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CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	1
Low-income Families	1
Affordable Homes (Budget)	2
Bad Weather (Impact on Council Services)	3
Planning Policy (Digital Infrastructure in New Homes)	4
Local Authority Services (Budget)	4
Council Services	5
Poverty (Renfrewshire South)	7
Community Land Ownership (Community Councils)	7
SOCIAL SECURITY AND OLDER PEOPLE	8
Social Security Policies (Economic Inactivity)	8
Single-sex Exemptions to Equality Act 2010 (Hospital Wards)	9
Poverty Reduction Targets	11
Rent Arrears (Impact of Universal Credit)	12
Older People's Independence	14
"A Fairer Scotland for Older People: A Framework for Action"	15
Carers Allowance (Older People)	16
UNITED KINGDOM GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION	18
<i>Statement—[Michael Russell].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell)	18
SCOTTISH RATE RESOLUTION	30
<i>Motion moved—[Ben Macpherson].</i>	
The Minister for Public Finance and Migration (Ben Macpherson)	30
Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	32
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	35
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	37
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	39
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)	41
Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)	43
Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	45
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)	46
Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)	47
Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	49
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	51
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)	52
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	54
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	56
Ben Macpherson	58
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICS IN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION	65
<i>Motion moved—[Clare Adamson].</i>	
Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	65
The Minister for Children and Young People (Maree Todd)	67
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	70
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)	72
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)	73
Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)	76
Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)	77
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	79
Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	80
Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)	82
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)	84
Iain Gray	85
Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	87

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Richard Lochhead)	89
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab).....	91
BIRMINGHAM COMMONWEALTH GAMES BILL	93
<i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick].</i>	
POINT OF ORDER	94
BUSINESS MOTION	97
<i>Motion moved—[Graeme Dey]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	99
<i>Motions moved—[Graeme Dey].</i>	
DECISION TIME	100
EATING DISORDERS AWARENESS WEEK 2020	102
<i>Motion debated—[Emma Harper].</i>	
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)	102
Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP).....	105
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	106
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)	107
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	109
David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)	111
The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey).....	112

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 4 March 2020

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 13:30]

Portfolio Question Time

Communities and Local Government

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions on communities and local government. Questions 5 and 8 are grouped together.

Low-income Families

1. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to tackle inequalities among low-income families. (S5O-04196)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): Last year, we invested more than £1.4 billion to support low income families, including £522 million for affordable homes, £84 million to tackle fuel poverty and energy efficiency and more than £100 million to mitigate the worst impacts of United Kingdom Government welfare cuts.

The Scottish budget outlines an investment of £3.4 billion in social security spending, including £21 million to introduce our Scottish child payment. By year end, a low-income family with one child in the first year of their life will be entitled to receive an annual total of £1,572 in new Scottish benefits—more than £600 more than they would have got previously in the UK benefits system.

Anas Sarwar: Does the cabinet secretary recognise that the good efforts on social security are undermined by continued cuts to local authorities? I welcome the reversal of the decision to close the Blairvadach outdoor education centre, but fewer cuts does not mean more money. Does she think that a £205 million cut and site closures will help to increase or decrease inequality in Glasgow?

Aileen Campbell: We believe that we have afforded a fair budget to local government, although we understand that there are lots of challenges across public finances. However, our good efforts—all the things that I outlined in my answer to Anas Sarwar—are being undermined by the continued pursuit of austerity and welfare reforms by the UK Government. Imagine if the Scottish Government did not have to spend more

than £100 million to mitigate the worst impacts of welfare reform. I put a hand out to Anas Sarwar and ask him whether he will join us in recognising that we need all the powers over social security and employment to come to the Scottish Parliament. We need independence to be able to properly tackle poverty in the way that we want to in this Government.

Affordable Homes (Budget)

2. **Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what provision it has made for building affordable homes in the next financial year. (S5O-04197)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): We are committed to ensuring that everyone has access to a safe, warm and affordable home that meets their needs. That is why we have increased the affordable housing supply budget by £17 million to £843 million in 2020-21 and committed to £300 million interim funding certainty for 2021-22.

We have transformed access to affordable housing with a record investment of more than £3.5 billion to deliver our 50,000 affordable homes target, which includes 35,000 homes for social rent, over the course of this parliamentary session. This Government can be very proud of its record on affordable housing, having delivered more than 89,000 affordable homes since 2007.

Annabelle Ewing: I welcome the extra £17 million for this financial year and note the considerable progress that has been made in this area, including on affordable housing. What wider progress is being made by the Scottish Government on the housing to 2040 vision, so that we will have a housing sector that meets the needs of Scotland's changing population?

Kevin Stewart: It is clear that Scotland's housing system must help to address many of the challenges that we face, such as our ageing population, which means that business as usual is not an option. We also need to think carefully about how we support the distinct needs of rural communities and ensure that we have a housing system that works for all.

In the programme for government 2018-19, we committed to working with the whole of Scotland on a shared vision for how our homes and communities should look and feel by 2040. Since then, wisdom and expertise have been put into our consultation. Between 2 December and 28 February, we consulted extensively on our draft vision and principles and the options and choices to get there. We have received a wealth of feedback and ideas, which we will carefully assess as we develop the housing to 2040 vision and route map.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):

The announcement in the draft budget of an extra £300 million for 2021-22 is welcome, but that is enough to deliver only less than half of the extra 10,000 houses a year that are needed. Does the minister not agree that the figure should be increased?

Kevin Stewart: I am grateful to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Kate Forbes, for providing that £300 million to give comfort and certainty beyond the current parliamentary session. I am sure that Ms Forbes will look carefully at what is required for the future. It would be helpful if we actually had a United Kingdom budget that gave us the certainty that we need to carry out a full and comprehensive spending review so that we can deal with Scotland's finances, including moneys for housing, in an appropriate manner.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let us try to speed things up a bit.

Bad Weather (Impact on Council Services)

3. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of the impact on housing and other local government services of the recent poor weather, and what additional assistance it has offered to councils to respond to this. (S5O-04198)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): Any impact on housing and other local government services due to the recent poor weather is a matter for individual local authorities. The Scottish Government, for its part, has activated the Bellwin scheme to provide additional revenue support to local authorities to assist with the immediate and unforeseen costs that meet the qualifying criteria in the aftermath of emergency incidents such as the recent storms. The scheme was most recently activated on 25 February following storm Dennis.

Alison Harris: Obviously, the recent poor weather has caused fields, roads, railways and local communities in Scotland to flood, which can impact on housing estates and housing construction. In the light of the flooding's impact on construction, and taking into account the large number of homes that were still to be built before the flooding, can the minister update Parliament on whether the Government remains confident that it will achieve its goal of building 50,000 affordable homes by the end of the current session of Parliament?

Kevin Stewart: I am confident that we will deliver 50,000 affordable homes during this session of Parliament. At the moment, we are on track to do so. However, we must not forget the risks. The weather is one risk, but it can be counteracted. One of the biggest risks is Brexit

and the fact that we might lose European nationals who are in the construction workforce, which might cause difficulties. We should also take cognisance of the current situation with Covid-19 and coronavirus, which might cause problems not only in the construction sector but in many other parts of the economy. That is why the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, Jeane Freeman, has been at the forefront of trying to ensure that we do our best to tackle that virus.

Planning Policy (Digital Infrastructure in New Homes)

4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether the next version of the Scottish planning policy will include requirements for all new housing developments to have access to superfast broadband. (S5O-04199)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): We are currently considering how planning policy in combination with other devolved powers might best ensure provision of digital infrastructure in new homes as part of our early engagement in preparation for national planning framework 4.

Willie Rennie: That is a helpful answer, and I hope that the minister comes forward with such a proposal, because it is a nonsense that new housing developments can be built without superfast broadband being built into the homes. Superfast broadband should be available automatically, as happens with other utilities, but far too many developments are being built without it. I hope that the minister includes that measure in the Scottish planning policy when it is published in September.

Kevin Stewart: I encourage all members to engage with the formulation of national planning framework 4 and the review of Scottish planning policy in order to deal with such issues. I ask members to take a look at the website and discussion papers on NPF4 and Scottish planning policy, to get engaged and to try to get their constituents engaged, so that we have the right planning policies in place to take this country forward.

Local Authority Services (Budget)

5. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I note that my question was lodged in advance of negotiations concluding.

To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to protect local authority services, in the light of the claim by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that the proposals in its draft budget will hit "vulnerable communities the hardest". (S5O-04200)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): As confirmed by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance at stage 1 of the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill, we have taken action to allocate an additional £95 million in revenue support for local government. That will deliver a total increase in revenue funding from the Scottish Government in 2020-21 of £589 million to support the delivery of local government services, including those for the most vulnerable.

Alexander Stewart: Councils are at the end of their tether, thanks to years of underfunding by the Scottish Government. The recent £95 million does not account for inflation or restore the years of cuts. There will still be a £117 million black hole in capital funding. The Government's reluctance to properly resource councils has left the financial burden on hard-working Scots. Why is the Government undermining and underfunding local government?

Aileen Campbell: As I said in a previous response, we have tried to treat local government fairly. We recognise that there are financial challenges across the public sector, but those are not driven by decisions that the Government has taken; they are driven by 10 years of austerity from Alexander Stewart's party at United Kingdom Government level. I really hope that he is as vocal with his UK Government colleagues as he repeatedly is in this chamber. If the UK Government reversed austerity, stopped welfare reforms and tried to rebalance the economy in a way that worked for people around the country, our communities would feel the benefit.

We are treating local government fairly. We have put £95 million extra into the local government budget, as voted for last week. I remind Alexander Stewart to have a wee look at his party leadership's income tax proposals, which would benefit those in higher-earning households and disproportionately disadvantage those in lower income brackets. He needs to have a wee look at his party's policy before coming here with a brass neck challenging us on how we support our vulnerable communities.

Council Services

8. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of the impact on communities of any reduced levels of council services. (S50-04203)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): Local authorities are independent democratically elected bodies with their own powers and responsibilities. Ultimately, it is for locally elected representatives to make decisions on how best to deliver services to their communities.

For its part, the Scottish Government is providing local government with a substantial funding package worth £11.4 billion in total, which includes an increase of £589 million or 5.8 per cent in 2020-21 in support for spending on core revenue services.

Rhoda Grant: At the end of this month, people with vision impairments in Highland will lose the support of Sight Action, which is a statutory service for local government that is led by NHS Highland under the lead agency model. In light of the £205 million cut to the local government budget, what reassurance can the minister give my vision-impaired constituents that they will receive the support that they require after the end of the month?

Aileen Campbell: I point Rhoda Grant to the additional money that we put into local government funding, and I ask her to recognise that local government is autonomous. However, as I am not aware of the details that she mentioned, I am happy to engage with her and, if she wants to furnish me with further information, to look at that. We have a number of powers and policies in place to help people cope with visual impairments or any other disabilities, and we can furnish her with relevant information if her constituents need support and help.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary set out how the Scottish Government, by providing a local government funding package in 2020-21 of £11.4 billion—91 per cent of which councils have complete autonomy to allocate—is ensuring that councils have the means to deliver services, despite years of United Kingdom Government austerity and cuts to the Scottish budget?

Aileen Campbell: Colin Beattie is correct to point to the 10 years of continued austerity, which has had an impact on public services and public life. That is why we have endeavoured to treat local government fairly; it is why, when we came into office back in 2007, we endeavoured to take away some of the ring fencing; and it is why local authorities have autonomy with regard to 91 per cent of their funding.

Local authorities are responsible for how they spend their money, and it is absolutely correct for them, as democratically elected bodies in their own right, to have that autonomy. That is why we continue to work with them on the local governance review and why we want to provide further empowerment. Kate Forbes is working on the fiscal empowerment element of the local governance review to see what more work we can do together to rebalance democracy for the people of Scotland.

Poverty (Renfrewshire South)

6. Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it tackles poverty in the Renfrewshire South constituency. (S5O-04201)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): We are investing more than £3.5 billion to deliver 50,000 more affordable homes, including 35,000 for social rent, over the current parliamentary term. We have made available £71.438 million to Renfrewshire Council over that period to provide affordable energy-efficient housing. Since 2015, Renfrewshire has received £28 million of attainment challenge funding in order to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap, including almost £13 million to schools through pupil equity funding. Renfrewshire Council was allocated £1.4 million from the £50 million town centre fund, and it is working with partners on a number of projects that will benefit the Renfrewshire South constituency.

Tom Arthur: Given all the additionalities that result from investment in housing and improved mental and physical health, does the cabinet secretary agree that the Government's commitment to housing demonstrates its commitment to a wellbeing economy?

Aileen Campbell: Absolutely. The fundamental point about housing is that it is more than just bricks and mortar. It has a reach and an impact that are beneficial not only for me and my colleague Kevin Stewart, who have explicit responsibility for housing; it has an impact on the health portfolio and on attainment. Children who live in safe and warm homes can do their homework far better than those who feel cold and vulnerable. Housing has an impact across the Government, and that impact will contribute to our wellbeing economy and help us to meet the outcome requirements for our national performance framework.

I will give a figure to illustrate that impact. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that child poverty rates in Scotland differ from those in the rest of the United Kingdom by 6 percentage points. That is because of the investment that we have put into housing to ensure that we reduce people's household costs. We continue to work hard to deliver equality and fairness for the people of this country, which is why we will continue to support and invest in housing.

Community Land Ownership (Community Councils)

7. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement the communities

secretary has had with community councils regarding community ownership of land through the Scottish land fund. (S5O-04202)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government values the role of community councils, which undertake a wide range of activities for the benefit of their communities. I have not had any direct engagement with community councils regarding community ownership of land through the Scottish land fund.

Rachael Hamilton: I will be generous and thank the Scottish Government and Buccleuch Estates Ltd for assisting the Newcastleton & District Community Trust with the successful transfer of land, which will be hugely beneficial to the community. How will the Scottish Government support the community's wish to buy out Holm hill, which is part of Langholm moor, in order to prioritise the need for more housing to be made available in the community, particularly in light of the devastation that Newcastleton has faced following storm Dennis?

Aileen Campbell: I am glad that the member recognises the value of the regeneration capital grant fund, which is transforming lives and communities across the country. We are proud of what the fund has achieved. We have outlined in a report the impact that the fund has had, and I am glad that it is benefiting Rachael Hamilton's constituents.

I am happy to engage with Rachael Hamilton on the issues that she has raised. I offer to meet her to further discuss the plans of communities in her constituency to ensure that we support them as best we can to make the applications that require to be made, so that they feel empowered and can benefit from the policies and work that the Government is taking forward.

