmers and crofters provide wider benefits through actions such as tree planting, renewable energy generation and protection of historical carbon stores. The Scottish Government remains committed to working with our farmers, crofters and others who have the means to demonstrate such actions, and to exploring whole-farm carbon footprinting and agricultural produce emissions intensity. However, it must be understood that none of those complementary actions can replace the greenhouse gas inventory, which is determined by international classifications.

Alexander Stewart: That kind of data is certainly complex and crucial if we are to have an accurate assessment of carbon management by individual farms and estates. Given that talks are already taking place, will the Scottish Government publish a report next year showing clear dates and timescales for the progress of its work?

Mairi Gougeon: I am happy to consider that suggestion. There is so much work under way, because we recognise the scale of the challenge.

I know from farmers to whom I have spoken that the idea that they are causing emissions, rather than doing positive work on their land, can be a great cause of frustration. That is why it is vital that we find a way of properly taking account of their work in the data. Work on that will be on-going. I am happy to talk to Alexander Stewart about other initiatives that we are considering, and about how we intend to progress the work.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Can the minister advise Parliament how many carbon audits were provided for in the farm advisory service and how many have been taken up?

Mairi Gougeon: The farm advisory service has received 629 applications for carbon audits, which is more than twice our annual target. That number shows the willingness of our farmers, crofters and land managers to be part of the solution in tackling climate change and cutting emissions.

I encourage all farmers and crofters to look at the opportunities, information and advice that are available through the farm advisory service. Carbon audits are just one aspect of the service: it can also provide integrated land management plans, specialist advice and mentoring, and a raft of technical notes and case studies that are aimed at helping our agriculture industry to work towards a more sustainable future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 was not lodged.

Geese and Stoa Population Management (Orkney)

7. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I draw the attention of Parliament to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a partner in a farming business.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the management of the geese and stoat populations in Orkney. (S5O-03717)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Scottish Natural Heritage met the Orkney goose management group in June 2019 to discuss agricultural damage caused by resident greylag geese. A range of actions were agreed to help the group to develop a management strategy.

Work has now commenced seeking to eradicate stoats from Orkney, as part of the Orkney native wildlife project. Stoats are a non-native species on Orkney, and sightings can be reported on the websites of the Orkney native wildlife project and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I know that the cabinet secretary and Scottish Natural Heritage are aware of the impact of goose numbers on Orkney. The frustration of local farmers has not been addressed yet, and a long-term sustainable solution needs to be put in place. However, the cabinet secretary will also be aware that some elements of the package of measures that are being considered will require funding for implementation. Is she looking for funding to support measures to combat geese numbers in Orkney being included in the Scottish Government budget?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am always looking for more money for my portfolio; I hope that Jamie Halcro Johnston will take that as read. However,

the arrangement between SNH and the Orkney goose management group talks about a range of actions. I do not want to list them because I suspect that the member already knows what they are.

I understand the real problem that is developing. Historically, greylags have been a migratory species, but there is now a population that is staying put: they have stopped travelling and have decided to take up residence. That is one of the factors that creates the problem. I reassure Jamie Halcro Johnston that we are keeping an eye on the matter and thinking very carefully about what can be done.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): In the summer, I took up the offer from Douglas Paterson to see first hand the damage that is caused to crops and farmland in the east of Orkney's Mainland. I acknowledge the work that has been done by SNH and others in the local group, but I extend the invitation, on behalf of Douglas Paterson and the local NFU Scotland, to the cabinet secretary to visit Orkney in the early part of next year to see first hand the damage that is being done to farm land in Orkney.

Roseanna Cunningham: I am sorry that my schedule did not allow for that during my August visit. I am always happy to visit Orkney and to have a reason to do so, so I will be happy to talk to Liam McArthur about the best time for that.

Community Recycling (Glasgow)

8. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports community recycling initiatives in Glasgow. (S5O-03718)

Roseanna Cunningham: The Scottish Government supports community recycling through different funding streams, such as Zero Waste Scotland's resource-efficient circular economy accelerator programme and the climate challenge fund, which support projects involving waste and circular economy activities, including recycling. Community groups can also get tailored support and advice for recycling initiatives from Zero Waste Scotland.

Bob Doris: I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to an ambitious plan by the newly formed Springburn youth forum, in my constituency, to reclaim a patch of neglected land outside Springburn academy as a seating area for students at lunchtime, and to co-locate community recycling facilities that could also act as a community hub to encourage recycling across the wider area. Will the cabinet secretary offer her support for such innovative plans, and does she think that such initiatives should be encouraged

more widely, not only in my constituency, but right across Scotland?

Roseanna Cunningham: I certainly do. That sounds like an extremely interesting project. If Bob Doris wishes to invite me to come and visit, I would be happy to do so.

Ferries

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-19715, in the name of Jamie Greene, on the resilience of Scotland's ferry network.

14:41

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): The reality is that Scotland's ferry service is under tremendous pressure: there is no doubt about that. That pressure disproportionately affects our island communities, businesses, residents and visitors. We have spent a lot of time already in the chamber discussing the political ramifications of who owns what, or who should own what. However, I do not see any value in rehashing those arguments in today's debate.

I have brought this debate to the chamber because we are fast approaching winter, when the resilience of Scotland's ferries will be pushed to its very limits. I make no apologies for using parliamentary time to bang on about the ferries again, because, quite frankly, somebody has to. I judge the importance of the issue of connectivity to our islands by the volume of correspondence that I get on it, as do many others across the political spectrum, and the fact that it is the number 1 issue on people's lips when we visit island communities.

Let me paint a picture of where we are at the moment. As well as giving the statistics that are involved, of which there are many, I will paint a picture of the human aspect to the debate, which is often lost when we talk about funding, strategies and reports. To date, delays and cancellations have accumulated to more than 82,000 since 2007. The numbers in the course of the past 12 years speak for themselves: the number of delays and cancellations in our ferry network has skyrocketed. In 2009-10, there were 1,800 cancellations of services per year across the CalMac Ferries network, all of them regrettable. Last year, the number had risen to more than 4,400, which is an increase of 130 per cent. In 2009-10, the number of delays in the network was 2,000 per year, which was, again, regrettable. However, last year, the number of delays had risen to 5,500, which is an increase of 160 per cent. The reality is that since the Government took office, there have been more than 43,000 cancellations and 39,000 delays.

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: If it is brief, as the minister will have an opportunity to speak after me.

Paul Wheelhouse: Thank you. Presiding Officer, I look forward to you giving me the opportunity to speak later.

Jamie Greene mentioned the statistics for the past year. Does he not recognise that, as set out in my amendment to his motion, there has been significant improvement in reliability over the past 12 months? It would be nice if Jamie Greene would acknowledge that. Only 0.67 per cent of ferry services have suffered cancellation through technical failure this year.

Jamie Greene: The minister has chosen to mention a very small number of cancellations that were due to mechanical breakdown. I will come on to his amendment in a moment, but it misses the point. What the minister is trying to say, in other words, is that 99.4 per cent of cancellations were weather related. I presume that that is the minister's point. I do not know whether that is an accurate number, but I am sure that when the minister speaks he will clarify that.

Paul Wheelhouse: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I need to make progress through my points.

By looking at a period of only nine months, the minister is painting a very small picture—I am looking at the past 12 years since this Government came to power, because that is what people are really worried about.

I will briefly mention Labour's amendment, because it makes some valid points. The important point from Labour's amendment is that it highlights the excellent work that the staff who work for our ferry services do. They work in extremely difficult circumstances and they make the best of the assets that are available to them—assets that frequently let them, as well as passengers, down.

Labour's amendment also makes an important point about the importance of delivering the new vessels that were ordered—vessels 801 and 802.

When the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee asked whether the late arrival of those vessels would have a knock-on effect on fleet resilience, the answer was simple—yes. However, there is no mention of that in Mr Wheelhouse's amendment.

So, when he responds to my comments, will the minister explain to Parliament not only why a detailed plan on the revised timetable and costings to deliver those vessels, which Derek Mackay promised would be with the Parliament by the end of October, has not materialised, but why no reason has been given for its absence? In fact, in response to today's debate, the Government seeks to amend my motion by simply deleting it,

and replacing it by saying, “There is nothing to see here. We are doing a great job. There is not a problem here”.

The Government’s defence that—as the minister said—a small proportion of cancellations was avoidable misses the point. Ten years ago, the number of cancellations on the Ardrossan to Brodick route was 86 per year; last year, that number was 328. Tell me that that is the sign of success and of a good service. On the Lochranza service, that number went from 160 to 215 in the same period. Is the weather really that different from one side of Arran to another?

The problem is that, when the weather becomes an issue, our vessels and docks are not geared up for those weather events. Having an ageing fleet means that those vessels need more maintenance than newer vessels; it means that, when they need maintenance, they have to go offline; it means vessel replacement; and it means taking a ship from one route and putting it on to another. It is not simply about mechanical breakdown; an ageing fleet has a much wider effect than that. The minister knows that we have a problem and that the status quo is not okay for our islanders, and he must know how unhappy people are about the unreliability of the fleet. If he does not know, he is either not asking or not listening.

I said that I would mention the human aspect, and I will now briefly do so. I was written to by an elderly resident who lives on Arran. On getting to the hospital, he said:

“Due to the current unreliable status of the Ardrossan ferry service, it means that I need to make the ferry crossing journey at least a day early, sometimes two”.

He has to leave two days earlier than his appointment to get there. Another resident wrote to say that they are fed up with the service, and that

“unreliability makes it harder to attract and retain the talent the island needs thereby hampering our economic growth”.

Those are their words—not mine. Even the former managing director of CalMac said that it does not have fleet resilience, and that any breakdown will have a knock-on effect on the rest of the fleet. The Government has known for years that new ferries are needed. I ask simply: where are they, minister?

I challenge the Scottish National Party members: when they rise to speak in the debate, will they accept the Government’s amendment, which simply deletes my motion, makes excuses, apologises for nothing, and buries its head in the sand? Will they stick up for their constituents or their front bench? I know who we will stick up for, and it is about time that they did the same.

I move,

That the Parliament notes its growing concern with the resilience of Scotland’s ferry network; highlights that over 82,000 delays and cancellations have occurred since 2007; believes that the combination of an ageing fleet of vessels, mechanical breakdowns and the late arrival of new operational vessels for the network have resulted in avoidable disruption to services to the detriment of Scotland’s island communities, their inhabitants, business and tourism; expresses disappointment at the absence of a long-term strategy to procure or build replacement vessels, and calls on the Scottish Government to urgently outline how it will address the Parliament’s concerns.

14:48

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government understands the importance of safe and reliable ferry services to meet the needs of our remote and island communities. Those lifeline ferry services are critical to the continued socio-economic development of our island communities.

As I have previously indicated in this Parliament, and as set out in the proposed national islands plan, we remain committed to improving our ferry services, and the issues that matter most to the businesses and communities that rely on them are service quality and reliability.

I have undertaken a considerable number of meetings with stakeholders over the past year, and I am far from complacent in respect of further improving the reliability and punctuality of Scotland’s supported ferry services. That said, it is important to record that performance has already improved. The actual reliability of all CalMac sailings for the period January to September 2019, which also takes into account weather disruption, is 97 per cent, which is an improvement of 0.5 percentage points when compared with the same period last year. The actual reliability of all NorthLink Ferries that sailed over the same period is more than 98.1 per cent, which is an improvement of 0.4 percentage points compared to the same period in 2018. As my amendment makes clear, just 873 out of 130,184 sailings—or just 0.67 per cent—were affected by technical issues in the past year.

Although the hard work and dedication of the staff and crew of CalMac Ferries and NorthLink Ferries are key to delivering reliability improvements, the Scottish Government’s continued support has also been a factor. In August 2018, we announced a £3.5 million resilience fund to reduce the risk of vessels in the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services breaking down. A further £4 million was announced in the 2019-20 budget. The funds are used and will continue to be used to upgrade or replace key systems and equipment on vessels to improve the resilience of the fleet, with works undertaken as part of the annual maintenance programme.

Despite real-terms funding reductions by the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Government has invested over £2 billion in the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, northern isles ferry services and ferry infrastructure since 2007. That includes investment of almost £1.7 billion in operational costs, over £116 million associated with piers and harbours infrastructure, and £7.5 million for upgrades and resilience of vessels. Ferries with a capital value of over £255 million have been secured for service across Scotland. The investment also includes investment in the roll-out of significantly reduced fares through the road equivalent tariff scheme.

Eight new vessels have been introduced in the CalMac fleet since 2007, and a further two are in construction. There has been significant recent investment to secure the long-term use of the three Ropax passenger vessels and the two freighters for continued operation on the northern isles ferry services, and of MV Loch Seaforth for continued operation on the Stornoway to Ullapool route.

The Scottish Government's budget for 2019-20 ensures continued support for subsidised ferry services across Scotland's islands. Capital funds are allocated in the budget to support the continued construction of MV Glen Sannox and hull 802.

Allocation has also been made in the budget for the Skye triangle and Ardrossan port projects. As part of that, we have recently approved investment of £15 million by Transport Scotland and Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd in the harbour upgrade at Tarbert on Harris.

However, we cannot be complacent. My SNP colleagues and I acknowledge the huge frustration that passengers experience when services are not reliable or do not match demand, even when that is experienced in the context of the wider success of the operators.

Five of the last six orders for new vessels have been awarded to Scottish yards. The Government sees the contribution that ferries make to our supply chain and to securing growth in our maritime economy. All five of those Scotland-built vessels will deploy hybrid and dual fuel technologies to reduce harmful emissions, which will make an important contribution to our overarching strategy to reduce emissions.

The Scottish Government has continued to support vessel investment and the commercial shipbuilding sector in Scotland through the construction of MV Glen Sannox and hull 802 at Ferguson Marine and, through public ownership of the yard, which is supported by the trade unions, we will work to safeguard and create shipbuilding jobs at the yard. Ferguson Marine has high-

standard facilities and a highly skilled and capable workforce.

We have achieved much, but we must continue to look forward and build on our investment to date. We have a strategic investment programme, which we will keep under review. Investment, such as for Islay, is being made in accordance with the published vessel replacement and deployment plan. The next version of that plan is currently in final drafting. It will take into account findings that emerge from the appraisals under the Scottish transport appraisal guidance of the outer Hebrides, Mallaig to Armadale and Craignure routes. The final report is due to be published later this year. In particular, that will have to reflect the huge success of the road equivalent tariff and its impact on passenger demand on some routes.

The next ferries plan will be taken forward following the finalisation of the national transport strategy and in parallel with the strategic transport projects review, which will also consider other potential viable options for connecting our islands. That work is being taken forward jointly by Transport Scotland, CMAL and CalMac. As I have previously indicated, we will also work in close consultation with key businesses and community stakeholders. We will engage with the trade unions to reflect the operational impact of any proposals on staff and crew.

Those are, quite properly, long-term measures. Given the scale of investment, it is important that we take an informed, strategic and balanced approach.

I will say more in my closing remarks. I look forward to the debate ahead.

I move amendment S5M-19715.3, to leave out from "notes its growing concern" to end and insert:

"recognises the improving performance of the ferry services that are directly supported by the Scottish Government; acknowledges the inconvenience that disruption can cause, but notes that only 873, or 0.67%, of the 130,184 sailings on Scottish Government-subsidised ferry services have been cancelled due to technical reasons in 2019; commends the hard-working and dedicated staff and crew in delivering these reliability improvements; notes the improvements, including new routes, more sailings and lower fares, that have helped drive passenger growth on an annual basis, with these ferry services now carrying over six million passengers, or an increase of some 16.1% since 2012; acknowledges that, despite facing real-terms funding reductions by the UK Government, the Scottish Government has invested more than £2 billion in ferry services and infrastructure since 2007; notes that investment has been made in accordance with the published Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan and that the next Ferries Plan will be taken forward following the finalisation of the National Transport Strategy and in parallel with the Strategic Transport Projects Review, and notes that, in the context of the need for renewal of the fleet, the Scottish Government has continued to support vessel investment and the commercial shipbuilding sector in Scotland through the construction of

the MV Glen Sannox and Hull 802 at Ferguson Marine and through public ownership of the yard, which is supported by the trade unions, and will work to safeguard and create shipbuilding jobs at the yard.”

14:53

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): We cannot overstate the importance of Scotland’s ferry network to our island communities. Last year, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee carried out budget scrutiny of investment to support the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services. In its evidence to the committee, Western Isles Council described its ferry links as

“central to the sustainability and wellbeing of the island communities”,

and Argyll and Bute Council said that the network is

“the very means to survive and prosper.”

That survival is under threat from the type of disruption that many of our island communities have suffered in recent years, which has been caused by the lack of capacity and resilience on many of our routes that rely on an ever-ageing fleet. More than half of CMAL’s fleet is more than 20 years old and more than a quarter of it is more than 30 years old. That not only impacts on reliability but has caused maintenance costs to skyrocket by more than 150 per cent over the past 10 years, meaning that more vessels are being withdrawn for longer for extra maintenance, which is a point that the Government’s amendment ignores.

This winter, CalMac alone is planning £9 million of extra maintenance on the Clyde and Hebrides network, in addition to its on-going maintenance schedule, just to keep the fleet afloat and to try to make it more resilient. Every year, more and more money is needed to mitigate the risks of a fleet that is too old and not fit for purpose and which is being kept going by the, at times, heroic efforts of staff on the ferries and in our ports. That money could have been saved if a more proactive and strategic approach to vessel replacement had been taken.

In 2017, Audit Scotland concluded:

“There is no Scotland-wide, long-term strategy”.

Ten years ago, the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee called on the Scottish Government to produce a national ferries strategy that would detail long-term plans for routes, ferry replacement, refurbishment and port infrastructure, accompanied by an implementation and delivery plan with a clear programme of funding, but that has still not been delivered. More than ever, we need a proper long-term ferries strategy that delivers comprehensive and strategic

planning for our fleet and sets out a regular programme of replacement. Not only will that improve the reliability of the ferry network, it will benefit Scotland’s shipbuilding sector, whose jobs remain crucial to the Scottish economy. A strategy for ferry replacement that sets out a clear programme of work will help to provide certainty for the shipbuilding sector, allowing it to invest in yards, create jobs and develop and maintain vital skills and expertise. As well as allowing yards to invest, the steady drumbeat of consistent work will improve efficiency and deliver better value for the public purse.

Therefore, Labour welcomes the recent decision to save Ferguson Marine in order to protect the yard’s future and the vital jobs that it provides. However, we still have not seen any schedule from the Government that shows when the two new ferries that are being built at the yard will be completed, and we need to be clear about the actions and the lack of earlier intervention that put those jobs at risk in the first place. The Ferguson Marine workforce has been working tirelessly to deliver the new ferries under incredibly difficult circumstances, and its work and expertise should not be overshadowed by events over which it has no control. The workforce wants the ferries to be delivered as much as the communities that they will ultimately serve. Those workers, more than anyone, want a long-term vision for shipbuilding.

It is clear that the lack of resilience and capacity, particularly at peak times on particular routes, is a barrier to our island communities that prevents islanders from accessing healthcare, employment, education and more. The failure to have a programme of more regular ferry replacement is undermining our shipyards. More than ever, we need a modern ferry network that properly meets the needs of Scotland’s island communities, and we need a strong shipbuilding sector to protect the jobs that are so important to our economy. It is time for the Scottish Government to deliver both.

I move amendment S5M-19715.2, to insert at end

“; notes the challenges many routes face with regard to capacity and the impact this has on connectivity and access to services; commends the work of the dedicated and resourceful ferry workers to deliver another winter timetable in difficult weather and technical conditions on ageing fleets; welcomes the decision to save Ferguson Marine by taking it into public ownership and reiterates the importance of delivering the MV Glen Sannox and Hull 802 as quickly as possible; recognises the importance of the Scottish shipbuilding sector and the jobs it provides; believes that there should be a Scottish ferry building programme; regrets that the ferry services procurement policy review has not made more progress, and believes that Scotland’s lifeline ferry services should be publicly owned.”

14:57

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Presiding Officer,

“It is the role of the Government to provide the long term strategy for continuing to meet the needs of the communities that rely on ferry services.”