Social Security and Older People

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to questions on social security and older people. Questions 6 and 7 are grouped together. Question 1 has not been lodged.

Social Security Policies (Economic Inactivity)

2. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to use its social security policies to address reported high levels of economic inactivity. (S5O-04205)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We are already using the powers that we have to tackle long-standing issues. Our employability service, fair start Scotland, is delivering

personalised support to 19,000 people, with 5,000 people already having been supported into jobs.

We are taking forward the disability employment action plan, which aims to at least halve the disability employment gap by 2038. In spring 2020, we will also deliver the job start payment, which aims to support 5,000 young people into work. I point out that Scotland's unemployment rate of 3.5 per cent is lower than that of the United Kingdom, which is 3.8 per cent.

Dean Lockhart: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the latest figures, which show that the level of economic inactivity in Scotland, at 22 per cent, is well above the UK average of 20 per cent. To put that into perspective, that represents more than 750,000 people in Scotland who are not active in the labour market. Given that recent figures have shown that only 4 per cent of those who enter the Scottish Government's fair start Scotland programme are still in work 26 weeks after starting the programme, is the cabinet secretary satisfied that her Government is doing enough to address economic inactivity in Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Scottish Government will always endeavour to do all that we can and will continuously strive to do more. However, I point out to the member that the main groups of people who are economically inactive include the long-term sick, at 28.3 per cent; students, at 24.5 per cent; and people who are looking after the family or home, at 18.8 per cent.

I am more than happy to consider those aspects, as all the members in the chamber should do. However, using the figures that Dean Lockhart presents gives a less than full picture and is unfair to the work that has already been done by fair start Scotland.

Single-sex Exemptions to Equality Act 2010 (Hospital Wards)

3. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of its commitment to uphold the single-sex exemptions under the Equality Act 2010, what its response is to concerns that this could be undermined by allowing male hospital patients who identify as female, including those who have made no physical changes, to be placed in wards that match their gender identity. (S5O-04206)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government expects everyone to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect when accessing and using national health service services. NHS staff will make every effort to ensure that the privacy and dignity of all patients are maintained in Scottish hospitals. The Scottish

Government supports the appropriate use of the single-sex exemptions by service providers where it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Joan McAlpine: I welcome that answer, but NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's gender reassignment policy review says, on page 17, that a female patient who is distressed at the presence of a male-bodied trans-identified person in the next bed should be told that that person is female and that her complaint is similar to a white woman complaining about a black patient being in the next bed.

Does the cabinet secretary understand that such statements in official documents cast doubt on assurances that the Government is committed to maintaining women's privacy and dignity and the single-sex exemptions in the 2010 act, and will she speak to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde about reviewing that policy?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: This Government expects all service providers, including health boards, to take account of everyone's rights when developing policies and to ensure that all rights, including those of women, are protected. Health boards should assess each situation individually and sensitively, using their experience and expertise to determine the appropriate course of action while fulfilling their responsibilities under the 2010 act.

I say once again that this Government supports the single-sex exemptions in the Equality Act 2010, which allow for trans people to be excluded when that is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

All service providers are encouraged to know their rights in this area, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission published a statutory code of practice that assists providers to understand the relevant issues in this area.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): What role did the Scottish ministers have in the development of that policy? Given the clear argument that objecting to a male-bodied person in a women-only place is akin to racism, will the cabinet secretary confirm that the Government will, as a matter of urgency, meet that health board to emphasise the rights that are set out in the 2010 act? Further, will she accept that it should not be up to the individual to know what their rights are, as she suggests, but that it is the responsibility of organisations to allow those rights to be enforced?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I made clear in my second answer to Joan McAlpine, the Government absolutely supports the single-sex exemptions in the 2010 act, and every service provider, including health boards, should take account of the 2010 act and the single-sex

exemption that it contains. Again, I stress that statutory codes of practice are available to all service providers, including health boards, and I encourage all health boards and, indeed, all service providers to ensure that they are up-to-date with their knowledge on this matter.

Again, I stress the Government's support for the use of single-sex exemption is if it is deemed appropriate and where it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Does this not come down to the long-standing principle that treating trans women as though they are men or trans men as though they are women is a breach of their human rights? That is why we have a gender recognition act in the first place, and we should seek to improve it.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Patrick Harvie raises an important point. I absolutely appreciate that these are difficult issues to debate and that there are strongly held views in many areas, but I encourage all members—and, as I have done before, all service providers—to be aware of exactly what the obligations and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 are, so that there can be a dignified and responsible debate on the topic.

Poverty Reduction Targets

4. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that it meets its poverty reduction targets. (S5O-04207)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Our tackling child poverty delivery plan, which is backed by a £50 million fund, outlines the actions that we are taking. They include committing £16 million to parental employment support, which will help parents to enter and progress in work; almost doubling funded early learning and childcare to 1,140 free hours; and introducing the new Scottish child payment, which will give £10 per week per child to the families who need it most. The first update on our tackling child poverty delivery plan showed that 48 of the 58 actions in the plan are in progress or are being delivered.

Patrick Harvie: Many of the actions have broad support across the political spectrum, and the Scottish child payment will be an important step forward. However, the Scottish Government's projections of the extent to which it will reduce child poverty are based on an expectation of an 83 per cent take-up. Given that the Scottish Fiscal Commission has revised that figure downwards to 74 per cent, what is the Scottish Government going to do about that anomaly? Does it intend to reject that forecast and take additional measures to increase uptake, or is it going to revise

downwards its expectation of how effective the policy will be?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are certainly not revising downwards what we want to see from the Scottish child payment. The Scottish Fiscal Commission is working on the information that it has at the moment. As we go forward, we will work with it to demonstrate to it what we are doing on benefit take-up, on publicity and in our work with stakeholders to increase that. I appreciate the work that the Scottish Fiscal Commission has done to create its forecast and I look forward to my officials working with it to demonstrate that we can do so much more than that as we move forward with this groundbreaking achievement.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The best start grant helps the Government to meet the poverty reduction target. What formula will the cabinet secretary use for future uprating of that grant? Will she report on the cumulative effect of any freeze in future upratings?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The best start grant is one measure to support children in this area, but, as I mentioned in my first answer to Patrick Harvie, the Scottish child payment, which will come into force this year, will play an even larger part. If the best start grant had been increased by inflation, it would have gone up by about £10. Instead, the Scottish Government is introducing the Scottish child payment, which will see £520 going to a family if they are eligible.

We will, of course, take decisions on the uprating of the best start grant in each annual budget process. I note that, in its discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work during the current process, Scottish Labour did not make a recommendation that money be spent in that manner.

Rent Arrears (Impact of Universal Credit)

5. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of universal credit on rent arrears in the South Scotland region. (S5O-04208)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I am deeply concerned about the impact of universal credit in Scotland, not just on rent arrears but given the wider anxiety and hardship that it is undoubtedly causing. On 7 January, the Scottish Government published its second follow-up to the 2019 annual report on welfare reform, which assesses the impact of United Kingdom Government policy on housing. Although there is no region-specific data, the report makes it clear that, since universal credit was introduced, in 2013, rent arrears in Scotland have steadily increased.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities found that, between March 2016 and March 2018, rent arrears in full service areas in Scotland rose by an average of 26 per cent.

The UK Government must start to listen to the evidence, fix the problems with universal credit and make it a benefit that works for people, not against them.

Colin Smyth: Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership has told me that 75 per cent of tenants on universal credit have rent arrears, and the council has reported that the number of crisis grant applications has risen by 26 per cent in the past year.

It is a year since the cabinet secretary committed to an evaluation of Scottish choices, including the option of landlords receiving direct payments by default. Will the cabinet secretary listen to the many voices that are asking the Government to use its powers to ensure that payments are made to landlords as the default, to tackle the growing problem of arrears?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I recognise that there are calls for payments to be made directly to landlords, but I stress to Colin Smyth that our policy about that being a choice for the individual was made after consultation with people with lived experience of universal credit and of the benefits system. They asked to have a choice on the issue. I will, of course, listen very carefully to the landlord organisations, in particular, and to representatives who are looking to make the change, but I will also listen very carefully to the individuals who have asked for that flexibility to remain the same.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Because business has moved on to the general question, I can call Mr Paterson to ask his supplementary question although he is not a South Scotland member.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary outline what impact Scottish choices has had on mitigating the impact of that policy? Does she agree that, without full control over welfare, the Scottish Government and this Parliament are unfortunately limited in what they can do to support people who are on universal credit?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are using our limited powers to try to make the delivery of universal credit better suited to the needs of the people who claim it, including by giving people the choice to have their housing costs paid directly to their landlord or to receive their payments twice monthly. The changes that we can make are very small, however, and they do not take away the fundamental flaws of universal credit—only the full

devolution of social security powers would achieve that.

Older People's Independence

6. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it helps older people to maintain their independence. (S50-04209)

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): Work that supports older people's independence happens across the Scottish Government. We are supporting older people's services as part of the further £100 million transfer to local authorities in 2020-21 for investment in health and social care and mental health, which brings the total support for integration to £811 million in 2020-21.

In taking an intersectional approach to older people, we have developed regulations to give disabled people the right to make adaptations to common areas, we have issued guidance for local authorities to support delivery of more wheelchair-accessible housing, and we have funded amazing organisations that support independent living. We also continue to invest £210 million per year in the national concessionary fares scheme for older and disabled people.

Liam Kerr: In 2017, the Scottish Government published a research paper called "Older People and Employment in Scotland", which included three recommendations on ways in which the Scottish Government could help older people in work: to launch a publicity campaign, to lead events and workshops, and to review and promote opportunities for lifelong learning. Can the minister outline how the Government has implemented each of those recommendations?

Christina McKelvie: Liam Kerr will know that Jamie Hepburn is leading on the fairer work principles. That work takes account of issues that relate to the older workforce.

For my part, I am taking cognisance of the fact that, in nine short months, in 2021, our population will have more over-75s than it has now. We also have more people in the workforce who are aged over 50. I am taking a keen interest in that, especially in respect of the challenges that older people face in the workforce. Some of my work with the women's convention is to do with the menopause, and with disabled people in the workplace and the fairer Scotland work. My work to review the public sector equality duty is also taking real cognisance of older people in the workplace.

Specifically on the advertising campaign, I will get information from Jamie Hepburn for Liam Kerr, who can rest assured that we are working closely together to make sure that our older workforce is

in flexible workplaces that support them if they are carers, or if they face challenges with their health or have long-term conditions. All those factors have been taken into account in developing our strategy for older people in the workplace

“A Fairer Scotland for Older People: A Framework for Action”

7. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what progress it is making in implementing the proposals in its paper, “A Fairer Scotland for Older People: A Framework for Action”. (S5O-04210)

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): The Scottish Government is working with the older people’s strategic action forum to develop our first annual report on monitoring of the progress of “A Fairer Scotland for Older People: A Framework for Action”. The annual report will be published in April 2020, so it is coming very soon. It will report on the progress of all 56 actions that were contained in the framework, as well as identifying next steps.

Just last week I met the action forum, which is providing real expertise in terms of formulating our annual report. The work that it has done, and which its organisations are doing to realise actions, is extensive and exciting, so members should look out for the report when it is published next month.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are making Mr Whittle smile.

Brian Whittle: You know how difficult that is, Presiding Officer.

Does the minister agree that ensuring access to activity in later life enables not only longer life but better-quality life, by tackling issues including poor physical and mental health and loneliness? If so, what is the Scottish Government doing to make such opportunities available for all?

Christina McKelvie: I absolutely agree. That ties in to what we are doing on fairer work and on ensuring that people are retained longer in the workplace. Brian Whittle is absolutely on the money on how to tackle the challenges. For many old people, social isolation and loneliness are among the biggest problems that they face. In our work on the social isolation and loneliness strategy, we are working with older people and the action forum and we are applying their learning and experience to how we work with other organisations to deliver services that prevent social isolation and loneliness, while tackling it when people are experiencing it.

Just this morning, I was at Generations Working Together’s conference, at which I spent time with

young people and older people who are working together to bridge the generation gap, to remove negative stereotyping, and to deal with the ageism that exists in our society that might prevent people from taking part in local organisations or events that are available to them.

Brian Whittle is on the money with what he says, and we are on the ball with it. He should look out for the report when it is published: he will see the progress that we have made.

Carers Allowance (Older People)

8. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to reports of an increase in the number of people who are entitled to carers allowance not claiming it. (S5O-04211)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We set out a range of actions to increase the number of people claiming all our benefits in our benefit take-up strategy, which was published in October last year. Last week, I announced funding of £600,000 to support work on take-up of Scottish social security benefits among hard-to-reach groups, single parents and people with particular barriers such as mental or physical disabilities.

That builds on our work to increase uptake of carers allowance and the young carers grant through, for example, regular promotion of the carers allowance supplement and material on the Young Scot website to encourage younger carers to claim the support to which they are entitled. We have also introduced a duty on local authorities to provide advice to carers on income maximisation, which covers carers allowance.

Sarah Boyack: Work is being done, and that is welcome. However, will the cabinet secretary take note of the fact that the Government’s own statistics to last August show that overall numbers of people who have underlying entitlement are down, and that thousands fewer people have entitlement only? In response to the Oxfam report on the multibillion-pound effort that unpaid carers contribute to society, the First Minister recently said that she would like support for them to be increased and extended, financially and otherwise. Ahead of carers week 2020, will the cabinet secretary bring forward the planned consultation on wider changes to carers allowance, which was not due to begin until next year?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As Sarah Boyack correctly said, we are due to consult on carers allowance in 2021. That goes along with our framework and timeframe for social security benefits as we move forward on devolution of them. Currently, work is focused particularly on disability assistance. However, we continue to

meet stakeholder organisations and carers directly to discuss with them what they would like as we move forward with devolution of carers allowance. That will, I am sure, be something to which we will give serious consideration.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind Ms Boyack and others that they should be in the chamber from the beginning of the portfolio question time in which they hope to ask a question. Do not come in in the middle of it.

United Kingdom Government's Approach to Negotiations with the European Union

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a statement by Michael Russell on the United Kingdom Government's negotiating mandate. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement; there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

14:09

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): I want to provide an update on the publication, last Thursday, of "The Future Relationship with the EU: The UK's Approach to Negotiations", and on the negotiations process itself, which began on Monday this week.

There is no doubt that, if the intentions in the Government's document are turned into reality, they will result in the people of Scotland being worse off financially, cut off practically and turned off politically from the European mainstream. The document reveals beyond peradventure that the UK Government is now in the hands of ideological extremists.