Those are not my words but those of CalMac, in its submission to the REC Committee. It also said:

“Between 2012 and 2017 the number of cars carried has grown by 37% to 1.43m per year and passenger numbers have risen by 17% to 5.2 million per year.”

In the same submission, CalMac said:

“Despite many Trust, local authority or privately-owned ports to which CalMac operates accruing millions of pounds in berthing duties, it is not clear how this income has been re-invested in ports.”

That is very important, because Mr Greene used the term “our docks”. This is a very complicated situation. I understand that you want to slag off the whole approach over a lengthy period, and I understand that the Government wants to say that everything is as positive as it can be. However, I have to pull you up for saying that the Government is unwilling to apologise, given that the Government’s amendment is explicit in acknowledging the inconvenience that has been caused.

I will also pick up on something that my colleague Colin Smyth said. CalMac states:

“It is impossible to overstate the importance of lifeline ferry services to the long-term economic sustainability of remote and vulnerable island communities.”

I am very proud to represent such communities, and it will not surprise you that, in recent months, I have used ferries on a number of occasions. On each occasion, the ferry was perfectly on time, the staff were courteous and the service was very efficient. Of course—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can I interrupt you, please, Mr Finnie? This is not a private conversation between two people. Please speak through the chair.

John Finnie: I will address all my remarks exclusively to you, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you.

John Finnie: The question is why this suddenly became an issue from 2007. I wonder why that year has been picked, because it is very peculiar, to my mind. In the REC Committee’s pre-budget scrutiny, we heard clearly—I see that Mr Cameron is shaking his head, but I do not think that he would take issue with what Highlands and Islands transport partnership told us. It noted that no new major ferries entered service between 2001 and 2011.

We know the age and profile of the fleet—I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer, for averting my eyes. We know how important that is; as with anything, whether it is a motor vehicle or a pedal cycle, the longer we have it, the more repairs are needed and all the rest. There has been a long run-in time to the present situation; it has not suddenly appeared. There has been neglect over decades that is manifesting itself now. It is manifesting itself with the MV Glen Sannox and hull 802, which are desperately needed.

The economic reality is a fact, and the mention in the Government amendment of a reduction in funding is entirely appropriate. The Scottish Green Party will have a different manifesto and has different transport priorities; they will not be about £6 billion for two roads, and they will ensure that public services, including our lifeline ferry services, are properly funded.

I commend the Scottish Government not on its overall approach but on some of the things that it has done, not least the RET and taking the yard into public ownership. We are a maritime nation and we rely on a number of ferries to be replaced. I want Scotland to be known as a location that makes quality ferries—perhaps rather than warships—and we have a long way to go with that. We are not talking exclusively about the fleet that the Scottish Government has responsibility for; there are also the internal services in Orkney and Shetland. There are opportunities there; we are a maritime nation and there needs to be innovation. I regret that the public service ethos is not being followed for the northern isles contract, because I do not think that Serco should have the opportunity there.

Is everything great? No. Is everything awful? No. We will support the Labour amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sure that you two can carry on that conversation over coffee later.

15:01

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank Jamie Greene for the debate. He is right that somebody needs to bang on about ferries, and I take considerable pride in having been that someone. I cannot think of any issue that I have raised more frequently with ministers, and indeed with the First Minister, since being elected in 2007.

I recognise the public concerns that are referred to in the motion, not just in relation to the problems that are caused to individuals, businesses and communities in our islands and coastal areas from disruption to lifeline ferry services but, looking further ahead, in relation to the growing concerns about a lack of resilience in Scotland’s ferry network as a result of having an ageing fleet.

Mr Greene, Colin Smyth and others have understandably focused more of their remarks on what is happening on the west coast and in relation to the fall-out over the future of the Ferguson Marine yard. I assure the chamber that the concerns that are being highlighted today, which the minister seems to have airbrushed out through his amendment, are very much shared by the community that I represent in Orkney.

The minister will know that the internal ferry services in Orkney—

Paul Wheelhouse: Will the member give way?

Liam McArthur: No—the minister will have time to respond later. The internal ferry services in Orkney are already well below the minimum standard that was set out in the Government's national ferries plan, in terms of cost, frequency and accessibility. Across a range of measures, the north and south isles in Orkney are getting a raw deal in the quality of the internal ferry services on which they depend.

Most of the vessels are desperately in need of replacement. The minister knows that and it is a message that I have been reinforcing with him and his predecessors for some time, as have successive administrations of Orkney Island Council. I have lost track of how many Scottish transport appraisal guidance appraisals have been carried out since I was first elected. Each appraisal serves only to highlight the increasingly urgent need for new vessels, yet still there is no plan in place or agreement from the Government to help to meet the cost of vessels that are crucial to the future viability of some of our most fragile island communities.

That is despite bold promises that were made by the former transport and islands minister during the passage of the Islands (Scotland) Bill last year. At the time, Mr Yousaf told us to await publication of the national islands plan to see the detail of the Government's commitment on lifeline ferry services. When the draft plan was finally published last month, however, there was little to offer reassurance to people and businesses in Orkney. There was no sign that ministers were preparing to deliver on those promises, and no recognition of the responsibility to help to deliver a level of service that is in line with the standards that are set out in the Government's ferries plan.

That is simply not good enough. It is a failure that leaves island communities in Orkney less resilient and more vulnerable, puts island businesses at a competitive disadvantage at a time when they are already dealing with plenty of uncertainty, and forces crew members to do their best with resources that are no longer fit for purpose. It is little wonder that the leader of Orkney Islands Council described the islands plan

as “very disappointing” and “a missed opportunity” and as being “without any real substance”.

The Scottish Government needs to face up to its responsibilities in relation to the replacement of Orkney's internal ferry fleet. The Government needs to stop short-changing Orkney and must help to ensure that the level of service at least meets the minimum standards that are set out in its ferries plan. It needs to stop lodging amendments that gloss over concerns and paint a picture that everything is rosy when it comes to Scotland's ferry network. Scottish Liberal Democrats will support the motion at decision time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate, with speeches of four minutes, although there is time for interventions.

15:05

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I am disappointed by the Scottish National Party's failure to acknowledge that there are issues, as evidenced principally by its amendment and the minister's contribution. The minister says that we cannot be complacent, yet Liam McArthur is absolutely right that there is the usual “Nothing to see here” gloss, with the SNP effectively telling island communities and their inhabitants, businesses and tourism that there is no problem and no scope to improve. However, there are challenges.

In 2018, the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee took evidence on Audit Scotland's report on “Transport Scotland's ferry services”. We discovered that in, 2016-17, Transport Scotland spent £209.7 million on ferry services and assets. That is a sizeable figure that, to be fair, had increased by 115 per cent over 10 years, although that was for an increase in passengers of 0.3 per cent. However, at least there is a strategy, right? Wrong. Audit Scotland said that

“There is no Scotland-wide, long term strategy”,

with the result that,

“In the context of limited public finances, Transport Scotland will find it challenging to continue to provide ferry services that meet the needs of users within its allocated budget.”

In light of that conclusion, perhaps the minister will outline in closing whether his intention is to increase fares, reduce services or cut back on capital spending.

At least we can demonstrate empirically that island communities are getting the benefits. Oh, wait—no we cannot, because, according to Audit Scotland,

“Transport Scotland does not routinely measure the contribution that ferry services make to social and economic outcomes ... which makes it difficult to determine whether its spending is value for money.”

But at least we can be reassured that the tendering process is robust. Well, no. On the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, Audit Scotland tells us that the two tenderers submitted over 800 queries and that CalMac’s bid has 350 commitments whose achievement cannot be assessed. Of course, right after the contract was awarded, the successful contract increased in price by over £100 million, so that, between 2007 and 2017, the subsidies on the CHFS contract went up by 185 per cent.

Such issues raise serious questions about the SNP’s ability to deliver ferry services and reveal a cavalier attitude to spending taxpayers’ cash with little or no regard to value for money.

Here is why I want to flag the issue. I recall travelling several times on the Gourrock to Dunoon route with Western Ferries. The ferries on that route have low cancellation rates, with only six cancellations this year from 27,000 sailings. They are car ferries, which may have contributed to the 17 per cent increase in cars transported since 2007 and the 1 per cent increase in passenger numbers. This year, the ferries have provided crossings for 30 blue-light emergency vehicles. However, the SNP cannot take credit for that record, because that company, which employs predominantly local people and transports local vehicles, did not receive a penny in subsidy. That is unlike the state-owned competitor, Argyll Ferries, which, according to Audit Scotland, had a 148 per cent increase in subsidy and does not carry vehicles.

The minister mentioned Serco NorthLink Ferries. I echo the minister in saying that it is a well-run and efficient service that uses lots of local produce from the north-east and the islands, which is to the benefit of our communities. I think that there has been a 20 per cent passenger increase since 2013. However, although the years between 2011 and 2016 saw massive increases in subsidy to state providers, support to NorthLink reduced by more than a third.

John Finnie is absolutely right that it is not easy to run a ferry service. However, if the state is to run services, we cannot ignore the challenges of the tendering process, the issues that make running those services difficult, the lack of monitoring and defined outcomes or considerations of value for money. The SNP’s constant pretence that all is well does a disservice to passengers, businesses and, as Liam McArthur rightly said, the workers who are doing their best to provide these vital, valuable and iconic lifeline services. The SNP has been in charge for more

than 12 years. It is time for it to stand aside and let someone competent take over.

15:10

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Even Liam Kerr was smiling as he made that final comment.

Nine days ago, I met CalMac’s managing director, Robbie Drummond, and director of community and stakeholder engagement, Brian Fulton, to discuss all ferry-related matters. They provided an excellent document, which—contrary to the Tory moanfest that we have heard—pointed to the steady progress that CalMac has made in recent years in delivering Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, in particular services to Arran. CalMac staff are to be commended for their work in achieving that progress.

For example, since the SNP Government introduced road equivalent tariff, which reduced the cost of taking a car to Arran by 64 per cent, there has been a surge in demand. There has been a 66 per cent increase in cars travelling and a 25 per cent increase in passengers, which has helped to boost the Arran economy, creating and sustaining jobs. Last year alone, 847,428 passengers and 204,451 cars travelled to the island. A more efficient use of capacity and an increase in summer sailings this year, with the season being extended from the few weeks that we inherited from Labour and the Lib Dems to more than half the year, have been accompanied by a 29 per cent increase in scheduled sailings over the past eight years.

The breakdown rate on services to and from Arran was 0.5 per cent, or one in 200—that was due to a technical breakdown in 2017-18. Some 2.8 per cent of sailings were affected by inclement weather. One wonders what the number of aviation cancellations and delays is, in comparison.

Of course, whether a passenger from the island is going to a hospital appointment, shopping or just visiting friends on the mainland, it is understandable that they recall the sailing that was cancelled. Efforts to reduce cancellations must therefore be maintained. A £3.5 million resilience fund was established last year and has been increased to £4 million this year, which should improve the situation further.

The Government has invested a massive amount—£255 million—in eight new vessels. The £12.6 million MV *Catriona* entered service in September 2016 on the Lochranza to Claonaig route. A modern port has been developed at Brodick, representing investment of more than £30 million, and the £35.6 million Ardrossan harbour redevelopment will begin next year. Such

investment will improve resilience and the passenger experience and will result in fewer disruptions. Does anyone seriously expect us to believe that the Tories, who have cut billions in capital from Scotland's budget, would have done more for Arran, Cumbrae or any other Scottish island?

At CalMac, customer communication is improving, with a 92 per cent customer satisfaction rating. A new ticketing system, which is planned for 2021, will improve the customer experience, and an integrated operations control centre has been established to provide customers with more detailed and timely information. Indeed, CalMac's contact centre was awarded a CCA Global level 7 award for customer service—and CalMac is the only company in the world to have achieved that accolade.

Recently of course, we had the linkspan breakdowns at Ardrossan and Gourock, about which I have questioned the minister. They are the direct result of underinvestment in infrastructure by Peel Ports in the two and a half decades since privatisation—by the Tories, of course.

Challenges lie ahead. Although I am delighted that the next ferries plan will be taken forward following the finalisation of the national transport strategy and in parallel with the strategic transport projects review, renewal of the fleet is urgent. Vessels are ageing—eight are more than 30 years old—and I point out that two Lib Dem transport ministers in the coalition Administration did absolutely nothing to build vessels.

For reasons of reliability, flexibility and cost, I urge the Scottish Government to consider a sustained construction programme, with only two or at most three types of vessel. An approach whereby every vessel is uniquely designed to suit only one or two ports leads to costly delay.

We will take no lectures from the Tory transport spokesperson, who in 2016 lodged a parliamentary motion calling for the retention of the non-existent Ardrossan to Troon ferry service and who appears to want Ferguson Marine to shut rather than be in public hands, regardless of the employment issues.

The Times reported on 2 May that Chris Grayling, the then Tory UK transport secretary, had “wasted £83 million” on non-existent—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): And there you must conclude.

Kenneth Gibson: It is clear that our ferries are safe only in the hands of the SNP Government.

15:14

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In the northern isles, we are dependent on our ferry links. I have used them since I was a child. We have seen different operators come and go; there have been some areas of improvement, but services have also come under increasing pressure. Today, I will focus on the publicly supported services in Orkney and Shetland: the northern isles ferry service, which is operated by NorthLink Ferries, and the interisland internal ferries that are operated within their areas by Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council.

I turn first to the internal ferries. As early as 2012, the Scottish Government said that it recognised the unfairness of the situation, in which costs fell to the local authorities. By summer 2014, in the middle of that year's referendum campaign, the then First Minister Alex Salmond was trying to win support in the northern isles. He told all who would listen that the SNP would bring about fair funding

“in the provision of ferries and ferry infrastructure”.

Two years later, in 2016, a working group was established to consider how to deliver that promised fair funding—work that should have been done years before.

Meanwhile, island representatives worked together, relentlessly pressing ministers. In response, the SNP Government obfuscated and quibbled until, eventually able to bluster no more and under the weight of pressure from island politicians of all political colours, it delivered a one-off payment to both councils. However, that was not the long-term, sustainable commitment that the islands needed. The figure that was settled on then, which met the financial asks of the council then, does not meet the needs of those services now. Therefore, year after year, the island councils are forced to make the case to be allocated the fair funding settlement that, so many years ago, the Scottish Government and, at election after election, SNP candidates promised.

That is despite the our islands, our future campaign, which resulted in this Parliament passing the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, which required the creation of a national islands plan by the Scottish Government. However, despite its lengthy discussions about fairness and parity, there was not a single commitment on the fair funding of those lifeline ferry services.

The current instability and uncertainty over the future settlement are causing concern in our islands, and that is before we talk about the impending need to replace vessels, which Liam McArthur highlighted.

I turn to the northern isles ferry service—the main service that connects Orkney and Shetland with the Scottish mainland. Again, it is a story of promises made, promises made again—and again—and then delayed and delayed again.

The Scottish Government promised us lower fares but, instead of those fares being implemented in the middle of 2018 as promised, there was piecemeal implementation for Shetland and nothing for Orkney.

Paul Wheelhouse: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: The cabinet secretary will have a chance to respond later.

The delay was blamed on issues around compliance with EU state aid rules. That case would have been more reasonable if ministers had engaged with the ferry operators at an earlier stage. Instead, we got a legal dispute. The routes have recently been retendered, which was an opportunity to set the future direction of the service. Instead, we got a vague threat of nationalisation, which local people do not want. That was followed by a tendering process in which many of the issues that islanders are most concerned about—cost and availability of cabins, service reliability, freight capacity and the availability of suitable replacements when boats are on refit—have not been addressed.

If it seems as though the Scottish Government is making it up as it goes along, that is probably because it is. As Liam Kerr highlighted, we lack a strategic view on the future of our ferries and on how we connect our island communities, not just for now but for the years ahead. Without that, the Scottish Government's warm words around sustainability of island communities become meaningless.

Scotland's ferries provide lifeline links with our islands and other remote communities. They keep some of those communities sustainable. They make island life in the 21st century possible, but they have been neglected by an SNP Administration that does not have a comprehensive plan. It is better at making promises to the islands than it is at delivering them.

15:18

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I remind members that my wife works part time for CalMac.

I will touch on the Scottish Government amendment, part of the Labour amendment and the Conservative motion. It will come as no surprise that most of my comments will be focused on Ferguson Marine and the issue of shipbuilding.

I support the Scottish Government's actions in stepping in to save the yard. Make no mistake—the yard was going into administration. The Scottish Government needed to step in to save the jobs and to help my constituency and my community. It also needed to save shipbuilding for the future and to complete the two CMAL vessels, as well as the other three vessels that are under construction.

When I am out and about in my constituency, I get the same message from constituents, which is, "Thank you to the Scottish Government. Thank you for saving this shipyard." The Tories are laughing—if they do not want to save jobs, that is entirely up to them. The yard was going to shut.

My constituents know that the Scottish Government stands up for them, in comparison with the heartless Tories, whose record on shipbuilding, including in Inverclyde, is there for all to see: yards were shut, thousands of people were paid off, and people were forced to get on their bikes to go and find employment. There was also depopulation—and the list goes on and on.

Jamie Greene should know better, as he is from Inverclyde. Some of his public comments have been quite bizarre, and they do not reflect the history of what his party has inflicted on the Inverclyde area. I will give members just a couple of Mr Greene's quotes. On 10 August, on the back of the Ferguson situation, Mr Greene commented:

"The blame for this fiasco lies solely at the feet of the SNP government who have recklessly mismanaged this contract"—[*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—I cannot hear the quote, and neither can the official reporters. Please continue.

Stuart McMillan: Okay.

—"the SNP government who have recklessly mismanaged this contract, wasted hundreds of millions of pounds",

blah, blah, blah.

On 2 October, Mr Greene said:

"They are responsible for the mess the yard is in and they should have let it flourish in the private sector."

When Mr Greene speaks later in the debate, will he tell the Parliament how, given those two key points—

"recklessly mismanaged this contract"

and

"should have let it flourish in the private sector"

—the Government could have mismanaged the contract if the yard was in the private sector? [*Interruption.*]

Hold on. Secondly, if the yard was flourishing in the private sector, how was the contract

mismanaged? I will be keen to hear Mr Greene's comments—[*Interruption.*]

No—I have only four minutes.

Members: Oh!

Stuart McMillan: I will be happy to hear from Mr Greene later. That is not a problem at all.

Inverclyde knows that the Scottish Government is standing up for the area, unlike the Tories, whose political legacy is not one to be cherished. The Ferguson yard is saved. The Tories do not want to hear that, but the yard is saved, the jobs are saved, and the five vessels that are currently under construction will be finished, including the two CMAL vessels.

My constituents genuinely want the Ferguson shipyard to remain for many more years to come. I want there to be a longer-term strategy to ensure that it gets the throughput of more vessels to be built at the yard. I thank the GMB union for its support in ensuring that the yard would be saved. The workforce at the yard certainly do not trust the Tories, and they never will trust the Tories, but they thank the Scottish Government for the work that it has done to save their jobs.

15:22

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The Government's record on providing ferry services has been abysmal. When the Loch Seaforth was built for the Stornoway to Ullapool route, the community wanted two smaller boats. That would have enabled more sailings in the summer and provided cover throughout the fleet in the winter for dry-dock maintenance. Instead, the Government gave the community one large vessel that does not provide sufficient capacity in the summer and sails half empty in the winter. The design also appears to be flawed, in that the cooling system left the flagship floundering in the Minch during the summer. The Loch Seaforth is a beautiful boat that can berth only in Stornoway, Ullapool or Oban. Therefore, if there is a problem in Stornoway harbour, it cannot operate at all. The community view has turned out to be right, and the Scottish Government's view to be wrong.

Islands have been all but cut off by ferry breakdowns, which has caused huge inconvenience to our island communities. The people in Barra gave up and held a ceilidh on the pier instead. There is not enough capacity in the system to deal with breakdowns, or indeed with routine maintenance; that leads to inappropriate ferries on routes that they were not designed for, which leads in turn to more cancellations due to weather, because the ferries cannot cope. That problem arises especially in winter weather conditions—and winter is the time when most

routine maintenance takes place. That is why many of the cancellations are down to the weather. We need boats that are fit for purpose on the routes at that time of year.