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

Michael Russell: Yes, extremists like that.

Mark Drakeford, Wales's First Minister, summed up the position for many of us when he said last week:

"Over the last three and a half years, we have taken every opportunity to speak to UK ministers about the specific concerns we have on protecting and promoting the Welsh economy, providing evidence and proposals. The UK government has chosen a very different course. The mandate they have published means that Wales' vital interests are not represented in these negotiations. When the UK government begins these negotiations next week—the most important in 50 years—it will be doing so on its own."

As for Wales, so for Scotland.

Let me first tell members the extent of the devolved Administrations' involvement with the document. I set this out in more detail than usual, to dispel any suggestion from the UK Government that we had a meaningful role in shaping its approach.

We received what was clearly a virtual final draft on the morning of Friday 21 February. That sharing, at least, looked like progress. However, the draft did not include the section on justice and security.

I am grateful to all the officials who worked tirelessly over the weekend to produce a detailed response, which I approved late on Sunday 23 February and which went back to the UK Government in my name on the morning of Monday 24 February.

At 8.30 am on Tuesday 25 February, there was a conference call between the UK Government and the devolved Governments. We were assured that our concerns were being taken seriously. However, when we saw the final document, a mere hour and a half or so before it was presented to the House of Commons, two days later, there had been some minor, cosmetic changes but the substance and the tone had, if anything, been hardened.

The devolved Governments are, once again, being managed, not engaged.

The joint ministerial committee on European Union negotiations last met on Tuesday 28 January, in Cardiff. At the conclusion, the three devolved Governments made it clear that they needed to see the legal texts and working papers that were part of the process of producing the negotiating mandate. That did not happen. The JMC has not been convened since then.

Consequently, we have not agreed the way in which the devolved Governments will be involved in the second-stage negotiations. Nor have we agreed how we would reach a common mind on any issue to be negotiated, although there is a proposal from me on the table of a three-room structure.

Not only has the final mandate now been published, the negotiations have started. Not only is that contrary to the terms of reference of the JMC(EN), it is contrary to the devolution settlement, because it is devolved issues such as agriculture, environment and fisheries that will be at the heart of the negotiations.

As the legally and politically responsible body, this Parliament and this Government must be involved in deciding what stance to take. My elected ministerial colleagues are keen to have those discussions and I am sure that this Parliament is keen to see the discussions take place—clearly, the unelected David Frost is not.

As I said, the section in the paper on justice and security was not shown to us. We saw it only in the final published paper. It, too, is unacceptable in tone and substance. The UK Government must respect and take full account of the Scottish legal system—our separate courts, prosecution system and police. To fail to do so would be a breach of not just convention and the devolution settlement but the basic premise on which the UK is founded, which includes protection for our legal system.

Our representations to the UK Government over the past three and a half years have been clear that Scotland did not vote for Brexit, but that democratic fact has been ignored, even when we have offered compromise. Indeed, in the introduction to the published mandate, the UK Government adds insult to injury by explicitly referring to the “unique characteristics” of the crown dependencies, such as Jersey and Guernsey, while completely rejecting any need for a similar approach to the ancient nation of Scotland.

The Scottish Government does not believe that Boris Johnson has any mandate, in any part of the UK, for a form of Brexit that was regarded as being on the lunatic fringe of politics even during the June 2016 referendum. That form of Brexit, which the UK now regards as optimum, is a Canada-minus deal—the most basic of free trade agreements. Undoubtedly, that will mean new barriers and borders, trade-inhibiting rules of origin, customs difficulties and heavy regulatory requirements.

The approach will have a severe impact on many of Scotland's most important sectors. For example, the Scottish seafood industry, which in 2018 exported to the EU produce worth £696 million, will be severely disadvantaged by it. Scottish food producers will suffer and there are real concerns among the farming community about food standards. Elsewhere, even though services account for around 75 per cent of the Scottish economy, Scotland will be shut out of key EU services markets if the Prime Minister's ambition is realised.

Although the UK document makes no attempt to quantify the economic impact of the UK Government's approach, already-published Scottish Government modelling indicates that, if the UK Government secured a basic free trade agreement of the type that it is pursuing, Scottish gross domestic product would be 6.1 per cent, or £9 billion, lower by 2030 than it would be if the UK retained full EU membership. That is equivalent to £1,610 per person. The UK Government has also made it clear that it is prepared to walk away without a trade deal, which would raise that figure to £12.7 billion, equivalent to £2,300 per person.

In contrast, the UK-US negotiating mandate that was published on Monday attempts to quantify the potential economic impacts of a post-Brexit trade deal with the US, suggesting that such a deal could boost the UK economy by 0.16 per cent over the next 15 years. That would in no way make up for the damage caused by the UK's approach to the EU negotiations. It is a distraction. Very significantly, previous UK Government modelling from 2018 suggests that there would be damage for the UK as a whole from its current approach.

Back in 2017, my then UK counterpart David Davis said that a comprehensive free trade agreement and a comprehensive customs agreement would

“deliver the exact same benefits”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 24 January 2017; Vol 620, c 169.]

that we have with EU membership. That was then, and is now, nonsense, but tragically it may soon be very expensive nonsense, with the price being paid by every one of us.

The impacts of the UK Government’s approach will not be simply about numbers. The loss of freedom of movement means that our citizens will have curtailed opportunities to live, work, study, travel and retire abroad, and it will lead to a serious long-term shortfall in the number of workers needed in our economy. We also know that the impact will be worst for those people who can afford it least, such as the disabled and people in remote areas.

We are also likely to be less safe. We now know that the UK is not seeking membership of Europol or Eurojust, or participation in the European arrest warrant or the European investigation order. There is no guarantee that the alternative arrangements that the UK proposes will be agreed to and, even if they are, those arrangements are likely to be much less effective than those that we currently enjoy. Those EU tools help to keep people safe and secure by facilitating rapid information sharing and effective co-operation between police and prosecutors in the prevention, investigation and prosecution of crime.

The UK Government is also lukewarm about the UK’s participation in EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and horizon 2020, and it has actively abandoned involvement in other cross-border programmes such as creative Europe. We are told by the UK that devolved Governments will not be allowed to take up individual membership of any European programme if the UK does not join as a third party. “Allowed” is a significant word. That is how the UK Government sees the rights of the devolved Governments—matters for which permission can be given or withheld.

The Scottish Government does not intend to allow that situation to continue. We reject the published mandate as it is, we will make it clear that if the UK Government attempts to speak on matters of devolved competence, it does not speak for us, and we will ask the Scottish Parliament not to agree actions or agreements if they have not been discussed with us.

We will also shortly introduce the continuity bill, which will give the Parliament and our Government powers to keep pace with European regulation, and we will do so confident in our right to take those actions in areas that are devolved.

The extent to which devolved law aligns itself with the law of the EU is a decision for the Scottish Parliament to take, not the UK Government.

We will, of course, always be willing to discuss the negotiating position on devolved matters, if that discussion is meaningful and respects the devolved settlement. We will intensify our work to ensure that Scotland gets the right to choose its own future, and we invite every member in this chamber to endorse that right and help to obtain it. The delivery of that right is not the delivery of independence—it is simply the basic confirmation of democracy. No one speaks for us, and no one speaks about us, without us.

We are now entering an even more difficult phase of the Brexit process, which, if handled in the way that the UK Government proposes, will have severe negative impacts for the vast majority of people in Scotland. I continue to urge the UK Government to move back from its aggressive rhetoric and ideological obsession with delivering a very damaging hard Brexit, and I urge members to speak up for Scotland and to put differences aside to do so. The time and the threat demand that response from all of us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow up to 20 minutes for questions.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement. Given his recent announcement, I take the opportunity to wish him well on his upcoming retirement from the Parliament and whatever he chooses to do thereafter. However, we still have another year of this to get through, so I will turn to the substance of his statement.

When we are dealing with such serious matters, throwing around ludicrous hyperbole such as references to “the lunatic fringe” does him no favours at all. The irony of this Government referring to others as “ideological extremists” will not be lost on many observers.

Despite all the manufactured outrage, the cabinet secretary at least acknowledges that the Scottish Government and other devolved Administrations did have advance sight of the UK Government’s approach to negotiations prior to publication. Despite what the cabinet secretary claims, the mandate for that approach to negotiations rests on both the 2016 referendum result and the outcome of the UK general election in December. However, he gave the game away at the end of his statement: for the Scottish Government, it is all about independence. That is all that it has ever been about, and any pretence of trying to work constructively with the UK Government has been abandoned.

In an effort to make some constructive progress, I will ask the cabinet secretary a question. At the weekend, the French Government indicated that it was demanding full access to our fishing waters as a precondition for trade discussions. Does the Scottish Government support the stance of the UK Government in refusing that demand, or is it still the policy of the Scottish Government that we should remain members of the hated common fisheries policy?

Michael Russell: I thank Murdo Fraser for his kind words, and I assure him that I have plenty to do in the next year—I will be very busy. I commend to him the approach that I am taking, which is to choose my words carefully, make sure that I stand up for Scotland, defend the interests of the people whom I represent, and not take a position that causes damage to them as a result of what the UK is planning.

I notice that Murdo Fraser did not, in a single moment or word, refute the statistics that I put to members in the chamber. The economic damage that will be done and the way in which devolved competence is being undermined were not disputed. We just heard a reversion to the tired old question, so I will tell him the answer to that question: I will stand up for the rights of Scottish fishing communities and the fishing industry across Scotland. The best way in which the UK could do likewise is to work with the Scottish Government in the negotiations that are currently under way, and not sideline the Scottish Government in those negotiations.

Fishing is a devolved competence, and the lack of recognition of that, and the lack of willingness to work on that basis, is what will do immeasurable damage to the fishing communities that I represent. It is time that Mr Fraser thought of the people of Scotland, and not Boris Johnson and the UK Government.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I join Mr Russell in making clear that the actions and behaviour of the UK Government in its approach to Brexit are totally and utterly unacceptable. I hope that all members in the chamber agree that it is not acceptable for Mr Johnson and his advisers to approach Brexit in such a way, and that we will send a clear message that this Parliament supports this Government and the Welsh Government in having their voices heard in the negotiations. The devolution settlement must be adhered to.

The level of economic damage that will come from the current approach is concerning not only to us and the Welsh Government, but to many of the regions of England, as expressed by regional leaders and mayors. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the best way to change the approach is to unite all the nations and regions that are

expressing similar concerns? Rather than treat it as an issue that just affects Scotland, we should bring together all interested parties across the UK in order to build a campaign of unity that is in the best interests of the people of Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Michael Russell: I am grateful to Mr Rowley for his much more positive and constructive contribution. I agree that there are likely to be very severe problems right across England as a result of the UK Government's approach.

I am a democrat, and there is an issue of democracy here. The people of England, in the majority, voted for Brexit. I do not believe that they voted for—[*Interruption.*] Mr Rowley has got there before me. I was about to make the point that they did not vote for the type of Brexit that the UK Government is pursuing, and I hope that that will be made very clear by their representatives.

I am not saying to the UK Government that it does not have a mandate for Brexit within the UK as a whole; I am saying that it must recognise the mandate within Scotland and within Northern Ireland for it to recognise that there are different points of view and to work with everybody to get a better deal than the one that it seems to want to put on the table.

This is an extremely long process. Those of us who have been involved in it more or less since the referendum in 2016 recognised some major problems, one of which was the failure of Theresa May ever to sit down with the people that Mr Rowley is talking about across these islands and ask, "How could we get an agreement?" The whole process has been poisoned by that.

I will work with anybody to make sure that the current form of Brexit does not happen, but I believe that there is a solution for Scotland, and avoiding that solution will not serve the people of Scotland well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have 15 minutes and 10 members want to ask questions, so I ask for succinct questions and answers, please.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): On page 4, the UK Government's negotiating mandate appears to recognise the need to respect the separate legal systems of Scotland and Northern Ireland but, on page 25, it makes reference to the "UK's legal system" and the need to avoid constraining it. Does that contradictory language give the cabinet secretary confidence that the UK Government will recognise and respect Scotland's distinct legal system during negotiations?

Michael Russell: The member is absolutely right. That is a major area of concern, as I

indicated in my statement. It is an area of concern that will have an impact on every citizen in Scotland. The UK Government's approach goes against the founding principles of the UK. One cannot believe in the union and then play fast and loose with the documents that underpin it. In this case, severe damage will be done to the Scottish legal system in a range of areas, including the independence of the prosecutor, without consultation and without the involvement of Scotland. That cannot be allowed to happen.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): In his statement, the cabinet secretary made the big claim that the mandate is

“contrary to the devolution settlement”.

I think that that claim is completely without foundation. Does the cabinet secretary not agree that there is not a single provision in any of the Scotland Acts that is countermanded by any provision in the mandate that was published last week?

Michael Russell: No, I do not. I understood that Mr Tomkins had moved to consider strategy—that strategic approach appears to have failed already. Obviously, I do not agree with Mr Tomkins. There are many areas in which the mandate cuts across the devolution settlement, and I named several of them in my statement. *[Interruption.]*

As ever, Mr Tomkins is reduced to shouting from the sidelines, which, of course, is what the Tories do. *[Interruption.]* What they should be doing in Scotland—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Stop, everybody. I want to hear the answer. I want questions and answers, so do not heckle.

Michael Russell: If I may give the Tories in Scotland some helpful advice, they should stop tying themselves to Boris Johnson's apron strings and stand up for the people of Scotland. The more they shout from the sidelines, the less the people of Scotland will trust them, and trust in them is at an all-time low anyway.

Adam Tomkins: No answer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are still heckling, Mr Tomkins. I know that you understand the meaning of the word.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The loss of freedom of movement that will result from the UK Government's current stance will have a huge impact not only on those who value our close connection with Europe, but on vital immigration, including in my constituency, where food processors and others rely on migrant workers. Will the cabinet secretary outline his view on the

UK Government's points-based immigration system that will replace freedom of movement?

Michael Russell: The recommendation for a points-based system has been opposed not just by the Scottish Government, which has put forward constructive alternatives; it has been opposed by virtually every significant employer and trade body in Scotland, all of which know what damage it would do.

I heard a moan coming from a Tory member when freedom of movement was raised. I hope that it did not come from Mr Carson. As a farmer, Mr Carson must know what damage the ending of freedom of movement would do to the agriculture and food industries in Scotland. The damage that it would do is clear. That is being said by NFU Scotland and widely across the country. It is impossible for Tory members just to put their heads in the sand and pretend that it is not happening. That would be an economic disaster. Bodies that are in no sense radical, irresponsible or mad nats are saying absolutely clearly that that would be awful for them. However, all that the Tories can do is sit and moan when the facts are presented to them.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The cabinet secretary has set out the predicted outcomes of the UK Government's approach. I agree on the extent of the damage that that approach would cause to Scottish business, particularly if we end up with no trade deal. Is work being done to prepare for no trade deal? Although that is the outcome that we all want to avoid, is consideration being given to what support might be needed for businesses or investment in port infrastructure, for example?

Michael Russell: Claire Baker raises a good point. We have some experience of preparing for no deals, of course. That is expensive experience that has absorbed a great deal of bandwidth and money. However, we continue to be involved in that work, and we continue to prepare for no deal. As we have seen from aggressive statements in the House of Commons and elsewhere, some Tories would welcome no deal, which is extraordinary. We are absolutely determined that we will do our best to ensure that its effects would be mitigated in Scotland but, as I have said from this position often before, we will not be able to totally overcome them. That is the reality of no deal, which would be an even worse disaster.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): The negotiating mandate seeks to place Scotland and the rest of the UK as far from the EU as possible. Has the cabinet secretary been given any explanation from the UK Government about why it is so intent on creating a situation in which there is as little alignment as possible?

Michael Russell: Where the UK Government is now is simply the result of an illogical extension of an extension of the red lines that it signed on to very early on. If people are utterly obsessed with the issue of the European Court of Justice and its jurisdiction, for example, they eventually get to the ludicrous position at which they cannot accept its jurisdiction in anything and, when they look at entirely reasonable, helpful and important issues such as the regulation of road transportation in Europe, they will not take part in such consideration because they do not want the European Court of Justice's jurisdiction. Therefore, they will have to set up their own body, and then consider some sort of alignment and hope that it works.

The UK Government has found itself in a nonsense, Alice-in-wonderland position, but it continues to espouse it. It is important that we say that that will lead to and is leading to disaster, and that the emperor has no clothes. The Scottish Tories may see some wonderful raiment around Boris Johnson, but I see nothing at all.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The Greens share the Scottish Government's immense frustration at the UK Government's attitude towards schemes such as horizon 2020 and Erasmus+, which have brought immense benefits to Scotland. Does the Scottish Government believe that the UK Government has a legal basis for its stated position of seeking to exclude Scotland from such schemes if unilateral attempts were made to participate in them? Is the Scottish Government considering such unilateral attempts to stand up for Scotland's best interests?

Michael Russell: Yes, I am actively considering that. I know that there is very strong support for Erasmus+ in Scotland as a whole and that there is support for it in the other devolved areas, as well. We want to see that moving forward. There should be no question but that, if the UK Government decides not to participate in that for whatever reason—we have argued for some time that its analysis is deeply flawed—the option should exist for the devolved Administrations to take up that issue. In addition, the resource that is currently applied to that should be divided among the devolved Administrations for them to be able to make the decision with the same amount of money. The principle of no detriment should apply to that as well as to all other Brexit matters, and I want that to happen. However, if there is a dog-in-the-manger attitude from the UK Government that means that it says, "We're not taking part, and we're telling you that you're not taking part, either," we will resist that to the ultimate.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary and I share deep concerns about Brexit and the economic damage that it will

cause; there is no doubt about that. However, as we have discussed before in considering the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill, it would be helpful to keep pace with EU regulations to smooth trade and relations with our European neighbours. How will the cabinet secretary ensure that, in doing so, that does not hinder trade, regulations and relations with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Michael Russell: Mr Rennie makes a good point. It is important that that happens, and we do not believe that any of the proposals would do that. As we know, it is possible to be able to operate effectively across borders—that is what trade involves. People tend to trade with their nearest neighbours. We want to put together a system to keep pace that enhances our ability to keep the best and also ensures that we can continue to operate with everybody, including our closest neighbours.

The point that Mr Rennie makes can be addressed constructively during the development of the continuity bill. As he knows, I believe that when all bills are introduced in the Parliament they can be developed—they do not arrive perfect or fully formed. If the Liberal Democrats are keen to take part in developing the bill, I look forward to working with them on that matter. I would be happy to work with Mr Rumbles—I have rarely said that before in my life.

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): In his interactions with the UK Government and others, has the cabinet secretary seen or heard any explanation of why the negotiating mandates pay far less attention to the needs of Scotland and, in contrast, more to those of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, despite our clear and strong democratic preference to remain in the EU? So much for a partnership of equals.

Michael Russell: I understand Ms Constance's point—indeed, I have made the same point myself—but I do not want to diss my friends from Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, whom I often see at meetings of the British-Irish Council. Those islands have fought well and valiantly for their rights, but they are in a different position from us—for example, they are not part of the JMC process.

It puzzles me that there is such a determination to ensure that Scotland—absolutely uniquely—should have nothing. Looking across these islands, we can see that Wales voted for Brexit—that is regrettable, but it is true. Northern Ireland voted against it, but it has a very special set of circumstances. England voted for it, which many people regret, but that is how it voted. Scotland voted against Brexit absolutely clearly, and by a big majority, and yet, uniquely, it is to receive no special treatment at all. That issue should be

addressed not only by this chamber. I would have thought that the Scottish Conservatives would also wish to address it, but perhaps this is the problem: they are Scottish Conservatives, and they just do not recognise how important Scotland should be to them.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On that theme, in his statement the cabinet secretary referred a great deal to all the costs to the Scottish economy of the Brexit process. When will the Scottish Government publish an updated assessment of the costs that would be incurred to the Scottish economy should we ever be an independent country and suffer the trade problem of a hard border with our most important partner, which is England?

Michael Russell: I have to say to Liz Smith, with whom I have done a lot of good work and of whom I am fond—I hope that that does not damage her career, or even her personal life—that that question was not worthy of her. I say that very nicely. We have published a great deal of material on that subject, and will continue to do so. If anyone can look at the current situation and say to me, “Oh, Scotland would still be better off not making its own decisions”, I would suggest that they are not reading or thinking about the information, and they are certainly not thinking about their constituents.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that, irrespective of whether Scotland continues in EU programmes, devolved areas such as the Erasmus programme should be a matter for the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament and not for the UK Government?

Michael Russell: There is absolutely no doubt that the decision on which programmes we participate in should be one for us, and that resources to allow our participation should be part of the discussions on how we move forward financially. There have been no such discussions. I have seen nothing from the UK Government on how it intends to support the so-called shared prosperity fund, for example. Of course such decisions should be for us to make.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the statement.

Scottish Rate Resolution

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-21090, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on the Scottish rate resolution.

14:39

The Minister for Public Finance and Migration (Ben Macpherson): Today, the Scottish Parliament votes to set all rates and bands for Scottish income tax. This is our opportunity—together—to use the powers of the Parliament to continue our progressive approach to income tax. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance has written to the Presiding Officer with regard to the procedural connection between this rate resolution debate and the Budget (Scotland) Bill, under rule 9.16.7 of the parliamentary standing orders. The Parliament must pass the Scottish rate resolution before it considers stage 3 of the Budget (Scotland) Bill.

I am asking the Parliament to set income tax rates, which the Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasts will raise more than £12 billion in 2020-21. That revenue will support the best outcomes for the people of Scotland and will continue to deliver the fairest tax system in the United Kingdom at a time when Brexit is, and will remain, the biggest risk to the Scottish economy.

In contrast to Brexit, our proposal for the Scottish income tax offers certainty to Scottish taxpayers. We propose no changes to the existing rates in our income tax plans for 2020-21 as we continue to deliver the settled structure that we committed to for the duration of this parliamentary session. We propose to raise the starter and intermediate rate bands by inflation, as we did in 2019-20, and to freeze the higher and top-rate thresholds. The SFC forecasts that our decision to freeze the higher-rate threshold again in 2020-21 will raise £51 million next year. However, our decisions mean that, on their current income, no Scottish taxpayer will pay more in 2020-21 than they are paying in 2019-20.

Decisions on the personal allowance rate remain reserved to Westminster. For the purposes of modelling, the SFC has assumed that the UK Government will maintain its policy of freezing the personal allowance threshold at £12,500. However, that outcome is far from certain and demonstrates once more the impact on Scotland's finances of a delayed UK Government budget—a budget that was delayed by choice, not necessity.

Our fairer and more progressive income tax policy ensures that 56 per cent of all Scottish taxpayers will pay less income tax than they would if they lived elsewhere in the UK in 2020-21. Our

income tax proposals continue to deliver on the four key policy tests that the Scottish Government introduced in 2017. The first is to protect the lowest-paid taxpayers; the second is to accrete a more progressive arrangement; the third is to raise additional revenue to maintain and promote Scottish public services; and the fourth—taken in conjunction with our spending plans—is to support the Scottish economy.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On the issue of raising revenue, will the minister reflect on the scrutiny that the Scottish Parliament information centre has provided, which indicates that the £650 million extra that is being raised by the Scottish Government's tax changes will deliver a net benefit of only £46 million to the Scottish economy? Does that not suggest that the Scottish Government needs to rethink its approach?

Ben Macpherson: I point out to Murdo Fraser that, as he mentioned, without our approach there would be £46 million less to spend on key public services such as health, education, justice and local government, all of which are important for the delivery of public services on the ground and meet some of the requests that the Scottish Conservatives made in the budget process.

I am asking the Scottish Parliament to agree to the motion on the Scottish rate resolution, which, for the 2020-21 tax year, will raise funds for the Scottish budget to deliver the widest range of free-to-access public services in the UK. Those initiatives, such as concessionary travel for older and disabled persons as well as—following our budget deal with the Scottish Greens—for under-19s, will promote inclusion and provide support. Importantly, the funds will also help us to progress towards our ambitious targets on addressing child poverty through initiatives such as the Scottish child payment.

Tax is not set in isolation: we have guaranteed a 3 per cent basic pay increase for all public sector workers who earn up to £80,000. That means that, as a result of our income tax and pay policy choices for 2020-21, a senior nurse will be around £890 better off and a teacher will be around £950 better off in 2020-21 compared to this year.

Under the Scottish Government's proposals, there will be no increase in the tax divergence relative to the rest of the UK as long as the UK Government sticks to the commitments that it made in its 2018 budget. In 2018, the UK Government committed to freezing the higher-rate tax threshold in the rest of the UK at £50,000 in 2020-21. The Scottish Conservatives asked us not to create more divergence, and our proposals will ensure that. Divergence will increase only if the Conservative UK Government decides to deliver a tax cut for higher earners once again. What is more, regardless of what the UK Government

does, the benefits of having access to the wider set of free public services in Scotland outweigh any income tax differential with the rest of the UK.

Under the plans that we are putting before the Parliament today, Scotland will continue to be the lowest-taxed part of the UK for the majority of income tax payers for the third consecutive year. We have continued to deliver a Scottish tax system that offers convenience, fairness, efficiency and certainty for Scottish taxpayers and for the Scottish people. Our decisions on taxation have resulted in a more progressive tax system that protects low and middle-income taxpayers while raising additional revenue to invest in public services and Scotland's economy.

I present a motion on a Scottish rate resolution that will deliver a fair and progressive tax system and raise £12 billion for the Scottish budget to protect and enhance our vital public services and support our economy—that is £12 billion towards increasing wellbeing, tackling climate change, reducing child poverty and increasing sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of section 11A of the Income Tax Act 2007 (which provides for income tax to be charged at Scottish rates on certain non-savings and non-dividend income of a Scottish taxpayer), the Scottish rates and limits for the tax year 2020-21 are as follows—

(a) a starter rate of 19%, charged on income up to a limit of £2,085,

(b) the Scottish basic rate is 20%, charged on income above £2,085 and up to a limit of £12,658,

(c) an intermediate rate of 21%, charged on income above £12,658 and up to a limit of £30,930,

(d) a higher rate of 41%, charged on income above £30,930 and up to a limit of £150,000, and

(e) a top rate of 46%, charged on income above £150,000.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a little time in hand for interventions across the afternoon, so I will allow a little flexibility with speeches.

14:47

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome Ben Macpherson to his new role as the Minister for Public Finance and Migration. In much the same way as previous discussions between myself and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance have been conducted, he and I have had many constructive conversations since our respective election to the Scottish Parliament in 2016, and I look forward to continuing that positive dialogue with him.

I welcome the opportunity to open the debate for the Scottish Conservatives, but I regret that, yet again, we are faced with a Scottish rate resolution that continues to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom. I remain disappointed that, despite the talks that my party had with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, our request that the Government guarantee no further divergence on tax with the rest of the UK should the UK Government make any changes in its budget next week was ignored.

Although many hard-working people across Scotland will, no doubt, be relieved that the tax-hiking, levy-raising tendencies of this Government have been silenced for this year at least, the freezing of the higher and top-rate thresholds will mean—as has been said by one analyst—that, at a time when earnings growth is over 2 per cent, more people in Scotland will be sucked into paying more tax. Many will rightly ask why that has happened in the first place, given the cast-iron promise of the Scottish National Party in its 2016 manifesto, in which it said:

“We will freeze the Basic Rate of Income Tax throughout the next Parliament to protect those on low and middle incomes”.

As my colleague Murdo Fraser pointed out in the debate on the Scottish rate resolution last year, the First Minister told the Parliament in 2017:

“I have been very clear that the Government will not increase income tax rates”.—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2017; c 10.]

That is not true; it is another promise broken.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): On the subject of keeping promises, does the member accept that the chancellor promised to freeze the higher-rate threshold next year? If there is to be any more divergence, it is because he has broken his promise, not because of any decisions that this Government has made.

Donald Cameron: I do not accept that, but it is perfectly possible for the UK Government to make changes next week. All that we sought from the Scottish Government in our negotiations was a commitment to match any changes, should they happen.

However, there is a deeper problem. One year on from the Scottish National Party's big shake-up of the Scottish tax system, we now know that that grand idea has not quite paid off, because, despite crowing about hiking up taxes for middle earners, it turns out that the Scottish Government has not raised anywhere near the amount that it wanted to in order to ensure that the shake-up was worth while. According to SPICe,

“these higher tax revenues are forecast to be almost entirely offset by the deduction to the Scottish budget via the block grant adjustment.”

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Donald Cameron: No. I am keen to make some progress.

SPICe cites the Scottish Fiscal Commission's forecast, which estimates that the £650 million differential will generate only £46 million more than is deducted by the block grant adjustments. SPICe goes on to say:

“For around half of Scottish taxpayers, income tax devolution has meant higher tax bills, but no additional spending power for the Scottish Budget.”