The Government brought in the RET, which is another flagship policy, but did so without providing any additional capacity. The very policy that was put in place to help islanders has had the effect of shutting them out of ferries. People who are travelling at short notice cannot get a place on the boat to make their journeys. People who need to get to hospital, to visit sick relatives and indeed to attend funerals find themselves unable to travel. Port staff do their utmost to help, but most people are now routed through a centralised call centre and so do not get to speak to them directly. The ferries are old and so break down, and there is no additional capacity on routes in the summer. Someone needs to measure all that unmet need. How can we plan ferry services for the future if we do not know the needs that are currently going unmet?

I turn to the MV Glen Sannox and hull 802 vessels, which the Government boasts about in its amendment. However, those two ferries are nearly two years overdue, and nowhere in its amendment does the Government provide dates for their completion. There needs to be an inquiry into that fiasco. Rumours abound about what has gone wrong; if they are to be believed, it appears that those vessels represent yet more vanity projects by the Scottish Government. Their design was not signed off and was subject to multiple changes. The fuel system is so innovative that it is rumoured to be highly inappropriate: it does not work even for the short journeys that are involved for those ferries and so will not provide the cut in carbon emissions that is sought. What on earth is going on? You could not make it up. It appears that the existence of such vanity projects means that Scottish taxpayers are paying much more than they need to for the new ferries that we desperately need.

None of this situation is the fault of the workforce at Ferguson's, whose expertise is world renowned; it is down to the Scottish Government's mismanagement. We now see delays happening on the northern isles ferry contract, too. Again, the Scottish Government appears to have shut out the lowest bidder. There are also concerns about capacity in the northern isles. They produce the bulk of our fish and a large amount of livestock, which means seasonal variations in freight needs. Will any of those needs be met? The cost of a cabin for the long journey to Shetland is prohibitive. People need to be comfortable when they travel such a distance, and the provision of that comfort should not depend on their ability to pay.

All that our island communities want are ferries and ferry services that are fit for purpose, meet their needs and are affordable.

15:27

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As other members have said, it is impossible to overestimate the importance to my island constituency and others of CalMac and the services that it provides. Everything in the island economies depends, in one way or another, on its vessels.

It is true that not everything is as it should—or could—be with our ferry services. However, in the past decade, we have seen many improvements. I am afraid that that is a fact about which Mr Greene seems to be unaware. As Mr Gibson said, the introduction of RET was revolutionary. We have come a long way from the days when the Western Isles MP Donald Stewart was a lonely voice in the House of Commons when he advocated it. The present Scottish Government has doubled, in real terms, the amount of money that is invested in ferry services. That has been necessary to deal with the previous decade of chronic underinvestment, during which, as other members have pointed out, virtually no major vessels were built.

However, there are challenges, which it would be remiss of me not to mention. Compared with the figures from a decade ago, ferries to the Western Isles now deal with an astonishing 184,000 additional passenger journeys every year. The number of visitors that we now host in May is typically what we would previously have expected to see in July, which is a good thing. It is also a fantastic tribute to the work that the tourist industry and others have done in making the Western Isles a must-visit destination for a huge range of tourists.

That obviously puts strain on the network, the negative effects of which are felt predominantly by islanders who are trying to get on and off the islands at short notice. Although local people are able to live with that on a few busy weekends, it is asking too much for them to accept it for the whole of the summer. It is clear that we need more capacity on routes to the Western Isles. We also need to listen to what islanders say about how to deal with capacity issues in the short term. Over the summer there were calls for measures such as reserving space for islanders or introducing staggered bookings, and it is right that CalMac should explore the feasibility of introducing those.

Meanwhile, the minister will be aware that one of the major issues that came out of the Uist ferry summit, which I hosted last year and at which he spoke, was the urgent need for CalMac to

overhaul its ageing booking system, which regularly shows vessels as being full when they are not. I was encouraged to hear about progress on that front, so I would be grateful for any further information that the minister is able to provide today.

In the longer term, there are no easy solutions. The idea—I appreciate that it is a radical one—that some of CalMac's routes could ultimately be replaced by tunnels is becoming more realistic as time goes on. It is certainly not a cheap option or one that is suitable for every route, but no option is cheap when it is looked at over the long term. It is worth while to look for lessons from other places, not least the Faroe Islands, and to have an open debate on the subject from time to time in this place.

Ultimately, everyone agrees that more capacity is needed on our island ferry routes. However, we should not be prepared to take lessons on the subject from the Conservative Party, whose interest in it is so fleeting that not a single mention of CalMac or indeed ferries was made in its most recent Holyrood manifesto. Indeed, a word search—I accept that it is only a word search—of all Tory manifestos that I can see since devolution in 1999 produces only two mentions of ferries, and one of them, in 2011, was to speculate where savings might be made in the provision of ferry services. That probably speaks for itself.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a little time in hand, so all the closing speakers will get an extra minute. I call on Colin Smyth to close for Labour. You have five minutes, Mr Smyth.

15:31

Colin Smyth: Thank you for the advance warning, Presiding Officer. I will think of extra things to say. I am sure that you will be pleased to hear that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have to say that I have never found a politician who could not take an extra minute to speak.

Colin Smyth: That is 30 seconds gone already. *[Laughter.]*

The debate has, at least in some contributions, recognised the frustrations of our island communities about the impact of the lack of capacity and resilience in Scotland's ageing ferry fleet. It has highlighted the desperate need for a long-term ferry-building programme that details the Government's plans for fleet and port replacement and upgrades over the next 30 years or so. That plan needs to deliver a better, more reliable service for Scotland's island communities and it must deliver certainty for the shipbuilding sector to secure the jobs and skills of our shipyards and

their workforces. Such a strategic approach has been sorely missing. As a result, we have an ageing fleet with vessels requiring more and more maintenance, and a shipbuilding industry and workforce with no long-term view of their pipeline of work. That desperately needs to change.

Beyond that badly needed ferries plan, it is clear that there are also shortcomings in how the Government procures new ferries. The failings are exposed by the current delays to the delivery of the two new hybrid ferries—we still do not have a schedule for when they will be completed—and the decision to replace the MV Isle of Lewis with one large ship rather than two small vessels, as highlighted by Rhoda Grant.

Rhoda Grant and Alasdair Allan also highlighted the need for a new approach to capacity management. It is not enough for ferries to run on time if people cannot buy tickets to get on to them. We need to end the situation where ferries are fully booked months in advance and, in effect, become closed off to local residents who rely on them.

The introduction of road equivalent tariff fares on the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services improved affordability and provided a welcome boost to passenger numbers, but it was not accompanied by the planning or investment that were needed to help to meet the increased demand. The growing number of passengers travelling to the islands is positive, but it must not come at the expense of the local communities who rely on the services.

Some 18 months after RET fares were meant to be introduced on the northern isles ferry services, it is still not clear whether passengers on them will ever benefit from those fares. When, or if, they are introduced, we must ensure that the necessary capacity is put in place to meet the increased demand.

This debate has shown the need to view our lifeline ferry services as a public service—and, like all other public services, they need to be accessible. Labour believes that the lifeline ferry services should be in public ownership. On the Clyde and Hebrides routes, CalMac has provided value for money, and despite the clear challenges that it faces, it and its workforce deliver for our island communities daily. It is therefore disappointing that the Scottish Government decided against directly awarding the northern isles ferry services contract to a public sector operator.

One of the consequences of the Government's approach has been to fail to fully protect and enhance working conditions. During the current northern isles ferry services contract, the MV Arrow from Seatruck Ferries Ltd was chartered in order to meet growing freight demand on the

route. As part of that, subcontracted staff were paid not only less than the living wage, but less than the national minimum wage. That must be prevented in future contracts.

Paul Wheelhouse: I point out to the member that we have tried very hard, with the operator and the owner of the vessel, to change that. We even offered, on a bespoke basis, to pay the living wage. Unfortunately, that was not possible, or rather it was deemed not to be possible by the operator. We have the additional difficulty that, without the devolution of employment law to Scotland, we cannot legislate to make that a requirement. I will, however, certainly keep the member posted on that.

Colin Smyth: I listened to what the minister said, but the reality is that he has just renewed that contract in order to, in effect, continue to have in place a lower standard of workers' rights for those people if any ferry services are required to be subcontracted. Surely that situation should have been avoided when it came to awarding that particular contract. We should have put in place the capacity to ensure that we did not have to subcontract those services because of growing freight demand on that particular route.

I have asked the minister on more than one occasion to give me a guarantee that all staff, including subcontractors, on the new northern isles ferry services will be covered by a collective bargaining agreement. It seems, from what the minister has said today, that that will not be the case. The Government has been very keen to point out on numerous occasions that the fair work framework applies to those contracts. However, we must be clear that the framework definitely needs strengthened, because we are unable to guarantee collective bargaining for all the workforces, in particular those that are subcontracted. The Government really needs to start to address that issue when it comes to award those contracts.

I have used up my five minutes, so I will finish here. We need action from the Government, not only to improve how ferries are run by bringing lifeline services into public hands but on the way in which investment projects are planned, procured and managed, by creating a long-term strategy for our ferries and the necessary ferry-building plan to support that strategy.

15:36

Paul Wheelhouse: I will start where I had to finish in my opening remarks because of timing. We are responding to short-term challenges that have arisen in response to feedback from island communities. We have put in place an action plan, not least influenced by a meeting that I had with

Kenneth Gibson and Michael Russell and local ferry committees, to better manage what ferry users can expect by way of customer service and information from the ferry operator when services are disrupted. Transport Scotland will work together with ferry operators to get that right for passengers.

Kenneth Gibson and Dr Alasdair Allan raised the issue of the booking system; I think that Colin Smyth also referred to that in passing. To update members, Transport Scotland is fully funding the replacement of the existing system. As part of that, it is in active discussion with CalMac to explore upgrades to bring the current system into line with broader policy aspirations on smart ticketing. CalMac has already started a procurement process by issuing a notice in the *Official Journal of the European Union* at the end of September. Following on from that, the company will be issuing an invitation to tender in the next few months. It is expected that a preferred bidder will have been identified by summer 2020, and the project will subsequently be fully rolled out over the following couple of years.

I appreciate that that is not a quick process. I hope that members understand that procurement, by its nature, has to be done in a formal way. I reassure Dr Allan and Mr Gibson that we are taking that forward as a high priority.

A number of members have talked about CalMac. For balance, I will say this. During the past 12 months, CalMac has picked up some of the most prestigious awards. In 2018, the company won the ferry operator of the year award at the national transport awards. On customer service—as Mr Gibson mentioned—CalMac's customer service centre made it the first company in the UK to be measured against and awarded the new global accreditation standard by the Customer Contact Association. Indeed, the CCA assessor highlighted a number of strengths in the team, describing it as

“a competent, well managed, highly customer focused operation.”

I think—and this is reflected in Labour's amendment—that we should never lose sight of the fact that the hard-working team that works at CalMac, along with the team at NorthLink, provide an excellent service. Over the nine-month period from January to September this year, 97.2 per cent of Serco NorthLink passengers surveyed rated the service as excellent or good. Surely to goodness we in this chamber should reflect on good practice when it is delivered rather than criticising services, as seems to be the case today.

I did not have time earlier to address Jamie Greene's opening remarks. It is simply wrong to say that pressure on the network is greatest in the

winter months. The greatest period of pressure and overstretch is during the summer months, when passenger numbers soar and—as other members have noted—are fuelled by RET. This is the time of year when it is deemed to be most convenient to carry out the annual maintenance schedule.

Jamie Greene's interpretation of the data that I quoted is also wrong. I re-emphasise that we are talking about 0.67 per cent of all trips being cancelled for technical reasons. I think that he slightly misinterpreted the figure that I gave.

Mr Gibson will know well the difficulties of the solution that Mr Greene proposed to tackle the Arran situation, which displayed that he did not understand the issues regarding the different vessels, routes and conditions. I would rather leave it to the ships' masters to decide on the suitable solution for that situation.

On points that other members made, Jamie Halcro Johnston and Colin Smyth referred to RET. I did not get the chance to intervene on Mr Halcro Johnston, but I point out that we cannot implement RET on the northern isles ferry services at present, although it is still our policy to implement it eventually. There is an outstanding state aid complaint on the matter and I hope that members understand that we cannot force forward RET in the absence of a decision from the European Commission. Unfortunately, the Tories are just playing games on that matter.

Mr McArthur and Mr Halcro Johnston raised the issue of internal ferry services. I point out for Mr Halcro Johnston's benefit in particular that the Tories are responsible for the situation that has arisen in the isles, because it was a Conservative Administration back in the 1980s that decided to carve out internal ferry services and have a separate arrangement for them. Ironically, given the context of Brexit, that decision was made in order to attract European funding.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I am used to coming to the chamber and having back-bench SNP members blame us for absolutely everything going back many years. However, the minister is aware that his Government has been in power and responsible for transport in Scotland for 12 years. I can assure him that what he suggested about responsibility will get no response in the islands.

Paul Wheelhouse: That was a tremendously interesting contribution. The member made a point about the difficult situation in which the isles find themselves, but they are in that place because of Conservative ministers in the 1980s. To bring in our colleagues in the Liberal Democrats on this point, I should also mention that two Liberal Democrat transport ministers, as Kenneth Gibson highlighted, not only did not invest in vessels to

the extent that we have, but took no action to address the situation. It is this SNP Government that is working with the island authorities to try to address what is a long-term issue. We have a working group to develop the business case. Orkney Islands Council is keen to transfer services, but Shetland Islands Council is not and wishes to retain services. We are looking to help them with investment in the internal ferry routes.

On Rhoda Grant's points about the MV Loch Seaforth, it is our fastest and most reliable vessel. Yes, there was the incident to which Rhoda Grant referred, but I hope that she recognises that the vessel has provided an extremely good service for the communities of the Western Isles since it entered service. We are looking at how we can adapt service provision to address the capacity issue to which Rhoda Grant referred. The MV Loch Seaforth is a good addition to the fleet and is providing a sterling service for the Western Isles.

John Finnie made some excellent points about the history of trust ports, the degree to which privatisation has had a bearing on our need to invest in ports, the importance of lifeline ferry services and the lack of investment between 2001 and 2011. I appreciate that the SNP Government covered part of that period, but we are trying to address the long-term need to reinvest in our fleet. I assure members that that is very much part of our plans. As I said, development of the ferries plan is under way and we are looking at options to invest in our fleet.

It has been a good and interesting debate, but I encourage members to recognise the tremendous progress that has been made this year. Indeed, in its follow-up report in September, Audit Scotland did exactly that.

15:43

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to contribute again to a debate on the very important issue of ferries, because it affects so many of my constituents across the Highlands and Islands. I say "contribute again", because we have debated ferries several times recently, and it is hugely regrettable that we have to revisit an issue that is fast becoming a scandal that should shame the Scottish Government.

Like my colleagues who spoke earlier in the debate, I will focus on some specific issues as well as the broader discussion. For too long, people across the Highlands and Islands and other parts of Scotland have endured ferry services that are wholly unreliable and have little flexibility built in. As my colleague Jamie Greene noted in his speech, and as is noted in our motion for the debate, 82,000 delays and cancellations have

occurred since 2007. That is a lamentable statistic that should concern everyone in the chamber, not least because more than 100,000 people who live in our island communities rely on those ferry services to connect to the mainland. They are lifeline services for local people, vital to many businesses for transmitting goods and the main mode of transport for tourists to visit our islands. However, despite the clear need and demand for a reliable and robust ferry network, the SNP Government has failed miserably to rise to the challenge. There are many reasons why it has failed to do so.

We still see innumerable problems with our service. I have made the point before, but it is worth noting again, that, in its submission to the previous ferry review in 2010, CalMac said that the Government would have to build a new ferry every year just to stand still. However, we now face a situation in which the two new ferries that are on order are in limbo; if they are completed, they will be definitely late and almost certainly over budget. Of the existing fleet of ferries, almost 50 per cent are beyond their 25-year life expectancy, meaning that they are at significant risk of mechanical failures and breakdowns.

Despite repeated warnings over a number of years, the SNP Government has failed to act, and we are now in the middle of a ferry crisis. It is our residents, communities and businesses that suffer: from the young woman trying to catch the ferry from Dunoon to see her sick parent in Glasgow to the dairy farmer from Bute trying to get his produce to a processor on the mainland and the hotelier on Lewis who has to cancel bookings because the only ferry service is oversubscribed. Those are just a few examples of the many cases that I have dealt with since becoming an MSP. Often, there is little that I can do because, despite warm words from various ministers over the years, people see little material difference in many of our ferry services, and some services are getting worse.

An issue that has dominated my postbag since my election to the Parliament is the ferry service between Dunoon and Gourock town centres. Many people remain unhappy that the service never underwent a full tendering process after the contract with Argyll Ferries expired. Many are unhappy that the same unreliable vessels are still being used to this day. Despite it being the newest service on CalMac's books, it is the single worst performing service, with 995 cancelled sailings between January and September this year—that is almost 1,000 cancellations in nine months. It has accounted for more than a quarter of all of CalMac's cancelled sailings so far this year.

Paul Wheelhouse rose—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, your microphone is not on.

Paul Wheelhouse: Sorry—I have had to move desk.

There has been an increase in passenger traffic of more than 3 per cent this year, which I hope that Donald Cameron is interested to hear about and welcomes. He will know that the Gourock to Dunoon service, which we have set out plans to invest in, suffers badly from the vessels not being ideally suited to the conditions. I fully acknowledge that and we are committed to addressing it. However, weather-related matters account for a large number of the cancellations on the Gourock to Dunoon route.

Donald Cameron: Even if they are related to the weather, that does not excuse the fact that the number of cancellations and delays is increasing. Moreover, the MV Argyll Flyer, which is on that route, has cost more in breakdown repairs than it cost to purchase—the MV Ali Cat is not far behind in that regard.

As other members said, the Gourock linkspan has been out of action due to a fault, which has had knock-on effects for other services. Therefore, it is easy to understand why people in Dunoon and the Cowal peninsula are so exasperated with the service.

Another example that has been raised with me on several occasions is the issue of overcapacity on the Stornoway to Ullapool service. Many residents on Lewis are forced to plan ahead and book spaces to travel to the mainland due to space being booked up well in advance. Visitors also struggle to book on to the ferry, such is the demand during peak season. A constituent who runs a hotel on the west side of Lewis told me that she regularly has bookings cancelled due to people being unable to get on the ferry, which means a significant loss of income.

Those are merely two examples out of a catalogue of failings.

I turn to remarks made by colleagues in the chamber. A point made by the minister and other members was that we all recognise and thank the staff of the ferry services for their contribution. In my experience, the staff of CalMac, which runs the ferries that I travel on most often, are always highly professional.

Liam Kerr was among others who cited Audit Scotland's report and said that there is no Scotland-wide long-term strategy. That is the question that the minister should most reflect on.

I listened to Alasdair Allan speak about tunnels, and it is interesting that tunnels are being talked about more and more. However, I was disappointed to hear him question the good faith of

members on the Conservative benches when raising the issue of ferries. Several of us represent the Highlands and Islands, several of us represent the west of Scotland and several of us represent the north-east, and we are just as entitled to raise issues about ferries as he is.

I listened in amazement to Kenneth Gibson and the minister, who seemed to blame everyone else—including the Liberal Democrat transport minister, Chris Grayling, and the Labour Party—except the very Government that has run our ferry system for the past 12 years.

We are in the midst of a significant ferry crisis. Our ferry network has been badly let down by an SNP Government. It is aging, inflexible and unreliable, and local people are fed up with excuses. They want real action, and I hope that members support our motion today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the resilience—

Liam McArthur: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance in relation to what appeared to be misleading statements issued by both Kenneth Gibson and the minister in relation to the procurement of vessels for the northern isles—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will stop you right there, because I am one of those people who will tell you that that is not a point of order. Where there is statement with which you disagree, you can check the *Official Report* and bring the point up at another time, but it is not a point of order. I am not responsible for what members say.