It is running to stand still, in other words. I would not dare to suggest that £46 million is not, in and of itself, a considerable sum of money, but it amounts to less than a fifth of 1 per cent of the total Scottish budget. I ask the minister and the Government to reflect on that.

There lies another, much starker, peril for the Government in the near future—namely budget reconciliations for income tax receipts. The Scottish Fiscal Commission notes in its February forecast:

“Based on these forecasts the reconciliation for 2018-19 income tax, to be applied to the Scottish Budget in 2021-22, would be -£555 million.”

In other words, the SNP faces a black hole of over half a billion pounds in next year's budget. The total amount of money to be found this year, next year and the year after is close to £1 billion. Of course, this year, for the very first time, the Scottish Government is using its resource borrowing powers to address that. However, given that the Government is already maxing out the country's credit card when it comes to capital borrowing by continuing to borrow the maximum amount allowed of £450 million per year, it would be remiss not to mention the potential severe implications for the next few years.

As others have noted—the point was made by Bruce Crawford last week—that makes budget management between years all the more important. SPICe states:

“Based on the information we have to date, and the evidence that the balance of the reserve has been falling in recent years, it would seem from these plans that the Scottish Government is not building up large reserves to mitigate the large expected income tax reconciliations in 2020-21 and 2021-22.”

That is deeply worrying, and I hope that the minister and the cabinet secretary will address that as a matter of urgency.

Despite that gloomy picture, there is some light at the end of the tunnel. The UK Government's spending plans will see the Scottish Government's block grant increase by nearly £1.6 billion in real terms compared to last year. That figure is

acknowledged in the draft budget by the Scottish Government, whose estimate of Barnett consequential is almost £500 million more than the Treasury's own estimate. Thanks to the UK Government, a typical taxpayer in Scotland is now £1,205 better off than they were in 2010 due to the cumulative changes to the personal allowance, among other things. That is because, unlike the Scottish Government, we know that taxpayers are best placed to decide how their money is spent, not the SNP. It is undeniably clear that the UK Government has been able to keep more money in people's pockets and still invest record amounts in our public services, which Scotland plainly benefits from.

Presiding Officer, I began by talking about how people in Scotland are paying more tax. I will end by stating that that is not just about income tax; it is also about council tax. As a result of failing to find the £117 million of capital investment sought by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, many councils are now regretfully having to implement council tax rises of almost 5 per cent—another promise broken.

In the same vein as last year, we cannot support the rate resolution, because our reasonable request to guarantee no further tax divergence from the rest of the UK has been rejected out of hand. For those reasons, I urge Parliament to oppose the motion.

14:54

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, welcome Ben Macpherson to his new role.

Last year, the SNP introduced a rate resolution that gave high earners a tax cut but increased tax for some lower earners. This year, instead of righting that wrong, the Government has simply continued it.

From the foundation of this Parliament, we had tax-raising powers, but, in the first parliamentary sessions, those powers were modest and never used. That was as much due to high investment by the Labour Government at Westminster as it was due to the financial management of the Labour-led Scottish Executive. The level of child poverty was falling and the level of educational attainment was rising—those were the days. It all ground to a halt with this incompetent SNP Government, which, between 2007 and 2011, got its budget through on Tory votes. That tells us all that we need to know about SNP fiscal policies.

The SNP Government never intended to use its tax-raising powers and handed back the ability to use them. We now have an SNP Government that demands independence but is much too timid to tax the rich. Last year, it cut taxes for the better-off when it should have increased the top rate to 50p.

This year, again, it is too timid to do that. Children are growing up in poverty and the Scottish Government is too timid to ask the rich for a few extra pence to prevent that. So much for the brave new world.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
rose—

John Mason rose—

Rhoda Grant: The Government calls for independence but forgets the deficit. It forgets that an economy is built not on the generosity of one or two billionaires but on all citizens having a job and earning money to pay taxes. Instead, it has ushered in policies that have put tens of thousands of public servants out of work. In any other industry, partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—services would have been set up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Tom Arthur—no, John Mason.

John Mason: I think that we stood up at the same time.

Does Rhoda Grant accept that, although we can have slightly higher income tax rates than those in England, if we go too far ahead, there is the danger of behavioural change?

Rhoda Grant: I do not believe that there would be behavioural change unless we were to change taxes dramatically. The change that would happen is that we would have money to invest in the services that we very much need, which is what Scottish Labour is calling for.

The only way to reduce a deficit is to build the economy. The SNP Government often says that it does not have the levers to do that, but of course it does—indeed, it has used them to make us worse off. If it was to use the levers to bring down the deficit and build the economy, we might make some progress.

The SNP Government depends on an unpopular Tory Government making the negative argument for independence instead of using the powers that it has to make a positive one. It uses the politics of grudge and grievance rather than the politics of investment and growth. How could anyone trust the Scottish Government to negotiate independence? It negotiated a fiscal framework that leaves us £200 million worse off this year and creates a £1 billion black hole over the next three years.

Under this Government, the only thing that is growing is poverty. Educational standards are falling and the national health service is one long waiting list.

Our councils are no longer able to provide lifeline services for our communities. Can anyone

remember the historic concordat, which was heralded in a new relationship of mutual respect between Government and councils? Councils must rue the day that they fell for that one. The concordat now means that they are able to provide statutory services only, and they struggle to do even that. If that was not bad enough, council taxes are also set in Edinburgh by the Scottish Government.

Let me quote Jim Hunter's comments on last year's budget, which still hold true today. He said:

"Ministers and MSPs can keep councils on the tightest of tight reins—and, when services in consequence get slashed, they can arrange for councillors to get the blame. Perhaps, then, the time has come for councillors to quit council chambers, lock the doors and mail the keys to Holyrood. 'Since you guys insist on calling all the shots,' their covering notes could say, 'it's high time you carried the can.'"

This year's rate resolution heaps more misery on our councils, which are already failing to provide public services. It provides no hope for improvement; it provides only cuts on cuts. It is a political choice. This Government talks left-of-centre politics but, in practice, it is a right-wing, tax-cutting and service-cutting Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Patrick Harvie to open for the Greens. There is a little time in hand, Mr Harvie.

14:59

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Being the greatest fan of the Government's rate resolution and attempting to demolish it altogether, as Rhoda Grant has done, are both extreme positions, and neither is genuinely honest. There have been very important progressive changes to devolved income tax, but we could and should go further.

We are all aware that the Scotland Act 2016 was drafted so incompetently that, if the Scottish Parliament does not pass a rate resolution, the result will be nothing less than a catastrophe for public services. On that basis, the Greens will abstain, as we did last year, which will allow the rate resolution to pass, but not without comment.

My comments will be based on the recent paper from the Fraser of Allander institute on the impact of the Scottish Government's tax changes on household incomes. The paper integrates what we know about income tax changes that have been made by UK and Scottish Governments with what we know about what is happening through other fiscal measures, such as those relating to local taxation and social security.

The paper shows clearly that the UK changes to the personal allowance—with the notion of constantly increasing the personal allowance—are deeply regressive steps. The income of the five

deciles of the population with the highest income is boosted by a larger percentage than is the case for the lowest-income deciles. The Resolution Foundation has shown that three quarters of the cost to the Exchequer of the increase to the personal allowance goes to the highest-income half of all households. A third goes to the richest 20 per cent but, of course, the poorest in our society gain nothing at all—not a single penny—from the increase in the personal allowance, because their incomes are already below the threshold.

In the 2016 election, the Greens alone proposed moving to the five-band system—a progressive tax change—and I am pleased that the Scottish Government decided to change its position. I welcome it when the Government breaks a bad promise, and maybe that is what it did. The Greens' position in 2016 has, broadly speaking, been implemented, and that is the single element that makes the overall income tax changes progressive. The change saves relatively little for low-income households, but it means that high-income households pay more. The effect of the changes to rates and bands combined with the changes to the personal allowance has been that we have overcome the injustice that would have resulted from the UK Government changes, with a greater benefit flowing to the wealthy than to the rest of the population.

We have to look at how the system integrates with local taxation changes. Again, if there had been only the above-inflation increase, that would have hit the lowest-income households in Scotland the hardest, but there were also changes to bands E to H. The overall result of combining those effects is that everyone pays a little more council tax, but high-income households tend to pay more.

The combined effect of the income tax changes and the local council tax changes is that high-income households pay more on average and low-income households are protected. Some are better off, but the first five or six income deciles are protected from the overall effects of the tax changes. The single biggest element that achieves that progressive effect is the move to a five-band system of income tax in Scotland.

I do not think that that change is enough to alleviate poverty and inequality. Unlike some, I say that redistributing wealth should be one of our objectives when we set taxation and other policies in our economy. Income tax on its own will probably never be a powerful tool for improving the financial situation of the lowest-income households, because those households already pay very little income tax. If we want to go further and to achieve more, we have to look at, for example, council tax reform.

I encourage all political parties—including the SNP—to show greater imagination, creativity, and boldness in the council tax talks than we have seen today, because unless we redress the fundamentally regressive aspect of council tax in our tax system, whatever income tax policy we pass during our annual rate resolution debates will be only mitigation.

Once we have looked at income tax and council tax, we need to think about how they integrate with benefits through social security and other services. We see a positive impact from changes that have already been made and there will be more to come with the Scottish child payment—which is yet to come into force—which will help more. However, as we discussed at portfolio question time a few minutes ago, it is still linked to UK benefits and their persistent problems of administration and low take-up. As such, all political parties in this chamber have a responsibility not only to say whether we would go further as we pass a rate resolution today but, as we develop manifestos over the coming year, to put forward more policies that will cut housing and public transport costs, and that will create more benefits for people who are at the lower end of the income scale. No income tax rate resolution on its own will be able to achieve that. If we want genuine redistribution, we need all those levers to be used to maximum effect.

15:06

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I agree with Patrick Harvie about the council tax reforms. The cross-party group is working on those proposals just now, and I hope that the Government steps up and comes forward with proposals to end the council tax. I think that we are all committed to that, and I hope that it is seen to fruition. We have tried many times in the past, and now is the opportunity to do it. There is a will, and we need to find the way.

This is an opportunity to test the various parties' positions on tax as well as to decide whether we agree with the rate resolution. At the election in 2016, the Liberal Democrats were up front. We said that we should have what we described as a "modest penny" on income tax to invest in education. We were very clear with people that that was what they would get if they voted for us, and that is what we have argued for in various budgets in this Parliament. We were pleased that the Scottish Government changed its approach; as Patrick Harvie reminded us, it did not make that commitment in its manifesto at the previous election. Therefore, it is, I suppose, a kind of broken promise. I am pleased that it was revoked, but the Government needs to be careful going forward.

If there is predictability about tax, so that people know exactly where we are planning to go over the next four or five years, an element of trust is developed and, therefore, the behavioural change that could come with unrelenting tax changes does not come to fruition. That is where the Government has, potentially, gone wrong. Not only has it increased income tax—which we were sympathetic to—it has increased council tax and other taxes. Although there has not been the behavioural change that some predicted, there needs to be careful nurturing to make sure that such change does not happen.

However, we should, at this moment, reflect on the Conservatives' position on tax, because we have seen a screeching U-turn—the smell of burning rubber is still wafting around the chamber. They made dire predictions—repeatedly and relentlessly—that we would see massive behavioural change as a result of those income tax changes. They said that there would be cataclysmic events, a massive reduction in the tax take and a big economic shock, and that we would have an exodus south of the border, with all these workers leaving Scotland—that is what they said would happen. However, the reality is completely different, and we know why—those changes have not happened.

Murdo Fraser: I wonder whether Mr Rennie lives in a parallel universe to the rest of us. If he had read the SPICe briefing on the budget, he would know that the £650 million of additional taxation that was raised by the Scottish Government's income tax changes has delivered exactly £46 million.

Willie Rennie: If the Conservatives had their way on this, that would go even deeper, because they are proposing a tax cut on top of that, so we would not be able to compensate for those measures. Donald Cameron suggested that we will have to deal with the reconciliations in future years by having more tax cuts on top of that, but that would make the situation even worse. The argument does not stack up.

The Conservatives' predictions were wrong, and that is why, in the budget negotiations, they did not make any proposals to cut the tax. They know that the price for public services would be heavy, with cuts that were even deeper than those that we have already seen to local government. That is why the Conservatives did not have the guts to propose any tax changes in the budget negotiations. Their predictions of cataclysmic events never came to fruition and they have been found out. Perhaps they will take a different approach to tax as we progress.

It is also worth reiterating our concerns about the capital overspends on certain projects across Scotland—the sick kids hospital, the ferries

project, the Aberdeen western peripheral route, the Aberdeen hospitals and the Our Power energy company, with the £10 million loan. Those overspends are all deeply regrettable. I am sure that the cabinet secretary regrets them and hopes that she can get control of the projects and that her colleagues in the Cabinet will be a bit more responsible in their planning of such projects in future.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

However, it is difficult to ask people to pay tax when the Government is so irresponsible with those massive projects. It is costing us hundreds of millions of pounds. Taxpayers' trust needs to be repaired if we are to ensure that progressive tax changes will be made in future. However, with this Government's reckless approach to the public finances, I fear that that might not be possible.

Let us get control of the capital projects. Let us put an end to the arguments from the Conservatives that progressive tax changes result in cataclysmic events and behavioural change such as an exodus down south. Let us also make sure that, if parties propose to make tax changes, they put them in their election manifestos and do exactly what they said they would do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We move to the open debate. I ask for speeches of four minutes, please. We have a little time in hand to allow for interventions.

15:12

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I always enjoy a debate on tax. My first point is that income tax is a good thing. It has a lot of fairness about it, being linked to the ability to pay, and it is simple for employees as their employers generally deduct it under the pay-as-you-earn system before paying their wages, so many people do not have to be proactive in filling in forms and tax returns. At the same time, as Patrick Harvie said, it cannot be the only tax, as it takes no account of property or wealth.

Members who were at time for reflection yesterday will have heard James Faddes from Bishopbriggs emphasise that people with addiction and related criminal pasts can and do change, giving himself as an example. One of the folk that he mentioned said that one of their aims in life was to pay tax. Presumably, that was because, if that happened, they would be earning a proper wage and would have turned their life around from where it had been and be contributing once again as a full member of society.

That reminds us that paying income tax is a privilege, because it means that one is earning a wage, which many in the world are not, and contributing to wider society. It is also a duty, because we cannot have decent public services if we do not pay a decent amount of tax. Even the Conservatives say that they want to have quality public services, but they undermine their position by saying that they want lower taxes.