Liam McArthur: You have not heard the point of order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You said that there was a misleading statement.

Liam McArthur: There was a misleading statement, and there is no way of allowing the record to be rectified.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order. I am not responsible for what members say; they are responsible for what they say. You must raise it again. You can check the OR and bring the matter up again, but it is not a point of order.

Liam McArthur: Can I ask whether—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I know that there has been a practice of letting people do this, but it is not a point of order.

Liam McArthur: Presiding Officer, will this be a consistent ruling applied by the chair?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am telling you what I have said. I am not inclined to take this any

further. It is just not a point of order—end of story. Please sit down.

Where was I? I have completely lost track of what I was doing.

That concludes the debate on the resilience of Scotland's ferry network. We must move on to the next item of business. I will let members take their seats. I do not want to waste time, because there will be interventions in the next debate.

I am sorry that Mr McArthur has left. [*Interruption.*] He is just over there. I want to clarify what he can do. I make it clear that his point is not a point of order—I hold to that statement—but, if relevant, he can pursue the point in written questions and follow-up questions or by lodging motions for debate, raising the matter in the media or writing to the members concerned. It is not a point of order for the chair. There are remedies—

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This is a point of order, I hope.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Well, we will see.

Mike Rumbles: My point of order is a question that I want to ask you, Presiding Officer. Is this a ruling that all three Presiding Officers—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am speaking from the chair. I am the Presiding Officer. I am telling you that your point is also not a point of order, so please sit down.

Can we move on, because we are—

Mike Rumbles: Can I speak?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have the floor so far.

Mike Rumbles: Thank you, Presiding Officer. It is very important that we have procedures in this Parliament that are consistent right across the board. I am very happy with the ruling that you have made. I am seeking a ruling from the chair—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will discuss it. Please sit down.

Mike Rumbles: You have not heard what—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can discuss what you have said with the other Presiding Officers. I know where you are going. I do not want to waste time for the next debate. The issue raised by Mr McArthur was not a point of order. Everyone in the chamber has been told that each time, but it happens over and over again.

Mike Rumbles: My point of order has nothing to do with the content of what—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I know what you are asking. You are asking whether it is consistent.

Mike Rumbles: You do not know what I am asking.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please sit down. I do not think that you are doing yourself any favours. I apologise to the Conservatives. This is interrupting their time.

Mike Rumbles: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. If your ruling lasts, but then there is inconsistency from the chair, members will simply wait until decision time to raise the same point of order again and we will get nowhere. Consistency is important.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will reflect on what you have said, Mr Rumbles, but can we now move on? Thank you.

Curriculum for Excellence

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-19717, in the name of Liz Smith, on curriculum for excellence.

15:55

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development produced its very important and comprehensive report on Scottish education in 2015, it prioritised some key recommendations. The report was very clear that the principles that underlie curriculum for excellence are the rights ones, and that the twin ambitions of excellence and equity should underpin all aspects of education policy. It also had many good things to say about the approach to holistic learning. Those are the exactly the reasons why all parties in Parliament agreed with Peter Peacock, the Minister for Education and Young People at the time, that curriculum for excellence was the right approach for the 21st century.

However, the report also warned that significant challenges existed in respect of delivery of curriculum for excellence. It highlighted both the absolute and relative decline in some aspects of attainment—mathematics being its primary focus—expressed concern about the higher incidence of lower achievement among secondary pupils compared with previous standards, and about the difficulty of evaluating curriculum for excellence because there was insubstantial research and incomplete data. On that last point, it recommended strengthening

“evaluation and research, including independent knowledge”,

which was not helped, of course, by Scottish Government actions to remove Scotland from some key international measurements.

Therefore, let me use an evidence-based approach in the debate. There is no doubt that curriculum for excellence was designed to build on the widely acknowledged strengths of Scottish education, and to ensure that schools would be fit for the 21st century. I agree with the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills when he says that that demands a change of culture and a different approach in our thinking, such that we are not wedded to old theories and practice. However, that should never become the excuse just to move on and hope that by adopting a new culture, the current problems of Scottish education will be solved.

Curriculum for excellence is about far more than just exams and the traditional measures of attainment, but those traditional measures still

matter, just as they do in any education system anywhere in the world.

The cabinet secretary often cites the increase in the number of new qualifications that are available to young people as justification for claiming success for curriculum for excellence, but that must surely be set alongside what is happening to the core qualifications that parents, young people and employers will always see as being important for job prospects. It is undoubtedly true that there has been a very considerable increase in the number of new qualifications, but the increase remains much smaller than the extent of the fall in the numbers who are sitting core qualifications.

Our serious educationists in Scotland—including Mark Priestley, Lindsay Paterson, Keir Bloomer and Jim Scott—have examined the facts using the evidence-based approach that the OECD claimed was needed so much. In short, those specialists have, through their painstaking efforts, provided us with a very considerable bank of evidence about developments in Scottish education over the past decade—evidence that shows that, despite all the past strengths of Scottish education, there are some deeply worrying trends in the current system.

The biggest concerns are, first, that attainment in the core subjects has varied across the picture. The facts—including evidence that was presented to the Education and Skills Committee—show that there has been a very marked downward shift in subject choices away from science, technology, engineering and mathematics, languages and social subjects, to the extent that some subjects are approaching very serious problems for their sustainability in the future—to say nothing of the negative effects that that would have on the economy.

Secondly, even after taking into consideration structural and demographic changes, there has been a significant decline in attainment in several key areas of literacy and numeracy.

The third area of great concern relates to Professor Jim Scott's latest evidence, which highlights the fact that the least-able pupils are losing out most. For Scottish Conservative members, that is the key concern, given that curriculum for excellence was supposed to help that pupil cohort most. I will return to that point in a minute.

All the time, however, John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon are very keen on telling us that attainment is improving and that exam results are getting better, but that is simply not a fully accurate picture.

If the cabinet secretary will not listen to me, he must surely listen to his own advisers. We know that civil servants produced a paper on 2 August in

which concerns about the issue were raised. One of his officials told him:

“I am concerned about the drop in the overall Higher pass rate (down 2 percentage points) and in relation to English (down 2.7 percentage points) and mathematics (down 2.1 percentage points) in particular.”

We also know that, when the Scottish Qualifications Authority results were published, the officials were proved right. But what did Mr Swinney say when it was revealed that 2019 was the fourth year of falling attainment in highers—the so-called gold standard of Scottish education? Mr Swinney said that the summer results were

“a strong set of results”

and that he was not too concerned about “annual variation”.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I wonder how Liz Smith would describe a 75 per cent higher pass rate? Does she not consider that to be a strong performance by the young people of Scotland?

Liz Smith: I think that Mr Swinney should listen to what his civil servants have been telling him about their concerns about the downturn in the highers pass rate. That has happened four years in a row.

From the research evidence that we have available, it is increasingly clear that all groups of learners, from the most able to the least able, have suffered negative impacts from curriculum for excellence—despite all the good intentions. Particularly worrying, however, is the fact that the least able, or lower-level, learners have suffered to a significantly greater extent than those who are more able. It must surely be a matter of very considerable concern that the level of pupils with zero formal attainment has risen sharply, and has reached more than 3 per cent of the school-leaver population in a quarter of local authorities. If the cabinet secretary is going to tell me that extensive alternative provision of courses hides the true level of attainment, he will need to provide convincing evidence that is not currently in the public domain and is nowhere to be seen on most schools’ websites.

I know that time is short, Presiding Officer. I note that the cabinet secretary intends to support our motion. I hope that he will understand that we have very serious concerns about the direction of curriculum for excellence. The Education and Skills Committee has also said that it has concerns, employers have said that they have concerns and our educationists have said that they have concerns. It is time that the Scottish Government listened and acted.

I move,

That the Parliament is committed to the principles of excellence and equity to underpin policy approaches to education and to improve the delivery of the curriculum for excellence (CfE), but notes with growing concern the recent analysis of CfE, including the recent publication from Professor Jim Scott, which draws the conclusion that the attainment gap is widening and highlights that there are failures in the delivery of CfE; notes in particular that these failures are imposing proportionately greater barriers to success among the pupil cohort who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and calls on the Scottish Government to urgently address these concerns.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Swinney to speak to and move amendment S5M-19717.1. I beg your pardon—I mean S5M-19717.2. You were about to move the Labour amendment, cabinet secretary. That would have been interesting.

16:02

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I would have been unable to move the dismal words of the Labour amendment. I will, however, move the amendment in my name, which you properly ascribed to me.

Improving the education and life chances of all our children and young people, irrespective of their background, is the defining mission of the Scottish Government. Today’s debate focuses on one particular analysis report on education performance. In addressing the issue, it is important that we seek the broadest possible discussion, and that we incorporate a wide range of evidence and analysis.

The Conservatives claim that the attainment gap is widening. I refute that claim. If we look across a broad set of data, we see that we are beginning to make progress in closing the attainment gap.

Liz Smith: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: I will give way in a second. Let me first put some details on the record.

The gap for those achieving at least one pass or more at level 5—such as national 5s—or better has fallen by around one third, from 33.3 per cent in 2009-2010 to 20.3 per cent in 2017-2018. The gap at higher level—level 6—for those achieving at least one pass has fallen by almost one fifth, from 45.6 per cent in 2009-2010 to 37.4 per cent in 2017-2018.

I was surprised that Liz Smith could not bring herself to describe a 75 per cent pass rate in highers as a strong performance. The gap at higher level—level 6—has reduced every single year for the past eight years. Figures that were published in June showed a record proportion of school leavers going on to positive destinations,

and the gap between those from the most-deprived and the least-deprived communities achieving positive destinations reduced from 20.2 per cent to 8.6 per cent between 2019-2020 and 2017-2018.

Liz Smith: Professor Jim Scott's analysis, which was published earlier this week, deals with the issue methodically—school by school and local authority by local authority. The title of his report is "Widening the Gap". Does the Scottish Government accept that analysis?

John Swinney: I was coming to discussion of the analysis that Professor Scott issued this week, because Liz Smith's motion refers to it, and she referred to it in her comments.

I am aware that one statistic—on the proportion of young people leaving school with no qualifications—has drawn particular attention. However, I ask members to exercise caution in using one statistic from which to draw definitive conclusions about the system. The no-qualifications rate reached a low point of 1.5 per cent in 2012-13. It has remained at around 2 per cent over the past three years. However, that data, as with much of Jim Scott's analysis, focuses solely on national qualifications at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 3 and above. It is a fact that not all of those young people leave with nothing; the majority of those leavers achieved a course award or unit assessment.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: I will continue, if Mr Johnson will forgive me.

Around a fifth of leavers left with a course award—for example, a national 2 award, an employability award, or a modern languages for life and work award. A further two fifths achieved one unit assessment or more.

The reality is—Liz Smith referred to this in her contribution—that our young people are achieving a breadth of awards that give them the best chance of success in further learning, life and work. More than 54,000 skills-based qualifications were achieved in 2019—more than double the figure that was achieved in 2012, which was 24,849.

Let me be absolutely clear: no pupil in our education system should leave school without the knowledge, skills and attributes that they need. That is why we took the decisions to invest through the Scottish attainment challenge, the schools programme and pupil equity funding, to focus on ensuring that young people who face barriers to learning are supported to overcome those obstacles and to reach a positive outcome in their education.

It is vital that we have a broad discussion about such questions. That is why the Government is commissioning an independent review of the senior phase. I would like to say more about that review. Its purpose will be to explore further how curriculum for excellence is being implemented for young people in secondary 4 to S6 across the country, and to identify improvements that might be made.

In taking forward the review, I have sought assistance and leadership from outwith our education system, which is why we have asked the OECD to provide leadership. That follows on from what Liz Smith described as the

"very important and comprehensive report"

that in 2015 the OECD undertook on broad general education under curriculum for excellence.

It is important that our education sector is closely involved, because the OECD's leadership of the review must be informed by the experiences of young people and practitioners in our education system. If we do not listen to the experiences of young people, we will fail them badly in the exercise.

In line with empowerment of the teaching profession, education practitioners will work alongside the OECD team. That work will be led by Tony McDade from South Lanarkshire Council—a local authority director of education who has been nominated by the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.

The review will draw on the broadest possible range of evidence and data. One significant factor in that will be the Scottish Government's senior phase headteachers survey, which provides factual information from a range of schools on a range of curricular models and rationales that demonstrates the impact of CFE.

We will work with our local and national partners to agree the final remit of the review, and we will provide an opportunity for the Education and Skills Committee to give its views on the content of the review.

The review is an important exercise in looking properly at all the evidence, not just one part of it, and it will address issues for the future of the senior phase in Scottish education.

I move amendment S5M-19717.2, to insert at end:

"by conducting the review supported by the Parliament on 1 May 2019, called for by the Education and Skills Committee in its cross-party report into the senior phase of Scottish education, which was published in September 2019, and previously committed to by the Scottish Government, and notes that the independent review will draw on evidence from education stakeholders and partners, including the latest data on young people's

progress through CfE and the outcomes they achieve when they leave school.”

16:08

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I rise to support the motion and to speak to the far from dismal amendment in my name.

I congratulate Liz Smith on bringing the debate to the chamber. In truth, it is a very short debate for an enormously important and complex subject. That, of course, is because Opposition debates are, it seems, the only way in which we can debate school education at all in the Parliament. It is now more than two whole years since the Government saw fit to bring forward a debate on schools in its own time. That happened on 2 November 2017, and that debate was about the presumption of mainstreaming. It is even longer since the last Government debate on school education in general. We have to go back to June 2017 to find that. It is hard not to draw the conclusion that the Government is somewhat reluctant to have its record on education scrutinised. Given the figures that Professor Scott published this week, which are referred to in the Conservative motion, perhaps that is not surprising.

Professor Scott’s analysis of the SQA results is very worrying. The analysis is very detailed, of course, but the headline figures show that, since the introduction of the new exams, attainment has declined by 32.9 per cent in S4 and by nearly 10 per cent in S5. The raw numbers are even starker. Professor Scott calculates that, over the six and five years respectively since the introduction of the new exams, pupils have achieved 807,000 fewer qualifications in S4 and 36,000 fewer qualifications in S5 than might have been expected. Those are alarming figures, and the impact is not uniform.

It is entirely legitimate to look at the percentage of pupils who leave school with no qualifications at all, because they are at the sharpest end of the attainment gap. The number of such pupils is rising quickly and has reached more than 3 per cent in a quarter of local authorities, as Liz Smith said. It is the case, as John Swinney said, that the number had fallen to a low of 1.5 per cent, but the point is that that was an historic trend. The number had been falling since the introduction of comprehensive education, when some 70 per cent of young people left school without qualifications. It took us 50 years to reverse that trend, and we should start to worry if it turns around again.

In S5 and S6 in particular, the drop in the number of enrolments, as well as in attainment, is hitting STEM subjects and modern languages hardest. Professor Scott makes the point that some languages face an existential threat in our schools.

The worst thing is that none of this is new. In May 2015, Labour first raised Professor Scott’s work in the chamber. The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister dismissed our concerns but, four years on, there have been not only alarming numbers but alarming and consistent downward trends. Professor Scott is not a lone voice any more. The Education and Skills Committee’s recent report on the underlying causes of the fall in the number of qualifications uncovered evidence from a wide range of sources of a narrowing of the curriculum, the prevalence of multilevel teaching and pressure on overworked teachers. All those issues are relevant and are part of Labour’s amendment.

Given that I have mentioned overworked teachers, let me be very clear. I visit schools all the time, as I know Mr Swinney does, too, and the quality and professionalism of teachers are, indeed, second to none. The level of professionalism is much greater than it was when I was a teacher 35 years ago. The problems lie not with our teaching staff but in the management and structures relating to the implementation of curriculum for excellence.

I understand that the Government has agreed to a review, but that was asked for in May, and we have heard only today how it will be taken forward.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Could you conclude, please, Mr Gray?

Iain Gray: It is critical that the review moves forward quickly.

I move amendment SM5-19717.1, to insert after “delivery of CfE”:

“recognises that such failures have resulted in, for example, a narrowing of subject choice in the senior phase, a prevalence of multi-level teaching and an increased workload for many teachers;”.

16:13

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I thank Liz Smith for bringing the topic for debate. Like Iain Gray, I am frustrated that, once again, we are debating education during Opposition time alone. Given that the Government claims that educational attainment is its top priority, it is frankly alarming that the Scottish National Party is so reluctant to bring forward debates on our schools during Government time.

However, if we look at the findings from Professor Jim Scott, we see that it is not difficult to understand why the Government is not falling over itself to bring the issue to Parliament. There has been a sustained trend of decline in overall attainment, a widening of the attainment gap and an increase in the number of learners who leave school without qualifications. We all agree on the

principles of curriculum for excellence, but its introduction at a time of budget and staffing cuts, compounded by confusion over policy and objectives, has been a recipe for some quite predictable problems. Teachers have been left to pick up the pieces by a Government that did not plan properly or invest in the implementation of the biggest change to Scottish education for decades.

Worst of all, it has been left to academics to research and compile the information that the Parliament finds itself using regularly, both in the chamber and committees. Where was the body that is responsible for inspecting standards in Scottish schools? The last time Education Scotland appeared before the Education and Skills Committee, it refused outright to accept findings—including those of Professor Scott—showing the impact of deprivation on subject choice. It insisted that its experience told a different story, yet it failed to undertake any kind of comprehensive research or analysis of deprivation and its impact on attainment—thus the committee's clear instruction that it now do so.

Professor Scott has highlighted in his report an apparent lack of concern at all levels of governance about attainment. That reflects my experience with the public body that is responsible for standards in our schools and, given the Government's aversion to bringing forward debates on education, it feels as though such a culture permeates the Government and ministerial level as well.

The widening of our attainment gap and the increase in the number of young people leaving school without qualifications cannot be viewed in isolation. I welcome the SQA's confirmation that it is looking at the increase in the number of leavers with no qualifications, but the 18-month timescale that it gave indicates a lack of urgency that the cabinet secretary really must put right.

It would be wrong to pretend that the issues are all within education policy. They are also the result of poverty and the impact of that poverty on children who are growing up in Scotland. Around one in four children in Scotland live in relative poverty, a figure that has been rising steadily since around 2010 when the coalition Government began the waves of austerity that are still hitting our public services. Cuts to welfare support, punitive sanctions and caps on child tax credits have all left families worse off. A low minimum wage, excessive qualifying periods for protection against unfair dismissal, the growth of zero-hours contracts and the expansion of the gig economy mean that work is no longer a route out of poverty, either. Families get trapped in a low-pay no-pay cycle.

Closing the attainment gap in education simply will not happen at a time when child poverty is

once again growing. That is not to say that everything needs to be solved at Westminster or even here at Holyrood. Councils provide key services for families in poverty; lunch and breakfast clubs, social and recreational activities, libraries, support services, housing and transport are all provided at the local level. We know from the experience of Finland that policies such as free lunches for all pupils are key to its high levels of attainment. For Finland, attainment and equality across the board go hand in hand, and it is no coincidence that it is one of the highest-attaining countries and has one of the lowest rates of child poverty on the planet.

That is why the Greens have prioritised halting the cuts to council budgets in our negotiations with the Government over recent years, but there is so much more to do. This time last year, the Greens set out in our paper "Level the Playing Field" a range of policies that will help pupils. The Government is more than welcome to take and implement anything that was proposed in that paper; indeed, in a few instances—after a little encouragement—it already has. Education is an area in which Opposition parties are genuinely keen to work with the Government, but whether the issue is officials unwilling to even collect the data that is required or ministers unwilling to bring the issues to debate, we need to see not just a change in policy but a fundamental shift in Government culture.

The Greens are happy to support the motion and both amendments today.

16:18

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):

Here we are again—another Opposition-led debate on the state of Scotland's education system. I thank the Conservatives for giving us the opportunity to debate this hugely important issue, but I hope that it will be the Government that brings forward the next education debate.

The rationale behind curriculum for excellence is too important to abandon. We must ensure that our pupils have the skills that they need to succeed in the 21st century world of changing technology and work patterns. It was a fair criticism that the old curriculum often pushed pupils through exams by teaching them how to pass rather than how to learn, and it was fair to say that traditional subjects were often prioritised to the detriment of alternative courses that might be better suited to some pupils. Therefore, we are calling not for wholesale change but for the Government to fix what is going wrong before an entire cohort of our young people is disadvantaged through no fault of its own.