I support the motion. As Patrick Harvie reminded us, it was thanks to the Greens that we moved to a system with five rates, which has helped the tax to become more progressive. However, the rates are still grouped at 19, 20 and 21 per cent, and 41 and 46 per cent. In the longer term, I would like to have a system where the five rates were something like 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 per cent. That would seem to be a fairer and more progressive system with less-dramatic jumps between the stages.

On the subject of being more progressive, there is a strong argument for saying that national insurance is also a form of income tax. We could greatly simplify the UK system by combining them. National insurance is hardly progressive at all; it is used by Westminster Governments of different persuasions to make hidden changes. The rate for the highest earners falls from 12 per cent to 2 per cent—the opposite of income tax.

I would certainly like Scotland to have full control of both income tax and national insurance, creating a much simpler system. The combined marginal rates at the moment are 31, 32 and 33 per cent, then up to 53 per cent, then falling back to 43 per cent, with 48 per cent for top earners. It is not a wide spread. While I am on the subject, corporation tax is also a form of income tax, but for companies. There is a strong argument for corporation tax and income tax being at similar rates and corporation tax being devolved as well; those would reduce the opportunity for tax avoidance by people incorporating. I welcome the work by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to clamp down on situations where someone is an employee but attempts have been made to say that they are not. Apart from anything else, employment generally gives better rights and protections than self-employment or incorporation.

My final point is that we remain in a situation in which we set income tax rates not knowing what the UK rates will be. As long as we have devolution, we should focus on variations away from the UK rates; it is inevitable that those variations will be limited because of the risk of behavioural change. However, it is impossible for us to do that properly this year as long as we do not know what Westminster income tax rates will be. I congratulate Kate Forbes and the Scottish Government on setting income tax rates while

Westminster messes us around and keeps us in the dark. I look forward to debating the budget further tomorrow.

15:16

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I note my entry in the register of members' interests as a taxpayer.

As a representative from north-east Scotland, I would misrepresent my constituents if I did not point out how damaging the disproportionate increases in council tax, business rates and income tax have been on our local economy in recent years. It is shameful that other constituency MSPs for the north-east—all SNP—are supporting this budget, bringing further burdens to local shop owners, teachers, firefighters, doctors, nurses, social workers and pretty much everyone living in the north-east. They are not the big earners that the SNP likes to characterise in its annual attack on taxpayers. They are hard-working people who deserve better.

Kate Forbes: I would like to understand exactly what Alexander Burnett has said, in light of the fact that our headline poundage rate for business rates and our council tax, on average, are lower than those in the rest of the UK. On income tax, can he provide me with any evidence to demonstrate that anyone has made a conscious decision to live elsewhere in the UK rather than Scotland because of our decisions on income tax?

Alexander Burnett: My point is that the north-east has been hit disproportionately. The buoyant oil industry years have left us with high business rates and high costs of living, whereas wages and income have dropped, leaving us hit disproportionately. Business owners and investors cannot see why they pay more than colleagues in England. If the SNP Government continues to penalise Scottish businesses for doing well, and additionally penalises its workers, we will see a brain drain that will deter investment and growth. Scots should not be penalised for wanting to create business and contribute to their local economy.

Patrick Harvie: I recognise that Alexander Burnett and I come from different political perspectives; he calls tax penalising and I call it a contribution to society. Does he accept that, under Scotland's income tax position, only the highest-earning decile—the highest-earning one in 10 people—pay 1.2 per cent more of their income? Anyone who earns lower than that pays a fraction of a per cent more. That change is very modest.

Alexander Burnett: Whatever our differing political positions on the reasons for taxation, one we should agree on is that the purpose of taxation is to raise money to pay for the public services that

we all want. If rates are put up and are disproportionately high and the total tax take goes down, the money that we have to spend on public services will also go down.

Therefore, the SNP needs to listen to the Scottish Conservatives' sensible, growth-focused budget requests and reduce the large business supplement to the same rate that is payable in the rest of the UK. The SNP cannot say that it is acting for the Scottish electorate; in 2016, nearly 65 per cent of the electorate voted for parties that promised not to raise taxes, yet the SNP Government hiked them up, with anyone earning over £27,243 paying more in tax than they would in the rest of the UK.

I have had many of my constituents contact me to ask why they are seeing their taxes rise so significantly yet receiving nothing in return. Why are they seeing local services deteriorate? Why are they seeing vital infrastructure literally crumble before their eyes?

The SNP has no excuse. Its block grant from the UK Government has increased by more than £1.5 billion this year, yet we find ourselves with local authorities across the country being forced to increase council tax by nearly 5 per cent just to stay afloat. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities states that local government funding as a whole has been cut by £200 million in real terms, which is putting local councils into a corner, slashing services yet increasing their rates.

On top of that, new figures show that, under the SNP, local authority debt has risen by almost 15 per cent in just five years, to an eye-watering total of more than £18 billion—yes, £18 billion. It is therefore no surprise that a recent report found that 62 bridges are due to be closed across Aberdeenshire by 2030, which will see hundreds of constituents cut off from their local communities and facing lengthy detours. Councils across Scotland are making drastic cuts due to the SNP's imposed reductions on capital budgets, forcing local authorities to draw down their reserves. Essential maintenance is now being cut, which will only result in greater costs down the line.

They say that a stitch in time saves nine, but the only people being stitched up here are the Scottish taxpayers. The SNP Government should hang its head in shame because it has nobody to blame for those figures but itself. It has forced those difficult spending decisions on to local authorities while its own budget has been increasing. It has absolved itself from the responsibility of governing and that will not be forgotten in May next year. Scotland deserves better.

15:22

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. As it is my first opportunity to do so in the chamber, I congratulate Kate Forbes and Ben Macpherson and welcome them to their new positions.

We have a responsibility in this Parliament, as much as we come from different political traditions—and never is that more obvious than when we discuss tax—to be careful about the language that we use. Initially, I would like to look at some of the rhetoric from the Conservative Party. One of the terms that is used is “middle-income earner”. We sometimes see that term being used on the front page of tabloid newspapers, with the suggestion that a middle-income earner is someone who is on £40,000 or £50,000 and that the Government has some sort of oppressive Denis Healey-style set of policies that will precipitate a brain drain and leave Scotland crippled. That is the narrative, but we all know that it is nonsense.

We stand up and we engage in this pantomime but we know that it is not true, so let us try to establish some facts. The median income in Scotland is £25,200. In fact, 75 per cent of taxpayers in Scotland earn less than £37,000. Someone who is earning £40,000 in Scotland is paying about £2.45 more a week in tax than someone earning that in the rest of the UK. That is how much more a schoolteacher in Scotland who is earning £42,000, for example, is paying a week. However, unlike a schoolteacher in England, they are not sitting with almost £28,000 of tuition fee debt. It is important to get beyond this silly rhetoric. We can have a debate about taxation, its value, how it interacts with economic growth and what the objectives are—although that is somewhat difficult, given the limited powers that we have—but let us just be reasonable.

I appreciate that there was a bit of nostalgia in Rhoda Grant’s speech, in which she told us how wonderful things were when Labour was in government. She failed to admit to Labour’s light-touch regulation in the City of London and the Labour policies that led to the 2008 global crash, which precipitated a decade of austerity.

Rhoda Grant: I cannot help but be slightly amused that the member blames a Labour Government for a global crash. Were we so powerful? Maybe that is why poverty was falling.

Tom Arthur: I draw the member’s attention to a comment by her former party leader, Johann Lamont, who described London as a city state and a global financial centre. In many respects, London was at the centre of the global crash under Labour Government light-touch regulation. I

am not blaming Labour in isolation; that would be silly. I am just saying that Labour had a part in it. Of course, it was Alistair Darling who said that there would have to be “tougher and deeper” austerity than there was under Margaret Thatcher.

The SNP Government had been in power for barely a year when the financial crash happened. That is the reality that we have had to experience and deal with. Rhoda Grant’s comments about the SNP Government being a right-wing Government were ridiculous. I appreciate that the SNP might not be as left wing as the Labour Party and particularly acolytes of Jeremy Corbyn would like it to be, but to suggest that we have a right-wing Government is ridiculous. We need to up our game and improve our rhetoric.

This is a Parliament of minorities. In the history of devolution, we have had five years in which one party had a majority. Other than that, it has been for members of the Parliament to work together to set budgets. We have to raise our game. We have a responsibility to 5.4 million people and we have oversight of a budget that is in excess of £40 billion, yet we are engaging in this daft, puerile rhetoric and deliberately misleading people in the way in which we use terms such as “middle-income earner” and “right-wing Government”. We have to take a slightly more mature approach.

I will make this my final point, Presiding Officer, because I realise that time is against me. On the points that Donald Cameron and Murdo Fraser made about the income tax take, the fiscal framework is what we have and what we must deal with, but it is not sustainable in the long term. We are in a perverse situation whereby we can raise £650 million in additional revenue via income tax but have only £46 million of that available for public spending. The reason for that is not a decline in Scottish economic performance relative to the rest of the UK as a result of our policy; the reason is that we cannot grow our working-age population. That underscores the need to grow our working population through migration. It is excellent that we now have a Minister for Public Finance and Migration, because migration is critical.

15:27

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the new minister to his position. In his opening speech, the minister said that no Scottish taxpayer will pay more. I take issue with that, because we all know that it is not the full story. The SNP Government could use its income tax powers to make up the gap in the budget, but its lack of ambition means that it is tinkering around the edges and simply running to stand still.

The bands in the motion are not fair. Someone who earns £44,000 will pay tax at the same rate as someone who earns £100,000. How can that be fair? And are we really meant to celebrate the fact that people who earn less than £24,000 will pay 36p a year less at a time when the SNP is outsourcing its difficult decisions to councils, which are being forced to raise council tax to offset SNP cuts, and people on the lowest incomes will see their council tax rise?

I welcome the campaign that Citizens Advice Scotland is running this week to raise awareness of council tax discounts and exemptions. CAS has produced a straightforward online tool to help people to find out whether they are entitled to a reduction. We must ensure that everyone who is entitled to a reduction receives it, because statistics that were published this week show a further fall in people claiming the exemptions to which they are entitled. We need action.

The reduction in people claiming council tax exemptions is happening against a backdrop of £7 million of council tax debt in Scotland. Council tax debt is the leading form of personal debt, and the average debt is about £3,000, which is three times the average council tax bill.

There is therefore not much to celebrate in this debate. The SNP, instead of using the levers at its disposal to raise the money that our society needs from the people who can most afford to contribute, is relying on a tax that it knows is regressive. I share the disappointment of Willie Rennie and Patrick Harvie at the lack of progress of the cross-party working group on abolishing the council tax. We need to make faster progress, because council tax is regressive. It takes little note of a person's ability to pay and it relies on a 30-year-old valuation of the property in which the person happens to live.

After 13 years of underinvestment in local government by the SNP, councils have little choice but to raise the council tax and increase charges. The SNP Government would like us to celebrate the tax resolution that is in front of us, but the reality is that people on low and middle incomes will be paying more council tax and increased charges, whether those are for music tuition or collection of their garden waste.

There is little to celebrate today. The motion is a missed opportunity—it is smoke and mirrors. It does not address the fundamental opportunities that it could have addressed and is nothing to celebrate.

15:30

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I welcome the fact that by setting this year's Scottish rate resolution we will ensure that

Scotland remains the lowest-taxed part of the UK for the majority of income tax payers for the third consecutive year. To be clear, no Scottish taxpayer will pay more income tax in 2020-21 than they did in 2019-20, and 56 per cent of them will pay less than they would pay if they lived elsewhere in the UK. Those statistics were confirmed by the Tory Secretary of State for Scotland, Alister Jack, in an answer at Scottish questions at Westminster a couple of weeks ago.

To put that in context, I note that a police officer who is at the start of their career in Scotland not only earns more than their English counterparts, but will pay less income tax. Newly qualified nurses in Scotland on band 5 earnings will be the highest paid in the UK and will pay less income tax.

Over the past few years, we have introduced a more progressive income tax system than exists elsewhere in the UK.

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

Gordon MacDonald: No. I have only four minutes.

However, we could do a lot more if the setting of personal allowances, national insurance rates and income tax levels on dividends and savings were devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

We ask people who can afford it, such as MSPs, to pay more. That helps us to deliver a wider and better-funded range of free-to-access public services than is available elsewhere in the UK. One recognisable example is prescription charges. South of the border, they will rise to £9.15 per item from April. That is, in effect, a Tory tax on poor health that will affect millions of people, while in Scotland we have chosen to make sure that medication is free for all.

By passing the rate resolution on income tax today, we can pass the budget at stage 3 tomorrow, thereby protecting the £589 million increase for local government and the extra £60 million for Police Scotland, and ensuring that free bus travel for young people will be delivered.

The Scottish budget will also benefit most families across Scotland. First, our council tax rates are substantially lower than rates south of the border. The average rate for a band D property in England is currently £1,750. In Scotland, the average cost for the same band is £1,251. Here in Edinburgh, the rate for a band D property is £1,277, which would be a saving of £473 per household from the English average. The combined council tax and income tax savings will ensure that, for the majority of people in Scotland, the claim that Scotland is the highest-taxed part of

the UK, which is made by other parties in Parliament, is utter nonsense.

Secondly, the Scottish Government's proposal to introduce by Christmas a £10 per week Scottish child payment for low-income families with children under six will help to lift 30,000 children out of poverty. That is only the beginning. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has forecast that by the time that it is fully rolled out in 2023-24, at least 280,000 children will receive the Scottish child payment. When the benefit was first discussed, churches, trade unions, poverty academics and charities agreed that a £5 per week payment would make a huge difference: the Scottish Government has doubled that to £10. I hope that the other parties will support that move.

Scotland is taking the right steps to provide a more progressive tax system, but let us not forget that we could do even more if we had had certainty about the settlement from Westminster in advance of setting our budget. I hope that the Tory UK Government will see sense, and will in future years set its budget at a more appropriate time in order that the Scottish Government can continue to provide, with certainty, the support and services that the people of Scotland need.

15:35

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In the budget statement, the cabinet secretary claimed that the SNP has introduced

"the most progressive, fair and balanced income tax system in the UK"—[*Official Report*, 6 February 2020; c 69.]

and that the SNP's tax policies will help to promote wellbeing in Scotland. Both those claims are simply untrue. With respect to income tax, according to the Scottish Parliament information centre, Scottish taxpayers will this year pay £650 million more in income tax than their counterparts elsewhere in the UK, and everyone who earns more than £27,000 will pay more income tax. Today's Scottish tax resolution will entrench that tax gap and tax burden.

Those who supposedly pay less income tax in Scotland—whom the SNP use as the basis for saying that its system is fair—pay 50p a week less. That amount has already been more than wiped out by increases to council tax under the SNP. That SNP income tax policy actually costs more to administer than it does to provide that saving of 50p a week.

The reality is that the SNP has cynically manipulated the tax system in Scotland for the sake of a cheap political line. It is a line that the cabinet secretary and others, including Gordon MacDonald, repeat ad nauseam to show that the majority of taxpayers in Scotland pay less tax, when the reality is that, overall, Scottish tax payers

are paying £650 million more a year than their counterparts in the rest of the UK.

I will give way to the cabinet secretary, because I would like her to explain why that is the case, as it is, according to SPICe.

Kate Forbes: I have a very simple question. When we take into account the behavioural impacts of adopting Conservative tax policies, there would be something to the tune of £460 million less available to spend. What would Dean Lockhart cut?

Dean Lockhart: According to the Fraser of Allander institute, there would be no need for increased tax in Scotland if the economy was growing faster than it is right now. The cabinet secretary keeps asking us what we would cut, or what tax would we raise, but the simple answer is that we would grow the economy, which the cabinet secretary is incapable of doing.

The truly remarkable fact is that, despite £650 million-worth of higher taxes having been imposed by the SNP, according to the Fraser of Allander institute virtually no extra money is being raised to spend on public services. The institute says that higher tax in Scotland will be cancelled out by lower wage growth. Those are not my words; they are the words of the Fraser of Allander institute.

The hard-working people of Scotland will pay more tax and see a reduction in their take-home pay—not to fund extra public spending, but to subsidise the economic failures of the SNP. That is why one of our budget red lines was that there should be no further increase in the income tax gap between Scotland and the rest of the UK. That is not only because higher tax is bad for the economy—the Scottish economy continues to grow at less than half the rate of the rest of the UK, which was raised by Willie Rennie, and the SFC's forecast is that that will be the case for the next four years—but because it is unfair and regressive that the people of Scotland are be paying more just to subsidise cost overruns on ferries, hospitals and roads under the SNP.

I will turn to the other so-called policy objective that underlies the budget and the SNP's tax policy: that is, the promotion of wellbeing, which was mentioned by the minister in his opening remarks. Last month, Nicola Sturgeon announced that

"The goal and objective of all economic policy should be ... wellbeing",

which is

"at the very heart of our economic strategy."

Unfortunately, just hours after she made that statement, it was revealed that Scotland's ranking in the international wellbeing tables had suffered the biggest-ever decline of any country, having

gone from 16th to 22nd place in the international rankings. That means that we are now in the bottom half of the wellbeing ranking of developed nations. That decline is a result of declining education standards, relative economic decline and reduced life expectancy.

Instead of spinning the line that the SNP Government has promoted Scotland's wellbeing, the cabinet secretary and the minister should acknowledge that Scotland's rapid decline in international wellbeing tables is, in reality, a savage indictment of their Government's 13 years of failure in all areas of government. For those reasons, we will be voting against the rates resolution at decision time.

15:39

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in the debate, because who does not want to listen to the Tories talking nonsense about tax for an hour and a half of their life? Honestly—that is why I get up in the morning.

I am proud to advocate once again for a progressive tax system here in Scotland. Under the rates proposal that is before us, Scotland will remain the lowest-taxed part of the UK for the third year in a row, with 56 per cent of our taxpayers paying less than they would if they lived elsewhere in the UK. I am repeating things that my colleagues have already said, because I think that some members need to hear them again.

Dean Lockhart: Will the member give way?

George Adam: No. I have heard enough of Dean Lockhart's nonsense.

In these uncertain times, when we face increased Tory austerity and a lack of clarity from Boris Johnson and his cronies at Westminster, it is a relief to many Scots in my constituency—and, I am sure, to many others across the nation—to know that they will be treated fairly by their Government here in Scotland.

Despite the suggestions to the contrary from the Opposition, under our proposals no Scottish income tax payer will in 2020-21 pay more from their current salary than they do at the moment. Our Westminster counterparts, on the other hand, are quite happy to penalise low-income families—who are simply doing all that they can to make ends meet—in order to give tax breaks to the richest people in society.

The system in Scotland is vastly different. It is based on fairness, dignity and respect. The SNP wants to support our citizens and to make this country a better place—one where everyone can thrive. The SNP Government's decisions on taxation have resulted in a more progressive tax system that protects lower and middle-income

earners while raising additional revenue to support our economy and invest in delivering the widest range of free-to-access public services anywhere in these islands.

In looking at the rate proposal, it is vital that we consider all the services that are available to us in Scotland that we would not have access to elsewhere; for example, free prescriptions, free higher education and the baby box are enormously beneficial and life-changing initiatives that every Scot can take advantage of, regardless of their financial situation.

The Tories like to create misconceptions about the higher-rate threshold freeze, and to suggest that middle-income taxpayers are being targeted unfairly. The average taxpayer income in Scotland in 2018-19 was estimated to be £24,000 per year, so any notion that the tax policy of freezing the HRT is impacting on the middle classes is untrue and misleading. The higher-rate threshold freeze affects only people who earn more than £43,430, which is about 16 per cent of Scottish taxpayers in 2020-21.

Ultimately, the rates proposal that we are considering today, along with a budget that puts people firmly at the heart of the equation, renews our social contract with the people of Scotland. Scottish taxpayers continue to have access to a wider and better-funded set of free-to-access public services than taxpayers anywhere else in the UK. Scotland is the best place to live, work and do business in. Businesses benefit from our investment in infrastructure, broadband, research and development, business rates support, and skills and training. Above all, the social contract that the SNP has made with the people of Scotland continues to be upheld after 13 years in government.

As Paisley's MSP—which, as all members know, is a job that I love to do day in and day out—I am tired of seeing many of my constituents needlessly struggling at the hands of the Conservative Party. Those constituents are using food banks to feed their children and are having to decide between a hot meal and a hot home. They are generally struggling from day to day to make ends meet. That is why it is vital that we protect the low and middle-income earners in our society, and continue to ensure that the majority of Scots have the best deal in the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The last of the open-debate contributions will come from Stewart Stevenson.

15:44

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I want to pick up on a few issues

that other members have raised in the debate. I will go through them chronologically.

Let me start with Donald Cameron. He seems not to be here to hear me, but I am sure that he is listening somewhere. It was exceptionally brave of him to raise the issue of council tax, given that the average band D household council tax in England is £429 higher than the average band D council tax in Scotland. Donald Cameron therefore gets full marks for bravery and, perhaps, a few odd bonus marks for effrontery.

Rhoda Grant seemed to suggest that, under the proposals, I will pay less tax than I used to. I will consult the *Official Report* later, because I cannot really believe that she said that. I have gone into my database, got out my tax returns, and have found—I have various sources of income—that I am now paying £2,051 more per annum than I previously paid. I am happy to do so, as would many people with a social conscience in Scotland.

Rhoda Grant also criticised the relationship between the SNP Government and councils. There is a key thing that we did in 2007. When the SNP Government came in, we found that the Labour Party had left us with a situation in which 25 per cent of the money that councils got was ring fenced. We cut that amount dramatically. It has crept up a wee bit, subsequently, but councils have freedom that they very much welcome.

Willie Rennie—the man who never takes an intervention because he knows that it will hurt too much—criticised capital spending. When the Liberal Democrats came to me, when I was a Government minister, about the replacement Forth crossing, the budget was £3.4 billion to £4.3 billion. When the crossing went into the *Official Journal of the European Union* for bids, the top was £2.3 billion and the floor was £1.9 billion. We built it for less than £1.4 billion—half a billion pounds below budget. Willie Rennie, as a Fife MSP, should tak tent.

Alexander Burnett said so much that I am not sure that I have time to deal with it. Let us start with one of the crippling things that the Tories have done for local authorities across the UK: they have doubled the Public Works Loan Board interest rate. How will that help councils across the UK? It was done simply to tackle the abuse of borrowing powers by a couple of councils in England, which put money into commercial investments. The Tories could have dealt with that in another way.

Alexander Burnett criticised the position of Aberdeenshire Council. I have looked at Audit Scotland's 2019 report on Aberdeenshire Council. In the period from 2013-14 to 2018-19, it did extremely well in improving its position—only West Lothian Council and Midlothian Council did better.

Moray Council, which covers the other council area that I have the privilege to represent, was next. The Scottish Government is therefore undoing historical wrongs in council funding. Members will get that information on page 19 of the Audit Scotland report.

As I approach the end of the four minutes that I have, it is perhaps worth reminding members that the subject of income tax is fascinating. When did income tax start? The answer to that question is 1798. Who introduced it? It was William Pitt the younger—a Tory.

15:48

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

We have had quite a good debate and some really interesting points have been made.

We need to encourage a wider discussion in communities across Scotland about what kind of Scotland we want in the future and how we pay for that. Those on the Tory benches often object to taxes being paid; they support austerity but they complain when public services are cut. That does not square up, however, because we cannot have all those things. A cordial discussion and debate is needed.

I was surprised by what George Adam said in his contribution. When he looks back on it, I hope that he will reflect on this point. We want to encourage discussion among members of the public, but if we then come into the chamber and call each other names and accuse each other of talking nonsense, it is hardly surprising that we see debates of the kind that are on social media and that people are not able to have cordial discussions. How we discuss such issues here is important.

A lot has been said in the debate about behavioural change, which the SNP Government often relies on in its arguments. As Rhoda Grant said, last year, we saw the SNP introduce a rate resolution that gave higher earners a tax cut but increased tax for some lower earners. The type of behavioural change that worries me is that we are seeing working people, who used to get their wages and then be able to go and buy their shopping, now being forced into going to food banks. That needs to be addressed in our discussions.

Sarah Boyack mentioned Citizens Advice Scotland. Just before I came into the chamber, I received a letter from Mrs Sandy Watts, the chief executive of Perth citizens advice bureau, which says:

"In the last year, the biggest debt issue across the Scottish Citizens Advice network was council tax debt ... In total, the people who turned to the Citizens Advice network

in Scotland for help with council tax debt owe a combined £6.9 million or an average of £3,000 per person.”

We must surely be concerned about that. We should be talking to COSLA and local government as well as joining Citizens Advice Scotland in trying to raise awareness of the benefits of—

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw)

(SNP): Would the member not agree that part of the problem with council tax debt is the absolutely chaotic roll-out of universal credit? People have been having to wait for five weeks for payment, which has meant that they have been automatically going into council tax debt almost immediately. It is such pressure on poorer families that is causing so much of the upset that we on the SNP benches feel about the issue.

Alex Rowley: I do not disagree that welfare reform has had a dreadful impact on communities right across Scotland. However, it is interesting that the number of people who are in work but also in poverty has continued to grow. There is a wider issue there, which is about the difference between the economy as it stands and the one that we would like to see.

I agree with a point that was made from the Tory benches. We should look at tax not simply from the point of view of asking how much we can charge people; we have to grow our economy. The more that we do so, the more income tax we will be able to bring in, along with other forms of taxation. I raised that point with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance at this morning’s meeting of the Finance and Constitution Committee. I am not sure that the budget is linked to a clear policy direction that will deliver and grow our economy. If our country is to succeed as we move forward, we must put in place a budget that will link to such an aim.

Why did John Swinney sign up to the fiscal framework? Did the civil servants advise him at the time that it was not the best way forward for Scotland? We need to look at those questions, because the fiscal framework is turning out to be a disaster. Murdo Fraser made a good point when he questioned its adoption.

Kate Forbes: We all signed up to the fiscal framework in good faith. The fact that a review was baked into it indicated that it would need to be reviewed at some point. Will the Labour Party join the Scottish National Party—and, I hope, others in the chamber—in calling for an early review in order to protect Scottish taxpayers?

Alex Rowley: Absolutely. We certainly need to get the review process going and consider how we will move it forward.

Patrick Harvie made the point that manifestos are starting to emerge. I look forward to that.

Every political party needs to set out how it intends to move forward. It is one thing to blame Westminster, but we have powers here. If we want to be ambitious for Scotland, let us have discussions and debate, across the country, about the kind of society that we want here and how we might pay for it.

15:54

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

The debate has not been the most informative, although it has sometimes been lively enough. I will start in a consensual manner, by congratulating Ben Macpherson on leading his first debate in his new role as Minister for Public Finance and Migration. His predecessor used that position as a springboard to greater things, so we look forward to watching Mr Macpherson’s career with interest.

My colleague David Cameron set out at the start of the debate that the Scottish Conservatives cannot support the rate resolution—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, I confused my two esteemed Camerons. I meant Donald Cameron, who I am sure will make an excellent Prime Minister when the time comes. *[Laughter.]* It is good to see that he agrees with that.

We recognise that what the resolution proposes will not in itself widen the tax differential between Scotland and the rest of the UK. The point was made earlier in the debate that we do not know what will be in the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s budget next week when he sets out the tax rates for the rest of the UK. It is expected that there might not be a change in the thresholds for the higher and additional rates, and should that be the case, the tax differential will not widen. We have to wait and see.

As Donald Cameron reminded us, we asked the Scottish Government as part of our budget discussions to undertake that, if tax changes in the UK budget widen the differential, those changes should be mirrored in Scotland with a subsequent amendment to the rate resolution. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance decided not to go down that route, as was her right, but the issue mattered—and still does.

It is important to clarify that matching UK income tax changes comes at no cost to the Scottish Government. Under the fiscal framework, the Scottish budget is compensated for mirroring those amendments. Going down the route that we proposed had no down side for the Scottish budget.

A tax differential between Scotland and the rest of the UK has a negative impact: it sends out a message that Scotland is the highest-taxed part of the UK and means that anyone who earns above

£27,000 pays more taxes than their counterparts do elsewhere in the UK—substantially more, in some cases. People who earn £50,000 will now pay more than £1,500 extra in tax than their counterparts pay south of the border.

That approach to taxation has caused real concern among the business community, particularly for those businesses that try to recruit talented and mobile people to fill roles in Scotland. Not only is income tax higher for above-average earners, the land and building transaction tax rates are higher for larger properties.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I have listened with care to some of the language that Murdo Fraser and his colleagues have used. He mentions his concern that the Government's tax measures will deter those talented people who earn £50,000. Does it occur to the member that people who earn rather less than £50,000 might be talented too?