The first step is for the Government to listen to the evidence. The cabinet secretary told Parliament the last time we held this debate that we should wait for the Education and Skills Committee's report to be published before drawing any conclusions on the evidence—so seven months later, we are here having exactly the same debate. The reason is that the members who were involved in that inquiry and who are concerned about Scotland's education know credible evidence when they see it. Teacher shortages, a lack of resources and a confused chain of accountability are creating a postcode lottery of opportunity.

We know that there are 1,000 fewer maths and English teachers than there were in 2008 and that that is affecting schools such as Aith junior high school in Shetland, which is advertising yet again for an English teacher after several failed attempts to recruit.

The motion also highlights the important work of Professor Jim Scott, who gave evidence to the committee. Professor Scott's work is hugely valuable to policy makers, but we should not rely on him to do the research that is needed to properly evaluate the curriculum. Education Scotland needs to up its game. It is extraordinary that it cannot provide figures on teachers or the number of multilevel classes, or evidence on the impact of deprivation on subject choice.

The responsibility for fixing what has gone wrong should not fall on teachers, who are doing their best with the resources that they have. One of my constituents, who is a recently retired teacher, recently told me that CFE means curriculum for effluence rather than curriculum for excellence, and they were not using the word positively. I do not agree with that description, but it is useful to think of it in another way.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I appreciate that any individual teacher is entitled to their view, but the member says that she regards that as a "useful" contribution. Does she really think that it is?

Beatrice Wishart: As I said, I do not agree with the description, but I was coming on to make the point that it is useful to think of it in another way, which is that curriculum for excellence is about making sure that our young people flow out of school with all the skills that they need to succeed in whatever they choose to do next. Too many are doing that in spite of their school experience and not because of it. We therefore need the flow of the guidance and resources that are needed to make our curriculum a success to progress better through all levels of accountability.

The senior phase review that the Parliament has called for must be an opportunity for real improvement. We will back the motion.

16:21

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): The motion is focused on the weaknesses in the delivery of the curriculum for excellence and the real effect that those are having on Scotland's children. The Parliament has heard that the structure of the CFE has narrowed subject choice in S4, which greatly limits future options for our young people. That has been voiced in evidence to the Parliament many times by stakeholders from across the political spectrum and outwith it. I will focus on the drop in overall attainment and the widening of the attainment gap.

The recent academic paper by Professor Jim Scott, who has contributed to the Parliament's Education and Skills Committee regularly and thoroughly, is a valuable addition to the debate on Scotland's education. He notes that the Scottish Government could do a lot more to increase the quality and quantity of the data that we have on attainment. One of the main intentions of the CFE is to close the attainment gap through a number of initiatives. However, as the paper reveals, since those initiatives have come into place, equity has worsened and attainment has fallen. In fact, Professor Scott found that the percentage of pupils leaving school with no qualifications has risen since the implementation of the CFE. For example, in Falkirk, which is in my region, the proportion of children leaving school without any formal qualifications has almost tripled, from 1 per cent in 2012-13 to 2.8 per cent last year.

There are many other findings in Professor Scott's paper, but one figure that particularly stands out contradicts the Scottish Government, which has claimed that subject choice is not narrowing. Professor Scott noted that roughly half of secondary schools have adopted a six-course model for pupils in S4, whereas the norm was always seven or eight courses. That one factor was responsible for more than a third of the decline in attainment in S4 from 2013 to the current day.

That is concrete evidence of two things: first, that there has been a narrowing of subject choice in S4; and, secondly, that that narrowing has led to significant drops in attainment. The Government's favourite counter point—that alternative courses are making up for the fall in subject choice—is also addressed in Professor Scott's publication, which shows that, although there has been a rise of about 15,000 annual alternative qualification passes from 2013 to this year, that has coincided with a fall of nearly 165,000 annual traditional course passes. That is staggering.

The problems in our education system are very real. Despite the SNP's attempts to stifle the evidence, research such as that by Professor Scott exposes just how bad the situation is.

Attainment is falling, our teachers are overworked and the equity-related attainment gap is not closing. In his paper, Professor Scott said:

"Equity has also suffered, perhaps significantly, as a result of nNQs and CfE."

We need a Scottish Government that follows through on its promises to prioritise education and get it right for every child. It is unfortunate that we do not have that. Members of the Opposition parties owe it to our teachers and pupils to do everything we can to expose the failures of this Scottish Government until each and every concern is addressed.

16:25

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Like many members, I took very seriously the Education and Skills Committee's concerns when it undertook its inquiry into subject choice, but I do not think that we are reflecting the full conclusions of the report. There is a failure to recognise that we are comparing what happened previously in relation to national qualifications with how curriculum for excellence is designed to work. Indeed, how curriculum for excellence works and advances that have been made are still not recognised in the statistics.

We do ourselves and our pupils and teachers a disservice if we look only at the numbers. For example, my son, who has just graduated in music, was not able to do advanced higher music at his school, because it was not available on the curriculum. If we looked just at his school timetable, we would think that the option was not available. However, he was able to do that subject, of course, because there was an arrangement in the local authority to enable people to travel to do qualifications outwith the school—in another school, for example. Work has been done to ensure that pupils get opportunities to study what they want to study, and I think that that is being missed in the debate—yet again. It is important that we consider curriculum for excellence in the round and the outcomes for young people.

I would share people's concern if there were proven to be a lack of progress on attainment and if people were being disadvantaged, but that is not what I see and it is not what universities and colleges are seeing. There is a great uptake in applications to university and more of our young people are getting on and doing what they want to do.

I emphasise again that, just as we all recognise and support the principles of curriculum for excellence, we all supported the developing the young workforce programme, which absolutely was about preparing our young people for the workplace. That means that additional qualifications, voluntary qualifications, Duke of Edinburgh awards, foundation apprenticeships, college access courses and so on are just as important to the outcomes as the list of qualifications is. I hope that we can move away from the current approach to the debate.

I share people's concerns, which is why the committee asked the Government to research a number of areas. We know that the independent review of the senior phase is about to get under way. We asked the Government to consider the impact of different curricular models, because the situation is complex and not easy to understand just by counting pupil numbers or results.

I will give another example. Many more pupils are going straight to higher level qualifications without taking the equivalent of a standard grade qualification, which is the national 4 qualification. That shows in the statistics as a reduction in the number of nat 4 qualifications, but we know that schools are taking the opportunity to enable pupils to miss out that phase and go straight to higher qualifications.

That is why the independent review must consider curricular models and what is happening on the ground in our schools. I really hope that we can move forward positively on the issue.

I thank Ross Greer for making the important point that we cannot consider what is happening in our schools without looking at the great impact that austerity and other decisions of the Conservative Party are having on families in our communities. It is much, much harder for people to achieve things when they cannot get the basics of life right—we need only look to Maslow's hierarchy of needs to know just how important that is.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Clare Adamson: I think that I am out of time.

The Presiding Officer: Yes, I am afraid that you are.

16:29

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I will follow on from where the convener of the Education and Skills Committee left off. She is right that it is vital that we look at the curriculum for excellence in the round.

Before coming into this Parliament, I was aware of the issues and anecdotes around curriculum for

excellence. When I was first a member of the Education and Skills Committee and we were looking at curriculum for excellence, Ross Greer and I were in the chat room with a group of student teachers. We asked them, "What is the biggest single challenge that you face as student teachers?" We did not know what they were going to say. They said, "It is teaching third years." We were surprised. When we asked them to explain what that meant, they said that their point was that pupils in that age group are difficult to teach, because they do not see the point of being at school. They have not yet started their qualifications, but they have finished the broad general education. There are other insights, such as the misgivings about the reasons that some schools stick with the two-year, eight-subject model for secondary 3 and 4. Why is there a decline of some subjects? Why are young people having to drop more subjects at an earlier point?

The problem that we have in this debate is that we do not have the data and evidence to provide insight into what is happening—which things are reality and which are just anecdotes. I do not want to criticise curriculum for excellence, for one important reason: we are all invested in it and we all need it to succeed. Above all else, it is the right approach. It is right that we have a curriculum that seeks to give young people the skills that they need in order to learn, rather than filling their heads with facts. That is what they need in order to succeed in the 21st century.

When we undertake major change, such as introducing curriculum for excellence, it is vital that we stop to assess, reflect and—when things are not working correctly—adjust. The reality of this Government's approach is that there has been a paucity of that analysis, a lack of review and a lack of a baseline set of data, in order to assess whether we are succeeding in what we set out to achieve with the curriculum for excellence.

I thank Jim Scott for his useful contribution. I agree with the Deputy First Minister that we cannot take a single measure and treat it as a verdict on the whole system. I also say to him that he needs to look at all the measures in the round. Some of the measures that Professor Scott raised are matters for concern and need to be addressed. I ask that those things are addressed in the review into the senior phase. I am pleased that the Deputy First Minister provided further detail on what that will entail. Until now, there has been a lack of that detail. Although I am pleased that the OECD is being asked to conduct that review and that it will look at the effectiveness of S4 to S6, I would like to understand when it will report and what other things it will look at. It is not good enough simply to look at the effectiveness of those years.

As I hinted at in my anecdote, there is also the question of the broad general education. It is the flipside of the coin to the senior phase. Breadth is the key value in the Scottish education system, so we must look at the direction of intent and whether breadth is being maintained. We also need to look at qualification design. I would be grateful if the Deputy First Minister could clarify whether those things will be covered.

Unless we measure, we cannot manage. We need to look at the range of measures that we have in our system. The Scottish Government's record is not good. We have withdrawn from the international mathematics and science study and the progress in international reading literacy study. We have scrapped the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy. This Government has dismantled our ability to compare ourselves internationally and with ourselves.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Mr Johnson.

Daniel Johnson: We need to understand how we are achieving. We need to have confidence in the measurements that we have of our education system.

16:34

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I welcome this opportunity to discuss curriculum for excellence, and in particular the work that the Government is doing to close the attainment gap across Scotland. We all know that closing the attainment gap is at the heart of the Scottish Government's agenda, and I feel comfortable saying that everyone in the Parliament values and places the utmost importance on doing that.

I find it a great shame that the negative rhetoric from the Tories and Labour on our education system is still as prevalent. That is not to say that there is not more work to be done or that everything is perfect—we are having a review, and I agree with Daniel Johnson's remarks about measuring and taking stock of where we are—but the misinformation and the downplaying of the continuing success of the curriculum for excellence is disappointing.

Liz Smith: Does the member agree with the work that Professor Jim Scott has published? He made painstaking efforts to ensure that the evidence that he produced was accurate. I note that the Scottish Government is supporting the motion this evening.

Rona Mackay: I understand that Professor Scott carried out a great deal of detailed work. I cannot say for sure whether it is 100 per cent accurate. We can throw statistics around, but I

cannot say that for sure. I am more interested in outcomes, and we have a record of successful outcomes, which are far more important than someone criticising curriculum for excellence.

Under the present Scottish Government, the number of young people leaving school with five highers or more has gone up, and last year was the first time ever that 30 per cent of pupils got at least five highers or better—an increase of 22.2 per cent from 2009-10.

That was one of the points that I raised with Professor Jim Scott during his evidence session at the Education and Skills Committee's review of the senior phase of education. Frankly, he was at a loss to answer it. In relation to a further question from my colleague Jenny Gilruth, however, he said:

"We have a situation in which CFE should be a world-class initiative, and it has the potential to be so. I have debated with a few people in this room what the first committee started with in terms of ... a view of education, and I do not think that any of us disagreed that CFE is other than a good idea."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 24 April 2019; c 19.]

There are record numbers in higher education, and record numbers of students from deprived areas are going on to further education and achieving qualifications. Indeed, the gap between those from the most and least deprived areas achieving a higher or better is at a record low, having reduced for the eighth consecutive year. We should be celebrating that, instead of talking it down.

The Scottish Government is building on that success and is continuing its dedication to the young people of Scotland by committing to provide a further £750 million during this parliamentary session to raise attainment, including £120 million of pupil equity funding going directly to schools, on top of the £50 million for attainment challenge authorities.

I am proud to say that, although it is to some extent still a work in progress, curriculum for excellence has transformed learning experiences for children and young people across Scotland, and that was precisely the intention. It moves the focus from solely academic attainment, giving greater attention to the capacities that children need to make a success of their lives, with tailored experiences guided by the current and new generation of great teachers in this country so that children can fully achieve their potential.

Under CFE, young people can choose from a broader range of pathways than before. What matters is the qualifications that pupils leave school with. We have a forward-thinking, modern, flexible system, which treats every child as an individual.

The Scottish Government is getting on with the job of improving our education system so that it works for all. Perhaps it is time that, instead of talking down the achievements of teachers and pupils in Scotland, the Opposition parties celebrated them.

16:38

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I declare a registered interest: I have a daughter who is a secondary school teacher.

I am delighted to speak in today's debate, because it gives me the opportunity once again to reiterate my strong belief that education is a major solution to health and welfare issues. The Scottish Government's commitment at the beginning of the session to have education as its main objective was most welcome. In fact, Nicola Sturgeon went further, stating that we should judge it on the success of its education policy. That was against the backdrop, of course, of the flagship education bill, which is now defunct.

As Liz Smith stated in her opening remarks, the principles that underpin curriculum for excellence—excellence and equity—are the right ones and all parties in the Parliament quite rightly supported them. However, it is the Scottish Government's implementation of the policy and the measurement of its outcomes that highlight its failure to deliver against those objectives—no matter how hard the Scottish Government has tried to avoid proper scrutiny. The stark reality is that, when measured against the objectives of excellence and equity—especially equity, in my view—the Scottish Government has been shown to be failing significantly.

Despite the protestations of Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney to the contrary, we now know that even their own civil servants told them that subject choices were reducing and that senior students were taking fewer subjects than before. Time and again in the chamber, I have heard the incredible claim from John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon that, somehow, that would not have a negative effect on our children's education.

However, according to Professor Jim Scott, the effect of reducing S4 options is to force pupils to make their choices for highers in S3, which again reduces their ability to have a wider education base.

John Swinney: If Mr Whittle thinks that damage is being done to pupils, will he say why we have a record level—93 per cent—of school leavers going on to positive destinations?

Brian Whittle: I am just about to come to that. I was going to layer on top of what I have said the point that the Scottish Government's continuing

erosion of further education places in the college sector means that it is little wonder that the attainment gap between better-off and less well-off pupils continues to grow. It seems that the Scottish Government has an inability to grasp a systems-wide approach to education, which I have to say is not unique to the education portfolio.

In order to aspire, we need to be able to see the goal and the journey that is required to get there. By reducing options in curriculum for excellence and slashing places in colleges, the Scottish Government has created a systems-wide learning deficit. Only last week, I heard from my local college that it is being asked to trim yet more from its budget. The only means of doing so that it has left is compulsory redundancies, which would once again reduce students' learning opportunities.

Liz Smith has highlighted the deterioration in STEM uptake and the drop in the overall pass rates in mathematics and English, which are core skills. I add that the subjects that are being worst hit by the squeeze on subject choice—mainly art, drama, music, sport and languages—are those that speak directly to the desire for a more holistic and rounded education approach that is central to the core principles of curriculum for excellence. The figures for some of those subjects have dropped by 60 per cent since 2013. Those subjects are also the ones in which the biggest gaps between the haves and the have-nots occur, and they are the subjects in which soft skills—which are so beneficial to other key subjects—are learned. There is a growing chasm in access to such opportunities, which are central to a more rounded education. I think that that point is lost on the cabinet secretary.

We have world-class educators who are ready to deliver to eager young minds. They should have a world-class environment in which to operate, but the Scottish Government has shown itself to be inept at delivering that. The attainment gap is growing—as I think Mr Swinney knows. Perhaps education is not the SNP's priority after all.

"Judge me on my record",

Nicola Sturgeon challenged us. Well, we have—and she has failed.

16:42

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Yesterday, I attended a conference in Glasgow about Scotland becoming more trauma informed. In a powerful presentation, Dr Warren Larkin quoted a 2014 research article entitled "What Predicts a Successful Life? A Life-Course Model of Well-Being", which said:

"The most powerful childhood predictor of adult life-satisfaction is the child's emotional health. Next comes the child's conduct. The least powerful predictor is the child's

intellectual development. This has obvious implications for educational policy."

I mention that because trauma-informed thinking has an impact on policy here in Scotland, which is why policies such as getting it right for every child, PEF and curriculum for excellence are at the heart of the Government's approach to making Scotland the best place in which to grow up and learn.

Curriculum for excellence has transformed learning for children and young people across the country. Instead of rigid classroom learning, we now have a curriculum that can be flexible to young people's strengths and ensure that they reach positive destinations once their school careers are finished. Because of the support for teachers that is provided through the national improvement hub and the fact that, under curriculum for excellence, schools have the freedom to design a set of courses, qualifications and awards between S4 and S6 that is tailored to young people's needs, the number of courses on offer to pupils has increased.

Just today, in North Lanarkshire, I got to witness at first hand an example of curriculum for excellence in action. It was my pleasure to attend St Andrew's high school in Coatbridge to talk to pupils in the advanced higher modern studies class about their dissertations. They had some great questions and were clearly thriving in their learning. It was great that pupils from the nearby St Margaret's, which is in Alex Neil's Airdrie and Shotts constituency, were also there.

That happens regularly across the council area. It allows pupils to do the courses that they want to do and get access to high-quality teaching. On that note, I thank Ms Gallagher, who set up today's meeting, and her predecessor Mr Roy, who is now at St Ambrose, for their work in the area. The situation is not new. I remember that, when I was at Coatbridge high school, I wanted to take modern studies, history and geography. To make that happen, I had to travel to Rosehall high school, which is no longer there, for geography. I do not understand why there would be any issue with the pooling of resources in the area.

Closing the attainment gap is at the centre of this Government's approach to education, and I strongly disagree with the suggestion that we are imposing barriers to pupil success and achievement. The investment in pupil equity funding is designed for areas such as mine. St Andrew's high school, which I have just talked about, has many children from areas that are high in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, as does Coatbridge high school, which I visited a couple of weeks ago.

Jenny Marra: The member is talking about schools in his constituency. Does he believe that

the practice of multilevel teaching and the narrowing of the curriculum so that, in some schools, modern languages are all but disappearing is helping pupil development and attainment?

Fulton MacGregor: That is not what I am seeing in the schools in my constituency. The four high schools in my constituency are performing really well. The two that I am talking about are in real need of the Government intervention through pupil equity funding, and they are using it well. I will go on to make that point.

Coatbridge high school, which I visited a couple of weeks ago, has produced a programme called bridging the gap, using pupil equity funding, to develop literacy in the school. The Deputy First Minister is due to visit the school soon, and its staff are looking forward to meeting him and telling him about that and other projects. The Government's motion further commits to the independent review.

This Government is getting round the country and hearing what schools such as Coatbridge high are doing to deliver in difficult times of Tory austerity, as my colleague Clare Adamson mentioned. We are getting on with the day job. We will leave it to others such as the Tories to continue to run down Scottish education.

The Presiding Officer: We come to closing speeches. I call Iain Gray to wind up for the Labour Party.

16:47

Iain Gray: In some ways, this debate is not entirely about the reality of what is happening in our schools, but is also about the Government's response to some of the problems that have been identified around introduction and implementation of curriculum for excellence. At the heart of that is the review that is mentioned in the Government's amendment. I want to make it clear that we welcome the review, although Ross Greer made an important point when he talked about the lack of urgency in responses to some problems.

The review was first asked for in Parliament in May. It was agreed to only after the Education and Skills Committee report came out in September, and only today have we heard some more detail about how it will be taken forward. As Daniel Johnson pointed out, we still do not have its remit. Time is moving on, but we have no timeline for when we can expect the review to respond.

Worse than that, the truth is that it took us four years to get to the review, which has been driven by the Education and Skills Committee's report on the narrowing of the curriculum. It took four years of argument to get the Government to accept that

that is a problem. When narrowing of the curriculum was first raised as an issue in Parliament, the Government said that it was not happening. It then resorted to the sophistry of saying that pupils have more choice than ever—which is true, but they get to choose fewer subjects than they used to be able to choose. They might be able to choose from a wider menu, but they can choose fewer subjects.

John Swinney: Mr Gray and I have discussed this in the Education and Skills Committee and he knows that I have offered him a curricular model that completely refutes the statement that he has just made in Parliament. I am surprised that he has reiterated something that I clearly refuted in committee, with evidence to undermine the argument that he is advancing.

Iain Gray: If Mr Swinney is trying to say to me that he showed that pupils in S4 are currently able to choose as many subjects as they used to be able to choose, I say first that I do not recall that, and secondly, that I do not accept that he has evidence that that is the case.

That is not really the argument that he has made today. He has argued today that fewer traditional subjects are being chosen but other courses are available. That might or might not be true. Clare Adamson was right to say that Labour supported the developing the young workforce programme. However, as Liz Smith pointed out, evidence is not available with regard to what choices, in that respect, are being made available to young people.

My worry—Mr Swinney's intervention rather argues for this—is that, even with all the evidence and the report from the Education and Skills Committee, the Government still does not really accept that there is a problem. I was quite taken aback when I read a report about a fringe meeting at the SNP conference at which Mr Swinney talked about the Education and Skills Committee's report and said that “the logic” of it risked “alienating” pupils. He said that we should not worry about a narrowing curriculum because it would be “daft” if “old duffers” like him required children to do particular subjects.

Let us stop and think about what he is saying. He is saying that declining exam results, which mean that pupils might not have the skills that they need in science, engineering, computing and modern languages for the jobs of the future, can be shrugged off as just a “daft” concern of “old duffers”. If that is the new philosophy that underlies the Government's education policy, we are—to be frank—in more trouble than we had realised.

16:51

John Swinney: Iain Gray started his speech by saying that

“this debate is not ... about the reality of what is happening in our schools”.

I think that he used those words inadvertently, because he hastily changed direction, although he hit the nail on the head with that remark.

Iain Gray: The reality, of course, is that Mr Swinney is the only person left standing who is trying to argue that we do not have problems in our schools.

John Swinney: No, I am not. If Mr Gray was to treat with respect the evidence that he heard from all quarters at the Education and Skills Committee, he would accept long-serving and experienced educationists in the Scottish system having refuted the line of argument that he has put forward in Parliament today.

I agree with Daniel Johnson that we have to look at all the evidence. The Conservatives have brought to the chamber today a debate on one piece of evidence. I have marshalled a number of other pieces of evidence that demonstrate the closing of the attainment gap. I demonstrated the closing of the gap at national 5 level, in particular in areas of deprivation, and at higher level—level 6. I was surprised that Mr Greer did not reference that data in his comments in relation to the accusation that the gap is growing.

Ross Greer: If the cabinet secretary is so confident in the data that he cited, I am sure that members on all sides of the chamber would be delighted if he would bring it to a debate before the end of the year, to mark two years since the last time he brought to the chamber a debate on Scottish education.

John Swinney: We are having a lot of lovely debates about education in the chamber. I love taking part in them. We could also debate something that Mr Greer did not mention at any point in his entire speech, in which he criticised the impact on educational opportunity of the poverty that has been created by a Tory Government, whose party's motion he will support tonight. He made absolutely no mention of the Scottish attainment challenge or pupil equity funding, through which this Government is putting resources directly into our schools in order to close the poverty-related attainment gap. That is us trying to clear up the mess that has been created by the Tory Government, aided by its Liberal Democrat allies. For Beatrice Wishart to bemoan, in this Parliament, the reduction in teacher numbers, when her colleagues ushered in austerity in 2010, beggars belief.

Jenny Marra: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: Ms Marra will have to forgive me, as I have only four minutes in which to close the debate.

As Daniel Johnson said, it is important to look at all the data in the round, which is why I want to ensure that we take the broadest possible approach to the senior phase review. I was surprised by his comment that

“there has been a paucity of ... analysis”

by the Scottish Government. What about the OECD review of broad general education that was published in 2015? We have followed and are pursuing the recommendations in that report to ensure that we address the poverty-related attainment gap.

Through dialogue in due course with the Education and Skills Committee, we will discuss the scope of the review that we will undertake in order to ensure that it is comprehensive.

My last remark is on Alison Harris's point about choice narrowing. I am afraid that that position is not supported by Liz Smith, who said to me at the Education and Skills Committee that there is more choice. The issue at the heart of the debate is choice that is relevant to the 21st century and the educational opportunities of young people today.

Liz Smith: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: I am afraid that I have to close.

As I said, the fundamental question in the review is whether we are providing a curriculum that meets the needs of young people in the 21st century. I believe that we are. I look forward to discussing that with interested parties during the senior phase review.

16:55

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

This has been an instructive debate. Throughout it, we have seen all the Opposition parties—the Labour Party, the Greens, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives—speaking with one voice in raising, about curriculum for excellence, very serious concerns that reflect the views of experts. The only people who are standing against those concerns are members on the Government front bench and its party's back benchers, who seem to be saying that everything is fine. They are in denial that there is a serious problem.

The context for the debate is, of course, the findings of Professor Jim Scott, which were summed up very well in Alison Harris's speech. Professor Scott found that the number of higher

passes in S5 have gone down 10 per cent over the past four years, which he said is a reduction that Scotland cannot afford. He found that attainment in national qualification levels 3 to 5 by S4 pupils had dropped by 32.9 per cent—one third—since 2013. He also found that the least able and lower-average learners have suffered to a significantly greater degree than the able learners—in particular, the most able in S4. It should be, in his words,

“a matter of national concern that levels of “zero attainment” have risen and that this has reached over 3%“

which is, in effect, one child in every S1 comprehensive class. By any assessment, that is a damning analysis of the Government’s record in education.

Given that context, I would have thought that the SNP would welcome the debate’s focus on education. Brian Whittle reminded us that, among all the promises that the First Minister has made on the subject of education, she said that

“Education is this Government’s number 1 priority.”

She also said:

“Judge me on my record in education”

and that it was her ambition to “close the attainment gap”. However, the real gap that is growing daily is the gap between the SNP’s rhetoric on the issue and the reality.

Professor Jim Scott’s latest paper from this week is a painstaking piece of research into exactly what is happening to attainment in our schools. Although attainment varies across subjects, there are serious concerns about some aspects of literacy and numeracy, much of which has been the focus of the Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee over recent months.

We also know that there are serious concerns about subject choice, especially the marked movement away from STEM, languages and social subjects—the very subjects that are crucial not only for a rounded education but for the future success of the Scottish economy, as Iain Gray reminded us. Perhaps worst of all is that the evidence shows that the least-able pupils are losing out most. That is exactly the opposite of what was intended when curriculum for excellence was introduced.

It is not only Professor Jim Scott who has been raising the alarm. It has been raised by business and industry and by members of the Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee, who published two separate reports on attainment and subject choice, neither of which could have been happy reading for the cabinet secretary.

In addition, his own advisers were, rightly, clearly concerned this summer about some of the

trends in this year’s SQA results. When the cabinet secretary says, as he said a few moments ago, that we are using just one piece of evidence in isolation on the issue, he is quite wrong. The evidence goes far beyond that one piece that was mentioned in Professor Jim Scott’s analysis.

What has been the cabinet secretary’s reaction to all that? He is the one who has removed Scotland from some key international tables. He did not carry out the mid-term review of curriculum for excellence, as the OECD requested. He cancelled his flagship education bill, despite it being the primary focus of the programmes for government of 2016 and 2017.

Liz Smith’s speech reminded us that, in the summer, the cabinet secretary told us that the four-year decline in attainment levels in highers was down to “annual variation”. If the cabinet secretary cares to think about it, he will realise that that was quite an extraordinary comment, although it was trumped by his assertion that this year’s SQA results were a “strong set of results”. With the exception of national 5, which showed improvement, that was just spin, as he should know.

The main concern must surely be for the outcomes of pupils who already face barriers. Jim Scott’s evidence shows that, since the introduction of curriculum for excellence, the overall number of pupils leaving school with no qualifications is rising, and that there has been at least a doubling of that rate in 14 out of 32 local authorities. That is a national scandal that tells us all that we need to know about the education record of the Government.

It is disappointing that the cabinet secretary seems, so far, to be in denial. From the response to a freedom of information request that was published this week, we know that his officials told him seven months ago that subject choice had reduced across the entire senior phase, but subsequent to that, both he and the First Minister told Parliament that subject choice had not reduced. He needs to be clear with Parliament about exactly what the facts are.

I hope that in a few moments the Scottish Government will agree to the wording of our motion, which accepts Jim Scott’s conclusions, recognises the “failures in the delivery” of curriculum for excellence, and calls for urgent action.

Too many young people in Scotland are being let down by the Government’s failures in education. Let us ensure that today marks a turning point.

Business Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-19731, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 12 November 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Protecting the Rights of EU Citizens in Scotland
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 13 November 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity; Justice and the Law Officers
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Artificial Intelligence and Data Driven Technologies: Opportunities for the Scottish Economy and Society
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 November 2019

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: Government Business and Constitutional Relations
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Implications of the Imposition of US Tariffs on Scottish Products
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 19 November 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 20 November 2019

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Culture, Tourism and External Affairs; Education and Skills
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 21 November 2019

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 Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions
followed by Portfolio Questions: Health and Sport
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 12 November 2019, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S5M-19732, on a stage 1 timetable for a bill, and S5M-19733, on a stage 2 timetable for a bill.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 6 March 2020.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 13 December 2019.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions, S5M-19734 to S5M-19737, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 (Supplementary Provision) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Victim Surcharge (Scotland) Regulations 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Investigations: Code of Practice) (Scotland) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-19715.3, in the name of Paul Wheelhouse, which seeks to amend motion S5M-19715, in the name of Jamie Greene, on the resilience of Scotland's ferry network, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-19715.2, in the name of

Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S5M-19715, in the name of Jamie Greene, on the resilience of Scotland's ferry network, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)

Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caitness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 19, Against 91, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-19715, in the name of Jamie Greene, on the resilience of Scotland's ferry network, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the improving performance of the ferry services that are directly supported by the Scottish Government; acknowledges the inconvenience that disruption can cause, but notes that only 873, or 0.67%, of the 130,184 sailings on Scottish Government-subsidised ferry services have been cancelled due to technical reasons in 2019; commends the hard-working and dedicated staff and crew in delivering these reliability improvements; notes the improvements, including new routes, more sailings and lower fares, that have helped drive passenger growth on an annual basis, with these ferry services now carrying over six million passengers, or an increase of some 16.1% since 2012; acknowledges that, despite facing real-terms funding reductions by the UK Government, the Scottish Government has invested more than £2 billion in ferry services and infrastructure since 2007; notes that investment has been made in accordance with the published Vessel Replacement and Deployment

Plan and that the next Ferries Plan will be taken forward following the finalisation of the National Transport Strategy and in parallel with the Strategic Transport Projects Review, and notes that, in the context of the need for renewal of the fleet, the Scottish Government has continued to support vessel investment and the commercial shipbuilding sector in Scotland through the construction of the MV Glen Sannox and Hull 802 at Ferguson Marine and through public ownership of the yard, which is supported by the trade unions, and will work to safeguard and create shipbuilding jobs at the yard.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-19717.2, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S5M-19717, in the name of Liz Smith, on curriculum for excellence, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-19717.1, in the name of Iain Gray, which seeks to amend motion S5M-19717, in the name of Liz Smith, on curriculum for excellence, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)

Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)
 (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 51, Against 59, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-19717, in the name of Liz Smith, on curriculum for excellence, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament is committed to the principles of excellence and equity to underpin policy approaches to education and to improve the delivery of the curriculum for excellence (CfE), but notes with growing concern the recent analysis of CfE, including the recent publication from Professor Jim Scott, which draws the conclusion that the attainment gap is widening and highlights that there are failures in the delivery of CfE; notes in particular that these failures are imposing proportionately greater barriers to success among the pupil cohort who come from disadvantaged backgrounds; calls on the Scottish Government to urgently address these concerns by conducting the review supported by the Parliament on 1 May 2019, called for by the Education and Skills Committee in its cross-party report into the senior phase of Scottish education, which was published in September 2019, and previously committed to by the Scottish Government, and notes that the independent review will draw on evidence from education stakeholders and partners, including the latest data on young people's progress through CfE and the outcomes they achieve when they leave school.

The Presiding Officer: If no one objects, I propose to ask a single question on the four Parliamentary Bureau motions.

The question is, that motions S5M-19734 to S5M-19737, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 (Supplementary Provision) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Victim Surcharge (Scotland) Regulations 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Investigations: Code of Practice) (Scotland) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

UN Year of Indigenous Languages and European Day of Languages

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-18960, in the name of Angus MacDonald, on the United Nations year of indigenous languages and European day of languages. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

I ask those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. Members will note that there are things—I cannot remember their name.

Members: Headphones.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Headphones. [Laughter.] There are headphones on each desk for use for translation, as I understand that there will be a contribution in Gaelic.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that 2019 is the UN Year of Indigenous Languages, and that the European Day of Languages will take place on 26 September; acknowledges the strong contribution that indigenous languages bring to Scotland's rich and varied culture; notes that it is through language that we communicate with the world, define identity, express history and culture, learn, defend human rights and participate in all aspects of society; believes that, through language, people preserve their community's history, customs and traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking, meaning and expression; notes that language is pivotal in the areas of human rights protection, good governance, peace building, reconciliation and sustainable development; praises the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig for its efforts to promote, encourage and grow indigenous Gaelic language and culture through supporting local learning groups and events, as well as supporting the national Gaelic Language Plan and providing support for Gaelic-medium education; highlights the work of the Scots Language Centre in promoting and encouraging Scots and the regional dialects of the language throughout Scotland and, in doing so, raising the understanding of Scots, Doric and Lallans and how Scotland's language came to be; notes the work of the Scots Language Society in its efforts to promote and encourage the Scots leid, best known for its "Lallans" journal and annual "Sangschaw", which is a competition of singing and writing in Scots equivalent to the Scottish Gaelic Mod or Welsh Eisteddfod; understands that the Council of Europe declared 26 September the annual Day of Languages after the success of the European Year of Languages in 2001, and is marked across all 47 member states of the Council of Europe; recognises that the aims of the European Day of Languages are to alert the public to the importance of language learning and diversifying the range of languages learnt in order to increase plurilingualism and intercultural understanding, promoting the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe, which must be preserved and fostered, and encouraging lifelong language learning in and out of school, whether for study purposes, professional needs, purposes of mobility or pleasure and exchanges; considers that Scotland's colourful, multicultural society is only enhanced by the languages that bridge its diverse communities together,

from Polish, Indian, Chinese, Italian and many more to the languages of Scotland's culture in Scots and Gaelic; believes that, by celebrating the European Day of Languages, people are promoting the objectives of raising awareness of Europe's rich linguistic diversity, the need to diversify the range of languages people learn and the need for people to develop some degree of proficiency in two languages or more to be able to play their full part in democratic citizenship in Europe, while fully understanding that language skills are a necessity and a right for everyone; notes the calls for people to celebrate both the 2019 UN Year of Indigenous Languages and the European Day of Languages across all communities in Scotland, and looks forward to celebrating Scotland's indigenous languages and what it considers Scotland's diversity and acceptance of other cultures in the future.

17:10

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I am delighted to be able to bring the debate to the chamber and I thank colleagues from across the political spectrum for ensuring that my motion received cross-party support. They all know who they are.

From 195 countries in the world, it is estimated that between 5,000 and 7,000 different languages are spoken, and that around 60 per cent of the world's population speaks more than one language. It is clear why the United Nations designated 2019 as the year of indigenous languages, with the aim of highlighting the cultural importance of indigenous language and the impact that loss of languages can have while the language of dominant culture takes over.

My motion also refers to the European day of languages, which has been held on 26 September every year since 2001, raising awareness of Europe's rich linguistic diversity. The Council of Europe decided that that must be preserved and enhanced, while identifying the need to diversify the range of languages that people learn to include less widely used languages, resulting in plurilingualism.

The key message of the European day of languages is simply that language skills are a necessity and a right for everyone. The language that we have used over the centuries has shaped Scotland's rich cultural history and is largely responsible for the image that we, as old and new Scots, want to show the world. Scots is the nearest linguistic neighbour to English—it has been spoken and written in Scotland for hundreds of years and it has survived against the odds. It has survived not only the removal of the Crown to the south, the introduction of an English-language Bible and the prorogation for 300 years of this Parliament, but a long campaign of hostility towards Scots and Gaelic from educators and the elite.

As a Hebridean, I admit that I have trouble forgiving the actions that were taken by the

establishment in the past against Gaelic. Like Gaelic-speaking children, Scots-speaking bairns were also subjected to multiple indignities for speaking their language, including physical punishment. Thankfully, we now see many efforts to sustain and support Scots, with cultural production at a higher level than ever, and more and more people confidently speaking in the language that they have inherited from their forebears.

Hailing from the Isle of Lewis, as I do, I have to say that Gaelic remains the language that is closest to my heart, although clearly Scots comes a very close second. Unfortunately, Gaelic is considered as definitely endangered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, based on the reduction in learning Gaelic as a mother tongue in the home. I am probably a victim of that.

Although the language is considered to be in decline—some might even say that it is on life support—the Scottish Government is doing what it can to encourage the uptake of Gaelic in schools and local community learning through the national Gaelic language plan. Gaelic-medium education is also increasing, with a fourth Gaelic school now planned in Glasgow, and it is well known that Sgoil Ghàidhlig Glaschu is one of the highest-performing schools in Scotland.

More than 10,000 school pupils in Scotland are being educated in Gaelic. Nearly 4,000 are enrolled in GME, which is a 32 per cent increase in just three years, and around 10,000 adults are learning the language, with the figure set to increase with Duolingo coming on board with a Scottish Gaelic app for learners. I would encourage all members to sign up in advance of the app going live. In fact, I lodged a motion about that this afternoon, which members could perhaps consider signing.

Let us not forget that around 500 students from all over the world are enrolled in Gaelic courses at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, from beginner classes to postgraduate degrees.

There are also some great local examples of Gaelic in education in my constituency. With a steady increase since 2015, the number of children learning Gaelic in nurseries and primary schools in Falkirk district is set to break through the 1,000 mark this year alone, thanks to the Blasad Gàidhlig, or taste of Gaelic, programme, which is delivered by Fèisgoil, the formal education strand of one of Scotland's most successful arts organisations, Fèisean nan Gàidheal.

Just last week I visited Carron primary school in my constituency, which is part of the Larbert cluster, to see at first hand the Gaelic sessions

being delivered by Fèisean nan Gàidheal tutor, Eilidh Cormack. The enthusiasm for Gaelic from the primary 1 to 3 pupils was very infectious and a delight to see. With the benefits of bilingualism becoming more widely accepted, it is encouraging that 1,000 pupils from the Larbert cluster schools now have access to Gaelic through the Fèisgoil programme.

I look forward to the programme being rolled out to other schools in the district and, eventually, I hope, to a Gaelic-medium unit in Falkirk district, which I believe is long overdue. The warm welcome that I received from headmaster, Mr Forsyth, from the Gaelic tutor, Eilidh Cormack, from Eilidh Mackenzie of Fèisean nan Gàidheal and, of course, from the pupils was greatly appreciated, and I look forward to awareness of Gaelic going from strength to strength throughout Falkirk district in the future. The programme has been developed to support the one-plus-two language part of the curriculum for excellence and supports the local council in delivering its Gaelic language plan in nurseries and primary schools. The programme is delivered in schools throughout the country in which there is not already a GME offering in place, meaning that the language is reaching a wider audience within various regions.

Gaelic and Scots give us so much information on who we are as a people and the distance we have travelled as a country. They give us the foundation on which we are building a new Scotland, which is tolerant and progressive while always understanding our heritage and what it means to the world. Each of us in this place has a duty to encourage more uptake of Gaelic and Scots, and I include myself in that.

I offer the observation that we simply do not speak enough Gaelic or Scots in this chamber. Not so long ago, the Parliament's in-house Gaelic team issued us all with phrases to use in the chamber, but apart from my colleague Dr Alasdair Allan and a few others, I have heard very little attempt to use those phrases—although, given the speakers who are lined up for the debate, that may well change tonight.

We must all do better—again, I include myself in that—but there is good work going on out there. Despite some recent criticism, the good work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig in promoting and protecting the Gaelic language cannot be ignored; in fact, it should be praised. Similarly, the role of the Scots Language Centre and the Scots Language Society in ensuring that speakers of the Scots leid are given a strong voice have to be applauded.

The last thing that I want to do is to make this members' debate political. There is a time and place for political discourse and I do not believe that it should be during members' debates. That said, I was pleased that delegates at the recent

Scottish National Party conference in Aberdeen unanimously called for the creation of a new body to encourage the use of the Scots language. That would clearly strengthen the view of Scots as a language in its own right and improve the understanding of what it means and represents to us here.

We must ensure that both Gaelic and Scots have plenty life left in them and that those speakers who have inherited a centuries-old culture will continue to use it without fear or embarrassment. Scotland as it is today is a tapestry of colourful, diverse culture from all round the world: each thread has its own purpose, including our own languages of Gaelic and Scots. If we remove just one of those threads the tapestry will no longer be as strong as it is today. However, we have the opportunity to make it stronger by adding to it, in the knowledge that building on what we already have can only make a more colourful tapestry of what we want Scotland to be, for auld lang syne as well as for the future of our nation.

I thank you for your indulgence, Presiding Officer, and I look forward to hearing the contributions of other members.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr MacDonald. We move to the open debate; I request speeches of four minutes, please.

17:18

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands (Con): I start by expressing my thanks to Mr MacDonald for bringing the motion to the chamber today. He is a keen supporter of the cross-party group on Gaelic and has always been a passionate advocate for the language. Despite our many political differences, I have always been struck that support for indigenous languages, particularly Gaelic, exists across the political spectrum in the Parliament. That is incredibly important. I also notice that the Deputy First Minister is going to wrap up for the Government, and I acknowledge his personal interest in the language.

I have the great privilege of representing the Highlands and Islands, which is, of course, home to most, although not all, of the communities that speak Gaelic. Angus MacDonald spoke about how Gaelic is gaining ground in his constituency in the central belt.

I want to focus on the language. From my personal experience, I tried to learn Gaelic at night school in London and in Edinburgh, and I attended Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, albeit a long time ago. According to the previous census, Gaelic is currently spoken to some degree by around 60,000 people. Those speakers range from fluent speakers to those who are learning a few words

here and there. I will not inflict my Gaelic on members, but I warn them that Peter Chapman intends to speak in Doric. They should listen out for that, as I will.

Gaelic has recently received more exposure for people outwith the Highlands and Islands and, indeed, Scotland, and interest has increased in the Gaelic language and in Gaelic songs, poems and names. The Mòd, which is Scotland's best-known Gaelic festival, happened in Glasgow last month, which I think was the first time it had taken place in that city for nearly 30 years.

The motion acknowledges the role of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the work that it does to preserve and promote the language. It has been the subject of some criticism recently, but I am sure that it will meet the challenges with alacrity.

Organisations such as Comunn na Gàidhlig, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, MG Alba and many others should be commended for their efforts to widen people's exposure to the language. However, as with many other indigenous languages across the world, the use of Gaelic as a conversational language is under threat, as Angus MacDonald pointed out. Despite all the work that is going into its preservation and promotion, the director of the language sciences institute at the University of the Highlands and Islands, Professor Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, recently warned that the language is coming close to collapse. He told *The Guardian* in an interview that policies that are currently being used in Scotland maintain a focus on promoting Gaelic among new speakers, but it is important to note that we must also concentrate on those who are already fluent and strike a balance between new learners and those who are already fluent so that they can pass on the language from one generation to the next.

We know that BBC Alba has commissioned or created £160 million-worth of Gaelic television, but more could be done. If we consider how popular foreign language television programmes such as "Bron" and "Les Revenants"—"The Bridge" and "The Returned"—can be, we see that they are proof that a series does not have to be in English to attract an audience. It would be remiss not to point out the huge success of "Bannan", which is a Gaelic-language programme that has been produced by and aired on BBC Alba. It has also been shown in North America and Scandinavia.

I am aware that Angus MacDonald's motion also praises the European day of languages. I am sure that we all agree that, whatever language people take up, it is of benefit. As I have indicated, an important aspect of learning any language—particularly an indigenous one—is the doors that it opens.

I thank Angus MacDonald once again for lodging the motion, which celebrates both the United Nations year of indigenous languages and the European day of languages. It is right that we mark them. As Angus MacDonald said, indigenous languages are not in competition with one another. Together, we can ensure that they survive and thrive.

17:23

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Tapadh leibh, anns a' chiad dol-a-mach gu Aonghas Dòmhnallach, a fhuair cead airson an deasbaid seo an-diugh, a' toirt cothrom dhuinn uile dà rud cudromach a chomharrachadh aig an aon àm: latha nan cànan aig an Aonadh Eòrpach, agus bliadhna nan cànan dùthchasach aig na Dùthchannan Aonaichte.

Gu mì-fhòrtanach, bidh cuid anns an rìoghachd seo a' faighneachd fhathast carson, no eadhon ciamar, a bhiodh mac-màthair sam bith a' bruidhinn barrachd air an aon chànan? Ged a tha dà-chànanas nàdarrach gu leòr, agus àbhaisteach, air feadh an t-saoghail.

Mar dìreach aon eisimpleir den àbhaisteachd sin, bha mi air bòrd trèana eadar a' Bhruiseal agus Lucsamburg greiseag air ais. Bha mi ag èisteachd a-steach - gu mì-mhodhail, feumaidh mi a ràdh -- ris na còmhraidhean eadar an duine a bha a' reic cofaidh bho throlaidh agus an luchd-siubhail eile timcheall orm. Ged nach do thuig mi mòran, bha e follaiseach gu leòr gun robh comas aig an duine leis an trolaidh anns a' Ghearmailtis, Duidsis, Fraingis, Beurla agus Lucsamburgais.

Tha rathad fada romhainn fhathast mus ruig sinn an ìre sin anns an dùthaich seo. Ach bha mi airson a' phuing seo a dhèanamh: Tha ceangail ann eadar Alba a tha fosgailte gu cànan gu leir agus an spèis a th' againn mar dhùthaich airson nan cànan dùthchasach againne. Tha sin fìor a thaobh na Gàidhlig agus a thaobh Albais ann an dòighean eadar-dhealaichte.

Tha mi toilichte a ràdh gu bheil, mar a thuit Mairgheist Dòmhnallach fhèin, tòrr a tha math a' tachairt a-nis ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig. Am measg iomadach rud eile, bidh Duolingo, an t-seirbhis air-loidhne as motha anns an t-saoghal airson daoine a tha ag ionnsachadh cànan, a' tòiseachadh cùrsa Gàidhlig a dh'aithearr. Bha mòran ag iomairt air a shon, anns a' Phàrlamaid seo, am measg àiteachan eile.

Tha tòrr ann ri dhèanamh fhathast, ge-tà. Tha mi a' cur fàilte chridheil air na sgoiltean agus ionadan Gàidhlig a tha a' fosgladh, agus an obair sàr mhath a tha iad a' dèanamh airson a' chànan. Ma tha beàrn ann fhathast, 's e gu bheil feum mòr fhathast air seirbheisean tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig anns a' choimhearsnachd. Tha mi a'

creidsinn gun robh Maighstir Camshron a' dèanamh an aon phuing.

Tha sin fìor anns a' Ghàidhealtachd agus anns na h-Eileanan co-dhiù. Feumaidh sinn Gàidhlig a' neartachadh taobh a-muigh na sgoile cuideachd. Agus dhan a h-uile duine leis a' Ghàidhlig, tha an teachdaireachd soilleir - cleachd i no cail i.

Bidh duine sam bidh a tha a' leughadh an Daily Gael a' faicinn gu bheil an làrach-lìn sin a' cumail sùil gu math geur air an aineolas a bhios a' nochdadh anns na meadhanan fhathast mun Ghàidhlig, bho àm gu àm.

Tha a' mhòr-chuid ann an Alba, ge-tà, taiceil dhan Ghàidhlig, agus 's e briseadh-dùil a th' ann nuair a tha cuideigin a' sgoileadh sgudal mu shoidhnichean-rathaid no sgoiltean Gàidhlig agus mar sin air adhart. Dè chanas mi, gu modhail mu dheidhinn sin?

Uill, tha abairt anns a' Ghàidhlig airson daoine a tha thu ag iarraidh a bhith fad air falbh bhua:

"B' fheàrr leam ann an Hiort thu".

Ach tha Hiort anns an roinn-taghadh agamsa, mar sin ma tha na beachdan sin agad mun a' Ghàidhlig, dìreach fuirich far a bheil thu, tapadh leat.

Tha Alba taiceil ris a' Ghàidhlig, ri Albais agus ri saoghal far a bheil daoine fosgailte dhan a h-uile cànan agus a h-uile cultar a th' ann.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Dr Allan. I apologise to the chamber, because there appears to have been some problems with the feed. I know that Dr Allan has provided an English translation as well as the Gaelic, so we can read the *Official Report* tomorrow to get the full flavour of what he said.

Following is the translation of Dr Allan's speech:

First, many thanks to Angus MacDonald for securing today's debate and giving us all the opportunity to celebrate two important things at the same time: the European day of language and the United Nations day of indigenous languages.

Unfortunately, some in this country still ask why, or even how, anybody would speak more than one language, although bilingualism is natural enough and normal worldwide. I will give just one example of how normal it is. I was on a train between Brussels and Luxembourg a while back and was listening in—somewhat cheekily, I must say—to the conversations between the man selling coffee from a trolley and the other travellers around me. Although I did not understand much, it was clear enough that the man with the trolley was able to speak German, Dutch, French, English and Luxembourgish.

We have a long road before us before we reach that level in this country. However, I wanted to make the point that there is a link between a Scotland that is open to all languages and the respect that we have for our indigenous languages. The same is true for Gaelic and for Scots in different ways.

I am happy to say that, as Mr MacDonald said, there is a lot happening in the Gaelic world just now. Among many other things, Duolingo, the world's largest online language learning service, will be starting a Gaelic course. Many campaigned for it in the Parliament, among other places.

There is much yet to be done, however. I warmly welcome the opening of the new Gaelic schools and units, and the excellent work that they are doing for the language. If there is still a gap, it is that there is still a great need for Gaelic medium services in the community. I believe that Mr Cameron made the same point. That is true in the Highlands and Islands, at least. We also need to strengthen Gaelic outwith the school. For everyone who speaks Gaelic, the message is clear: use it or lose it.

Anyone who reads *The Daily Gael* will see that that website keeps a close eye on the ignorance that still appears in the media about Gaelic, from time to time. The majority of people in Scotland are supportive of Gaelic, and it is very disappointing when people spread rubbish about signage, Gaelic schools and so on. What can I say politely about that? Well, there is a Gaelic expression for people you would like to be far away from:

"I'd prefer if you were in St Kilda."

However, St Kilda is in my constituency so, for views like that, just stay where you are, please.

Scotland is supportive of Gaelic, of Scots and of a world where everyone is open to each and every language and culture.

17:27

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Tha mi toilichte bruidhinn san deasbad seo agus tha mi airson taing a thoirt do Angus MacDonald airson a thoirt dhan Phàrlamaid.

The member continued in English.

I am pleased to speak in the debate, and I congratulate Angus MacDonald on bringing it to the Parliament.

I welcome indigenous languages being recognised, with this year being the United Nations year of indigenous languages and 26 September marking the European day of languages.

Times have changed. A generation ago, indigenous languages and dialects were frowned on; indeed, they were discouraged. Now that we are so close to losing them, we begin to see their worth. The people's history and culture were never written down; they were handed down in stories, poems and songs. If we lose the language that holds that information, we will lose our culture and heritage, too.

At a time of austerity, when essential services are being cut, people question spending on things such as promoting language, and the Gaelic language has faced such threats. It is not a life and death issue and, when life and death services are being threatened, I understand why such questions are asked. However, people do not question funding for museums and historic buildings in the same way. Why is language seen as expendable?

The late John MacLeod was passionate about Gaelic achieving UNESCO status of intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO lists intangible cultural heritage, including oral traditions, performing arts, artisanship and so on, and John wanted that recognition for Gaelic—not only for the language itself but for the cultural heritage that it holds. He believed that that could be focused in the Western Isles, where there is the greatest number of speakers, although the number there is dwindling too. To have a focus on the language is important. I am proud that the Parliament passed the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, securing the status of Gaelic. Sadly, there appears to have been little progress since—indeed, the number of speakers continues to fall—so we must redouble our efforts to preserve the language.

The 2005 act established Bòrd na Gàidhlig. It is clear that there are problems with the board, and some of those are placed at the door of the Scottish Government. That must be sorted and quickly. At a critical time for Gaelic, the focus must be on protecting the language. We must promote the language, and promote its use.

A fitting legacy for John MacLeod would be that we achieve the UNESCO status that he campaigned for. Therefore, we should redouble our efforts to protect the language and gain that status.

I have been learning Gaelic for a couple of years, although members would be forgiven for not believing that, given my opening statement. However, I hope that before too long I might be able to deliver my whole speech in Gaelic—that is an aim for me. However, those things, although they are important, are simply window dressing. To protect the language, it needs to be the medium that is used for social as well as formal occasions. If we all spoke a little, that would help, so at a time when we look forward to making new

year resolutions, maybe we can think about how we can promote Gaelic and how we can speak it a little.

17:31

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Weel done tae Angus MacDonald on securin the debate. Ah am gey taen on wi the motion recognisin no just yin, but twa threatened leids here, in Scotland—yin o which Ah will attempt tae dae justice tae the nicht, wi thanks tae Stuart Paiterson for his help wi this speech, though he is no responsible for ma pronunciation.

The motion gies guid praise tae the darg o Bòrd na Gàidhlig fur promotin an growin Gaelic. It is richt a brow that Gaelic benefits fae this support, though it doesnae hae the official status o Welsh or English in the United Kingdom. Withoot ony inbidin leid bein official, English is the de facto leid o the UK. Yon absence o legislation maks fur discriminatory policy, so indigenous leids dinnae hae eeksie-peeksie staunnin in the UK.

Oor ither national leid is Scots, which is spoken fae Galloway tae the Grampians, Dumfriesshire tae Shetland an maist places in atween. Scots wis yince the official leid o the royal Scottish court an has a written tradition in education, government, law, sang an poetry gaun back ower 700 year. In the middle ages, Scots literature wis looked on as yin o the maist important in Europe, wi great works like Wyntoun's "Kronikill", Barbour's "The Bruce" an the poems o Henrysoun, Dunbar an King James the Fourth kent throughout the continent. In the 17th century, its official use stopped when the court moved tae England. It has syne suffered a when o attempts at makkin it whit it is no—slang, dialect, poor English an no a leid at aw.

But Scots wull nae be shoved intae the linguistic midden. It is no only haudin furrin, it is makkin its way back up tae where it should be: an officially recognised national language. In 2001, the UK Government signed the European Charter fur Regional or Minority Languages an unnertook tae recognise an promote Scots. That wis ratified no long efter by the Scottish Government here in Embra.

In the 2011 census, there wis a question on Scots leid fur the very first time: 1.5 million folk telt the census that they could speak Scots and 1.9 million folk telt the census that they could speak, read, scribe or unnerstaun Scots. Ah agree wi the motion that the Scots Language Society an Scots Language Association dae guid work, but they are awfy wee an unnerfundit when ye look at yon results fae the 2011 census.

Scots disnae get the official recognition an support o Gaelic. There is nae impetus on local or national Government tae produce info, leaflets or

documents in Scots, as there is fur Gaelic in the areas where Gaelic is spoken. There are, though, a growin number o national media outlets in Scots includin *The National*, BBC Scotland's "The Social" an Scots Language Radio.

Ah very much support the recently formed oor vyce group, which was set up tae ca for the establishment o a Scots language board, on a par wi Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The group has already met twice, and is made up o a wheen o educators, activists an artists. Ah wid also like tae gie a cry oot tae the Doric language board, which is based at the Elphinstone institute in Aberdeen, wha state that they are

"a steppin stane tae a National Scots Language Board".

Fae August 2014, the Scots language award has been available at Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels 3, 4, 5 and 6. It gies weans the opportunity tae study the history o the Scots leid an develop their ability to unnerstaun an communicate in Scots. This month, the Scottish Qualifications Authority heid o service reports that creative pieces scrievit in Scots for higher an advanced higher English were o an awfie high standard. They are seein a fair increase in the number o poetry an drama portfolio submissions in mony dialects o the Scots leid, including Doric, Shetlandic an Glaswegian. Banff academy has been working with the Elphinstone institute on neurolinguistic studies showin that speakin twa leids heezes up attainment in mony subjects. Validatin Scots through schemes such as the SQA award boosts the self-belief and confidence o weans.

There is mair. This year saw the first Scots language awards in Glesca. The Open University is noo runnin a free online course in Scots language and culture wi 10 units. Creative Scotland held its first ever Scots leid gaitherin, and it was selt oot. Scots language publication grants have been awardit tae nine publishers.

In this Parliament a couple o months syne, we memorably celebratit the amazin legacy o Scottish cultural icon Hamish Henderson, in this centenary year o his birth. Henderson was a firm advocate o the Scots leid. He spoke o the "carrying stream" o Scottish culture in language and sang. Whit better acknowledgement could there be o Hamish's legacy than making sure that the Scots "carrying stream" becomes a mighty river, fed by the virrsome tributary o this Scottish Parliament's commitment, no jist in words but in much-needit action.

17:37

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):
Mòran taing, Presiding Officer. Gabhibh mo

leisgeul; chan eil ach beagan Gàidhlig agam. Feumaidh mi Beurla a bhruidhinn.

I apologise to the interpreter, because I did not say before the debate that I was going to make my usual apology, which is that I have only a wee bit Gaelic, so I am afraid that members are going to get this in English.

I congratulate my colleague Angus MacDonald on an extremely comprehensive motion. I will have time to touch on only elements of it. I want to get a negative out of the way straight away, which is to say again that, like other members, I know people who were belted for speaking Gaelic at school, and not that long ago.

Dr Allan talked about recent ignorant pronouncements, but let us turn that into a positive. I have a very positive letter from Highland Council saying that the council effectively implements Gaelic immersion policy and is happy to support the expansion of Gaelic immersion education. That is important, because we do not want any misunderstandings.

Language is hugely important. As the motion says, its contribution is rich and varied. I am a typical mongrel Scot, with grandparents from all over the place. Three of them were Doric speakers and one spoke Lallans. I have a wee bit of French and a wee bit of Gaelic. My daughter is fluent in Gaelic, my son is fluent in Catalan, two of my grandchildren are fluent in Gaelic and two of them are fluent in Catalan and understand Spanish—or Castilian as they call it. There is a cultural difference there because, living in Catalunya, there is exposure to a range of languages, which Dr Allan talked about. I hope that we will benefit from that.

Angus MacDonald talked about old and new Scots. I stand to be corrected, but I think that the second most spoken language in the Highlands is Polish. We want to welcome the rich cultures that exist. Scotland has been doing that, but there is no place for complacency. Because of the waves of immigration that we have had, which I hope will continue, Doric has taken a back seat.

I give the example of a dear friend of mine, Henk Rennie, who I had cause to be away with on work a lot. Like me, he was a Scottish Police Federation secretary, from the north-east. He was of Dutch origin and spoke broad Doric. If on any occasion I did not hear what he said or did not pick it up correctly, he repeated in English. His default position was to assume that I did not understand rather than that I did not hear.

We have heard comments about officialdom. Members are aware that individuals have been challenged from shrieval benches for, quite legitimately, using the word "aye" for "yes".

There have been a lot of improvements. I had a wee look at the YoungScot website, where there is a piece entitled, “Seven Benefits of Being Bilingual”. I will rattle through them. There are benefits to the brain, such as improved attention span, which would be helpful for politicians, and there is a load of evidence about that from the mil—I am struggling to say this in English—millennium cohort study. There are health benefits; bilingual people seem to have lower levels of stress than monolingual people. Open-mindedness and adaptability are also benefits—that is huge—and social opportunities are another. There are more options for further education and work, and bilingual people have the ability to learn more languages. Benefit 7 is that there are “No Negatives!” That seems to be very positive.

I am a big football fan and the family in Catalunya are, of course, big Barça fans. If members look at a Barça web page, they will find that it is in Castilian, Thai and a range of other languages—it is also in Catalan, because there can be a local focus. My office manager, Steven Dehn, who is Bavarian, would want me to point out that, likewise, FC Bayern Munich, which is another multinational organisation, uses a range of languages and plays an important part in promoting Bavarian.

It is important that people hear Scots, Doric—I am looking forward to that today—and Gaelic being spoken in the chamber.

17:41

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I congratulate Angus MacDonald, not only on lodging the longest-ever motion in the Parliament but, more important, on securing the debate.

I thank my intern Anna, who is bilingual English and Mexican Spanish, for providing my speaking notes for tonight. She is familiar with bilingualism.

I want to pick up on a point that John Finnie made. My mother was born in Dalmeny Street, in Leith, in 1909, to a Gaelic native speaker father and an Anglophone mother. She learned Gaelic to some degree before she went to school, but when she went to school she was punished if she used Gaelic. She left school with no Gaelic. It is ironic that she became a language teacher, teaching French and German, although she had no Gaelic. That has been the message down the ages.

I am very much looking forward to hearing from Peter Chapman, whose Doric far surpasses my trivial amount of the language. It is worth making the point that Doric is, I think, a language in its own right. It is as close to—or as distant from—English as Norwegian is to Swedish, and Norwegian and Swedish are recognised as

separate languages. It might be time for Doric to have similar recognition.

I join other members in congratulating Bòrd na Gàidhlig on its successful work in promoting Gaelic and, in particular, for facilitating access to Gaelic for people at an early age. The number of people who speak Gaelic is stabilising, after a period of particular difficulty, and there is an increase in Gaelic speakers under the age of 20. If Gaelic becomes a language of the young, we can see a future for it, so I hope that that trend continues. We know that Gaelic is the key to Highland culture, heritage, tradition and society.

We have other languages that sort of dribble into our perception. Just a mile outside my constituency is the town of New Pitsligo, which has the alternative name Cyaak, which is Brythonic—it is really Welsh. We have a long history of many different languages in Scotland.

Teaching is important, if we are to preserve our traditions, but individuals can play their part, too. Expressions that we inherited from our ancestors are important, and it is good to use the oral tradition to pass them down.

Multilingualism is a key European value and a crucial component of economic growth and social cohesion, but not all Governments agree that that is the case. We have been particularly disappointed by the failure to allow into Scotland at first asking some Gaelic teachers from places elsewhere that use Gaelic. I hope that we will not see a repetition of that. There is an acute shortage of qualified Gaelic teachers, and we do not need further barriers to teachers coming here to help.

In September, the Scots language awards made an excellent contribution to that area of policy and gave much deserved recognition to the many talented writers, performers and educators who work in Scots.

On the doorstep of the Parliament, outside the Canongate kirk, there is a recent statue of Robert Fergusson. I will close with one verse of his nine-verse poem “Braid Claith”. It was published in 1773 and is directed at us politicians and our potential arrogance.

“Ye wha are fain to hae your name
Wrote in the bonny book of fame,
Let merit nae pretension claim
To laurel'd wreath,
But hap ye weel, baith back and wame,
In gude Braid Claith.”

In the 21st century, we can learn a lot from the Scots language, even if we have to go back to the 18th century. Robert Burns described Robert Fergusson as

“my elder brother in the muse”.

17:45

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank my colleague Angus MacDonald for bringing this debate before Parliament today.

This is the year of indigenous languages and I welcome that. It has been great to hear everybody's contributions so far. Like others, I am happy to hear Peter Chapman's Doric.

I want to use my short time this evening to focus on my first language, the language that I grew up with as a wee wean, dreepin aff the fairm dyke, loupin the burns, and just dumfoonert wi wunner at the world aroon me.

Scots is an indigenous leid. Mr MacDonald's motion states that

"through language, people preserve their community's history, customs and traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking, meaning and expression".

That is absolutely richt.

There are wonderful ways that ideas, feelings and stories can be communicated, with pinpointed, focused, specific accuracy when using particular Scots words to make crystal clear a meaning that one wants tae get across tae folk.

Fir me, words like dreich, fash, sleekit, scunnert, blether, fouter, clatty and houchin are unique and specific words that struggle tae be accurately translated.

A guid pal o mine, Scots speaker, poet and scriever, is author Susi Briggs. She has helped me an awfy lot and is here in oor public gallery this evening. Susi's children's book, "Nip Nebs", which is beautifully illustrated by Ruthie Redden, was written tae teach weans aboot Jack Frost and whit happens tae yer fingers, yer neb and yer taes when the winter weather is cal and frosty ootside and nippin ye. Her new book "Nip Nebs and the Last Berry" could not have been written without funding and support from Curly Tale Books and the Scottish Government. Actor Gary Lewis, who is a great supporter of Scots and a local Galloway talent, scrievit the foreword note in the book. Help and support from ither artists and dedicated funding can help ony new Scots srievers. Many thanks go to the Government for supporting Susi.

In September, I attended the verra first Scots language awards, which were held at the Mitchell library. The event was sponsored by Hands Up for Trad, headed by Simon Thoumire and hosted by Frieda Morrison and Alistair Heather—twa guid Scots leid presenters.

The thocht ahint the awards was tae heighlicht the Scots leid, bringin it forrit intae the een o the public and media in its mony forms. It was a wunnerfu nicht o poems, sangs and clatter and

mony Scots-speaking experts ably presented their personal wirk and aa folk supported ilk ither.

Angus MacDonald mentioned that, last month, at the Scottish National Party conference in Aiberdeen, a motion by Jack Capener and Charlotte Armitage, which supported the creation of a Scots language board, was unanimously approved, tae acclaim. I was happy tae speak supportin that motion. The motion asked that a board, similar tae Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which has been really successful in furthering Gaelic language, be established fir oor Scots leid.

As Joan McAlpine mentioned, there is a new campaign called Oor Vyce. It was also created by Jack Capener, who is a braw Scots speaker. Oor Vyce is a campaign for a Scots language board. It is campaigning for the statutory recognition and promotion of Scotland's second most spoken leid.

I am happy tae be working with colleagues in the chamber, such as Joan McAlpine and the multilingual Dr Alasdair Allan, to re-establish the cross-party group on Scots language in this Parliament. I have also had braw support from Stuart Paterson.

In the previous session we had a Scots language cross-party group convened by Rob Gibson MSP—a guid, braw Scots speaker who hails fae Wick. I record and reflect my thanks to him for his work in the previous session to raise awareness. I spoke to him recently, and he has a Scots "Statement o Principles". I have a copy here, but I dinnae hae time tae read it out loud—although I have a few copies if onybody wants yin.

I have just one ask: to ask the Deputy First Minister if the Government wid consider takin forrit action tae explore establishin a board for the Scots language. Once again, I thank Angus MacDonald for bringing the debate to the chamber.

17:50

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank Angus MacDonald for lodgin the langest motion that I have ever seen. Like Stewart Stevenson, I must say that I have never seen a motion as long.

For once in my life, I have not written a speech. I just thought I would stand up here and spik—I hope that I can dae that. I am absolutely delighted tae hae the opportunity tae spik in my natural language. I was born and bred and brocht up in a sma Buchan ferm in the 1950s. Aa that I heard until I went tae the skweel wis the Doric. Aabodie aboot there spoke the Doric. My mum and dad spoke the Doric. We didna hae a television in thaim days. I suppose we had a wireless, but I dinna remember listenin til it very much, so it was the Doric that we heard.

Suddenly, when we went to the skweel at five year aal, we werna allowed to spik the Doric. We suddenly almost had tae learn a new language, and it was tough going for us. There is a story o a wee loonie who had been tae school just long enough tae realise that they didna spik the Doric there. I apologise for the language a wee bit, but it was the loonie's language and nae mine. He came in ae day efter playtime, and he was greetin. The teacher says til him, "Oh, Jimmy, fit's wrang wi ye?" "Oh," he says, through his tears, "Please, miss, the big boys have pushed me ower, and I've torn a hole in the erse o ma briks." The teacher gies him a severe look, o course, and he realises that he is mistaken. He says, "Please, miss: what I meant to say is that I've torn a hole in the erse o ma trousers."

The Doric was frowned on and looked doon on. As folk have already said, you got the belt in my day if you didna spik English in the school. Doric is under pressure and has been under pressure aa these years. I would love tae see the Doric gettin the recognition that it deserves. The problem is that, wi each generation, we lose a bit mair o the language—we are aye lossin a few words. My son and my stepson baith spik pretty strong Doric, a bit like masel, but my grandkids dinna. They understand it, but they dinna spik it. That hurts me and worries me. In my ain hoosehold, I feel that I should be able tae dae a bit better.

The language is part o who we are; it is part of fa we are in the north-east. It is part of our culture and our heritage. It is the folk of the north-east. I am absolutely proud tae be spikker o Doric. It really annoys me when ye are in a crowd o folk and ye ken that they are aa Doric spickers, who have been born and bred and brocht up in the north-east, but they are nae spikkin Doric. They think that they are seen tae be better or cleverer or something, because they are tryin tae spik posh. That annoys me a lot.

Folk dinna realise the quality of the stuff written in the Doric—the poetry, for instance. There is some great poetry written in the Doric. As I keep sayin, there is poetry written in the Doric that would stand comparison wi onyhin written in the English language. We have folk such as Flora Garry, JC Milne, Charles Murray, John M Caie and Ian Middleton, tae name just a few, who are great writers o Doric poetry.

Ian Middleton wrote a heap o little sma bunnles, as he caad them—one-verse things. One of them was:

"My mither had grief an wis pittin on beef
An the doctor says, 'Nae ifs or buts:
You'll stop eatin fries
An puddins an pies
An ging ontill a diet o nuts.'
Well, she thocht she would try it,
This monkey nut diet,

But the remedies failed the disease.
An noo she's fair fizzin
Cause her wecht's geen an risen,
But, boy, she can nae half climb trees!"

That is a little short funny thing, but there are some great poems written in the Doric as weel. If I have time, I will gie memers one mair.

I have already said that I get annoyed if folk try and spik posh when they are among their ain folk. In the north-east that is kent as spikkin pan loaf. If ye are spikkin pan loaf, ye are tryin tae spik posh. Peter Buchan, the skipper o a fishin boat at Peterheid harbour, wrote a lot o great stuff. His poem ca'ed "Pan Loaf" was makin fun o these fowk who try an think that they are better by spikkin English when they should be spikkin their ain language. It goes like this:

"There are among us those who feign, wid treat wi scorn
and great disdain
And gien the slightest chance wid hain the Doric phrase.
Tae hear them spik ye'd think that they were born five
hunner mile away
Instead atween Burnhaven Bay and Ugie's Braes.
They think it impolite to say if, when freen meets freen,
Fit like the day? Oh no, that's not the proper way. It's
'How do you do?'
At phrases sic as oors they scoff,
They toss their heids an spik pan loaf.
They dinna hoast—oh no; they cough.
Their bluid is bloo, but drap a hemmer on their feet,
Or stick a needle in their seat, ye'll get the Doric,
Pure an sweet, aye rich an rare.
If they were richt they'd need nae shock,
Tae gar them spik like Buchan fowk,
They widnae be the lauchin stock,
That noo they are."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If we want to hear the cabinet secretary, I will need to have a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Angus MacDonald to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Angus MacDonald*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The floor is yours, cabinet secretary.

17:56

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Parliament could have saved me from having to follow Mr Chapman if it had not agreed to that timely motion from Mr MacDonald. I heartily congratulate Mr Chapman on his wonderful renditions. I also congratulate Angus MacDonald on securing the debate on the UN year of indigenous languages and the European day of languages.

It is an enormous privilege for me to hold ministerial responsibility for Scotland's languages, which is one that I take very seriously. I am delighted that Mr MacDonald has secured a debate that gives me the opportunity of participating on such matters.

Mr MacDonald spoke about his Hebridean roots and the challenges that have resulted from past actions that have served to make it more and more difficult for individuals in Scotland to maintain and continue the linguistic traditions of our country. The energies that are now being put in by a range of different organisations, led by the Government, to overcome those injuries of the past and to preserve and nurture our indigenous languages are a central part of the Government's agenda. I very much welcome the extensive motion that Mr MacDonald has lodged and the contributions that members around the chamber have made on this important subject.

The Scottish Government welcomes the UN resolution proclaiming 2019 as the international year of indigenous languages and appreciates UNESCO's work as the leading organisation on the subject. The Government sees the themed year as an excellent opportunity to further promote and preserve our indigenous languages, which play an important part in Scotland's culture, heritage and future.

The promotion of Scotland's indigenous languages and dialects is an important component of its international engagement activity. Scotland was the first home nation to sign up as a friend of the themed year, and our partners have prepared a programme of events to contribute to it. In the past 12 months alone, our offices in Berlin, Paris, Brussels and London have all supported events aimed at celebrating Scotland's linguistic richness. In future, we will continue to invest in policy exchanges and cultural collaborations with international partners.

In September, we published "Arctic Connections, Scotland's first Arctic policy framework". In that document, we committed to encouraging new collaborations between Scotland and Arctic communities—such as the Sami and Inuit people—in relation to the promotion of minority indigenous languages, respecting the fact that all languages have their own specific needs and roles.

As members will be aware, the Scottish Government has actively pursued its responsibilities to promote and support all our indigenous languages. We have introduced and supported legislation and have developed our own British Sign Language plan, Gaelic language plan and Scots policy, which make clear our intentions in that respect.

Rhoda Grant made the point that there is a duty in statute in relation to the Gaelic language for us to promote our native languages. The Government takes that duty seriously and we work with others to make sure that we advance it.

I am pleased to say that we have made good progress with Gaelic over recent years in the key areas of broadcasting, the arts and publishing, and we have seen welcome impacts on the economy, jobs, skills and the creative industries. The gains that have been made for the Gaelic language are impressive. We have a successful Gaelic-medium education sector operating within Scottish education. We have an increasing number of Gaelic stand-alone schools. We have a dedicated body—Stòrlann—that was set up to provide resources and support for teachers and pupils. We have benefited from the establishment of a Gaelic TV channel, which has been a success and has transformed broadcasting in Scotland. We also have a Gaelic arts sector that punches above its weight and without question enriches the cultural life of Scotland.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig was established 12 years ago with statutory duties to promote the Gaelic language. Rhoda Grant and Donald Cameron mentioned that there have been some issues of concern about the performance of the board. I assure members that those issues are uppermost in my mind and the Government is actively working with the board to address them.

We have excellent teaching and research in the Gaelic departments of our universities, and the Scottish Parliament has passed with all-party support strong legislation in support of the Gaelic language. An increasing number of local authorities and public bodies have Gaelic plans that list their commitments to Gaelic.

Having said all that, I think that there is still—Mr Finnie and Dr Allan mentioned the issue in their speeches—a challenging agenda that doubts and debates the wisdom and the value of many of those actions to try to protect and nurture the Gaelic language. It is a matter of fact that there is a statutory duty on us to do what we are doing, but there is also a moral duty and a moral imperative on us all to encourage the promotion of our indigenous languages. Gaelic is one of those languages and it merits the support of us all.

We have made progress in taking forward the support of the Gaelic language, but I recognise the necessity for us to put more impetus into that agenda, so, to add to all the activities that I have cited, I established the faster rate of progress initiative in 2018. It has brought together 24 public authorities with the clear aim of agreeing a number of measures that will allow improvements in support of the Gaelic language to be realised in

order to achieve the vision of the national Gaelic language plan.

We established five workstreams with priorities and challenges to take forward support of the Gaelic language. The first two are digital learning and media, and the economy and the labour market. I was stunned to learn in the faster rate of progress initiative that two thirds of international visitors who come to Scotland wish to have some experience of the Gaelic language during their visit to Scotland. That is a massive economic opportunity for our tourism sector, and we have to sustain and nurture the Gaelic language to support it.

The next two priorities are community engagement, and participation, usage and learner support. In that regard, Donald Cameron's comments on the importance of supporting use of the language and Dr Allan's point about the importance of ensuring that there is community utilisation and utilisation of the language in our public services were important observations to reinforce the work that we are doing. I commend Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for the work that it is doing in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise on developing a community approach to encouraging greater use of the language.

The final workstream in the programme is on the recruitment and retention of teachers in Gaelic-medium education, which I view as being central to encouraging further developments in the Gaelic language. We will explore all the implications for the curriculum at all stages to ensure that we are supporting the development of the Gaelic language.

Rhoda Grant mentioned her assiduous work as a learner of Gaelic. I am not a Gaelic speaker, but I have endeavoured to express myself in Gaelic when I have had the opportunity to do so and have felt that to be appropriate. Most recently, I delivered a reasonably significant proportion of my opening address to the Royal National Mòd in Glasgow in Gaelic. A member of the public who was there kindly wrote to me afterwards to express her appreciation of the fact that I had done that, as she knew that I was not a Gaelic speaker. I want to place on record how much I appreciated that encouragement to continue in my work on expressing a proportion of what I am thinking in the Gaelic language. It is a challenging language to learn, but I was deeply touched by the fact that a member of the public took the trouble to write to me to express her support and encouragement. It is crucial that individuals are supported in that way to learn the Gaelic language.

A number of colleagues—Joan McAlpine, Stewart Stevenson, Emma Harper and Peter Chapman—talked extensively about Scots and

Doric. The culture of our country is inextricably linked to the Scots language. Just last week, I visited Hill of Beath primary school near Cowdenbeath. The young people from the school come from a community that has a deep tradition of expression in the Scots language. Unlike Mr Chapman's experience all those years ago—if he may forgive me my choice of words—Hill of Beath primary school is embracing the Scots language. On my visit, I witnessed a tremendous distillation in every single class, from primary 1 to primary 7, of the young people expressing their natural roots and their natural acquisition of their language. As the school recognises, that is helping their attainment and performance, because they are more adept at utilising language as a consequence of the fact that they are being nurtured in the language of their roots. The artistic and cultural expression that came out of that experience was marvellous.

I saw many of those aspirations also reflected at the Scots gaitherin event—to which Joan McAlpine referred—that took place in Glasgow at the end of September, and which I had the good fortune to address. I give a commitment to Emma Harper that I will look carefully at the proposals that have been brought forward to establish a board in relation to the Scots language. The Government looks carefully at all suggestions to advance and develop the native languages of our country.

Scots song, poetry, literature and drama have a strong tradition, and Scots can also be seen to influence more immediate aspects of modern life through television and film, and through the increasing popularity of its expression through social media activities. All those activities and areas need central Government's support, and I am pleased that, in recent years, we have increased the Scottish Government's support to a variety of Scots organisations that are supporting the language and opening up access to those who wish to engage and use their mother tongue on a daily basis.

I will cover one last issue before I conclude my remarks. John Finnie referred to the seven benefits of bilingualism, which relates to a very broad point about how the learning of languages facilitates cultural awareness. That foundation of bilingualism enables individuals to make proactive connections and enhance their learning attributes as a consequence. That aspiration lies deep at the heart of the Government's one-plus-two languages agenda, which is about encouraging multilingualism in our society. Over the past six years, we have provided more than £30 million to local authorities to develop that approach throughout the curriculum in Scottish schools. Those actions to encourage multilingualism complement the work that is being taken forward

to enhance and encourage the use of Gaelic and Scots.

There is much to celebrate in the linguistic traditions of our country, but there is also—I am seized of this point—much to do to ensure that we live up to our commitment to our forefathers and mothers by doing all that we can to protect the languages that are part of our identity and history, and which must be part of our future in the years to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The debate's over, so I'm shuttin doon the day's gaitherin.

Meeting closed at 18:09.

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