Murdo Fraser: Of course, we have talented people who earn less than £50,000 but the most that they will gain from the SNP's tax benefits is 40p a week. That will not attract people to come to Scotland and we have to look at the downside as well as the upside.

That has an impact not just on the private sector, but also on the public sector where, in areas such as the NHS, the large numbers of highly paid medical staff—who have a choice of working anywhere in the UK—will consider the whole tax rate question as a determining factor in where they take up roles.

We have heard from SNP members that those additional taxes are justified because they support extra spending. Gordon MacDonald made the point that benefits such as free personal care, free university tuition and free prescriptions are available in Scotland but not in England, that there is a trade-off between higher taxes and better public services, and that people are happy to pay more if they get more in return.

The problem with that argument is that the facts do not support it. According to the SPICe analysis, the Scottish Government's decision not to replicate the tax policy that applies in the rest of the UK means that revenues should be around £650 million higher than would otherwise be the case, before any behavioural changes are taken into account. However, as I pointed out to the minister earlier and as Dean Lockhart reminded us, the net impact of those tax changes is not an additional £650 million, or £600 million, £500 million, or even £100 million, Mr Lyle. It is a mere £46 million: less than one tenth of the total figure that is raised in taxation.

Ben Macpherson: With respect, I will make it clear that the SPICe report does not include

behavioural change, which is interesting given that that has been a topic that Mr Fraser has covered in his closing speech. That caveat is important because our analysis shows that, when behavioural change is taken into account, the figure is close to £460 million, not £46 million.

Murdo Fraser: I will pay more attention to the SPICe analysis than the Government analysis, if the minister will forgive me.

The reason for the differential is the slower growth in earnings and, as a consequence, tax revenues in Scotland when compared to the rest of the UK. In terms of the fiscal framework, that means that the block grant adjustment reduces the Scottish budget. So Scottish taxpayers are paying £650 million more than their counterparts south of the border and yet the actual income being generated by those tax changes amounts to less than one tenth of the total being paid. Put another way, if the Scottish economy and Scottish earnings grew at the same rate as the UK average, there would be no need for additional tax bills in Scotland; we would raise the same amount of money from existing taxpayers. The SNP's tax grab is only just helping us to stand still.

I could say much more if I had more time, but I will say this in closing: Donald Cameron reminded us of the SNP's promise not to increase the basic rate of tax—a promise that has now been broken on three occasions and will be broken again if the Parliament passes the rate resolution.

It is the Scottish Conservative's ambition to see a reduction in the divergence in the tax rates between Scotland and the rest of the UK. The rate resolution does not achieve that; it perpetuates a situation in which Scottish taxpayers are asked to pay more but are getting less in return. For those reasons, the Scottish Conservatives must oppose the motion.

16:01

Ben Macpherson: I thank all members who have contributed to this important debate. In general, it has been a constructive discussion on how we balance the requirement on us all to act on behalf of our constituents to enhance social justice with creating an inclusive and sustainable economy and supporting its growth. We must also bear in mind that our constituents are with us in debating how, together, we can be proud to make contributions from our income to the common good of Scotland.

Many points were raised during the debate, and I will point out some important ones first. Patrick Harvie gave a nuanced and important speech. He made a clear point that, because of the arrangement under the Scotland Act 2016, if the rate resolution is not agreed to, the consequences

could be catastrophic, to use his term. I thank him for pointing out that serious issue, for reminding us of the significance of the debate and for the many important points that he made.

I will give way to John Mason—sorry, to Bill; no, to Bruce—[*Laughter.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That will be Bruce Crawford.

Bruce Crawford: I am alarmed to be compared with my good friend John Mason. [*Laughter.*]

Given the speech that Murdo Fraser has just made, could the minister confirm by how much money the budget would have decreased had we followed the Tories' tax plans and gone in that direction?

Ben Macpherson: I thank Bruce Crawford for that important question. Our analysis shows that if we had reverted to RUK income tax policy, Scotland would have received £460 million less in revenue for supporting public services and our economy. That is part of investment—

Murdo Fraser: Will the minister give way?

Ben Macpherson: Yes—briefly.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the minister for giving way.

I will respond to the comment that the minister made in relation to Patrick Harvie's speech. Can he confirm that a loss of £12 billion to Scotland's public finances would be, as he said, catastrophic?

Ben Macpherson: If we do not agree to the rate resolution in order to action the income tax powers, a loss of £12 billion in terms of the income tax take would mean that we would not be able to invest that money in Scottish public services.

That investment goes to some of the many benefits that members mentioned. George Adam talked about the baby box and Gordon MacDonald talked about the impact that the Scottish child payment will have. Others mentioned the abolition of tuition fees, with a saving of £27,000 per student, free personal care for the elderly, free school meals for children in P1 to P3, no prescription charges, concessionary travel and around 60,000 homes for social rent in Scotland since 2007—the list could go on. All those benefits have had a significant impact.

Patrick Harvie: I thank the minister for letting me join in on the interventions.

I agree that many of the spending policies that are made possible by more progressive tax disproportionately benefit lower earners—that is, people who are in greater need. Does the minister accept that we will have an overall progressive tax

system only if we follow through with a commitment to replace the regressive council tax, and that the Scottish Government and the SNP have to come forward with a proactive position on how they want to see that happen if we are to make progress?

Ben Macpherson: I thank Patrick Harvie for raising that important point. I enjoyed taking part in those discussions for the first time with him and colleagues last week. The undertaking that we gave in last year's budget process looks forward to further constructive discussions—they are very important discussions.

As well as the list that I gave of just some of the benefits that our income tax commitments, and the revenue that will be raised, will allow us to provide—and have allowed us to provide—it is important to emphasise, and for members to remember, that we also have to spend £110 million to mitigate the impact of UK Government welfare reforms.

I will deal with a point that was raised by members on the Conservative front bench. They made the erroneous analysis that the income tax situation in Scotland has a behavioural change impact in relation to Scotland's attractiveness. I point out to the Conservatives that Scotland has a very strong reputation and record on attracting inward investment and that net migration from outwith and, crucially, within the UK, is positive. More people come from the rest of the UK to Scotland than go to the rest of the UK from Scotland, in large part because of the high quality of public services and the socially just, progressive and competitive economy that we are building. The biggest threat to Scotland's attractiveness is the Conservative UK Government's immigration proposals. There was, to use Alexander Burnett's phrase, a significant "brain drain" from Scotland during the 1980s, and we know who was in government at Westminster at that point—the Conservative Party, whose policies had a really negative effect on Scotland's economy and society.

Some important points have been made about the quality of our debate on this issue and the need for us to be nuanced. Tom Arthur made a fine contribution on those points, as did a number of others. Members also set income tax consideration and policy within the wider scenario, including its relationship with national insurance, which John Mason talked about, and with dividend income tax and savings income tax. We need to consider all of that, as well as employment law, welfare policy, immigration policy and the suite of taxes that are reserved, when we reach decisions on what rates to set. That has been important thus far and is important today. Since 2016, we have had the ability to set income tax rates, and we

have had to do so responsibly and progressively, basing decisions on principle and logic, and responding to matters that are beyond our control—externalities such as, most prominently, Brexit.

Today is our opportunity to use the limited powers of this Parliament as best and as responsibly as we can to continue to build a fairer and more progressive country. It is important to emphasise that, contrary to what some members might say, in terms of income tax, Scotland remains the lowest-taxed part of the UK for the third consecutive year.

The proposals that were put forward today mean that, in 2020-21, 56 per cent of Scottish income tax payers will pay less income tax than if they lived elsewhere in the UK. No Scottish income tax payer will pay more income tax next year on their current income than they do now. Our budget sets out tax plans to protect the lowest-earning and middle-earning taxpayers and make the tax system fairer and more progressive.

As I said in my opening speech, we have chosen to freeze the higher-rate threshold in 2020-21, which the independent Scottish Fiscal Commission has forecast will raise £51 million next year for investment in public services. Not doing that would mean that there would be £51 million less to support our vital public services, invest in our economy, tackle climate change and meet our ambitious child poverty targets. We have asked those who can most afford it to pay a bit more, meaning that we can deliver a wider and better-funded set of free-to-access public services—services that are not available elsewhere in the UK.

I could say a lot more. I am thankful to members for taking part in this important debate. We in the Scottish Government take seriously the responsibility of Government to create, with the powers that we have, a tax system that is right for Scotland, its people, its businesses and the economy. I ask Parliament to share in that responsibility and agree to the Scottish rate resolution.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That concludes our debate on the Scottish rate resolution. Before I put the question, I advise members that, under rule 9.16.7 of the standing orders, stage 3 proceedings on the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill cannot begin unless the Scottish rate resolution is agreed to.

The question is, that motion S5M-21090, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on the Scottish rate resolution, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. As there are members who are not in the chamber, I will suspend the meeting for five minutes while we call them to the chamber.

16:12

Meeting suspended.

16:17

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on motion S5M-21090.

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)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, 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)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)
 (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)

Abstentions

Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 58, Against 50, Abstentions 5.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of section 11A of the Income Tax Act 2007 (which provides for income tax to be charged at Scottish rates on certain non-savings and non-dividend income of a Scottish taxpayer), the Scottish rates and limits for the tax year 2020-21 are as follows—

(a) a starter rate of 19%, charged on income up to a limit of £2,085,

(b) the Scottish basic rate is 20%, charged on income above £2,085 and up to a limit of £12,658,

(c) an intermediate rate of 21%, charged on income above £12,658 and up to a limit of £30,930,

(d) a higher rate of 41%, charged on income above £30,930 and up to a limit of £150,000, and

(e) a top rate of 46%, charged on income above £150,000.

The Presiding Officer: Stage 3 proceedings on the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill will take place on Thursday.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in Early Years Education

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is an Education and Skills Committee debate on motion S5M-21089, in the name of Clare Adamson, on science, technology, engineering and mathematics in early years education.

16:19

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank my colleagues from the Education and Skills Committee who took part in the deliberations around our inquiry into STEM in early years education. I also thank the clerks for the work that they put into the inquiry and the many people who contributed both in providing evidence at committee and through the interactions that we had over the course of our deliberations. I particularly thank Toni Scullion, a teacher who not only gave evidence to the committee but brought along some colleagues to hold a dressCode hackathon to launch our report. We had 10 teams of secondary 1 girls taking part, some of whom had never coded before but managed to produce some outstanding work on the day.

This week is Scottish apprenticeship week, which encourages our young people to consider where their talents could take them and to let their imagination drive their ambition. However, back in March 2019, our committee heard that young people as young as six years old often have a fixed idea of what jobs they could do and, more importantly, of what jobs are not for them. Those preconceptions, which are regularly based on gender or social circumstance, limit their aspirations. They curtail a young person's ambition and hamper Scotland's ability to attract people to STEM-related careers, which will be vital to the development of our workforce through the fourth industrial revolution. That is what made the formative, early years STEM teaching the focus of our inquiry.

We visited the Primary Science Teaching Trust education conference at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, which brought to life the potential of innovation at school level. The young people we saw that day had amazing projects and were very eloquent about what they were learning about STEM in school. We also held a workshop at the Scottish learning festival—at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow—to test out some of our findings from formal evidence on a group of around 50 teachers and early years practitioners. The committee was struck by the volume of groundbreaking work that

is taking place across Scotland. We met self-titled “STEM converts”—people who did not study STEM at university or college but who have taken a passion for STEM into their teaching in the early years.

The challenges of unconscious bias and its impact on gender balance were recurring themes of the evidence that the committee heard, as was the disadvantage of coming from a deprived background. The need to ensure that children from rural and remote areas receive the same range and regularity of opportunities as those from urban areas was also a strong theme.

The committee has developed 22 recommendations, which align with the ambitions of the Government's STEM strategy. A key takeaway is the importance of improving the confidence of teachers and early years practitioners, particularly in technology and engineering. One teacher, Lorna Hay, who has a passion for engineering, rightly outlined that STEM is made up of four constituent parts—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—and that bundling the four together can be a hindrance to identifying the subjects that teachers have confidence in or where more appropriate support is needed and could be offered.

Some student teachers suggested that they were not confident that they could cover STEM in sufficient detail. Once teachers are qualified, the need for continuing professional development is clear. It is important to have more information on the prevalence of CPD in STEM disciplines across the teaching profession. We heard about the advantages of cluster working, whereby nurseries, primary schools and high schools collaborate to share knowledge and experience. However, finding time in a busy curriculum is, of course, never easy, and some witnesses cited an inability to source staff cover for lessons as an inhibitor to collaboration and CPD. A regular suggestion from teachers was that non-contact time could be increased in order to make time for dedicated CPD in STEM areas.

We also heard about some of the physical challenges of teaching STEM in schools. We heard from Dr Karen Petrie that internet connectivity is an issue in schools, even in urban areas where high-quality broadband is available. With the growing importance of technology in STEM learning experiences and the need to increase uptake of computing subjects, the committee recommended that the Government look at the extent to which that is an issue. The committee is always keen to hear directly from teachers about the challenges that they face.

A range of witnesses, including Professor Ian Wall, who was previously the chair of STEMEC—the science, technology, engineering and

mathematics education committee—spoke about the value of interdisciplinary work, and one of our recommendations is that the Government look at the extent to which curriculum priorities such as literacy and numeracy can be taught through interdisciplinary learning. Blocks of time in a primary school that are dedicated solely to numeracy or literacy can be perceived as a barrier to interdisciplinary learning. Given the need for transferable skills and adaptability to respond to the evolving economy, the ability to understand how different disciplines interrelate will be a valuable skill for young people who are moving into employment and will allow them to meet the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution.

The inquiry also covered women's representation in STEM. We heard from many inspiring women, including Talat Yaqoob, who is the director of Equate Scotland and was elevated yesterday to become a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Talat gave evidence to the committee that challenged preconceived notions about how to improve gender balance. She said that

"it is not about changing what engineering, computing or chemistry are. It is not about making chemistry about making a perfume kit—which I have actually seen and rolled my eyes at. It is not about changing what science is: science works the way it works. The difference should be that we provide spaces in which we can encourage and develop confidence in girls and women."—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 27 March 2019 ; c 9.*]

Presiding Officer, I have many more things to say about our inquiry, but I believe that I have reached my time limit. I again thank all those who contributed.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions contained in the Education and Skills Committee's 8th Report, 2019 (Session 5), *Report on STEM in early years education* (SP Paper 624).

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for spotting the worried look on my face, convener.

I call Maree Todd to open for the Scottish Government.

16:25

The Minister for Children and Young People (Maree Todd): I am grateful to the Education and Skills Committee for securing time for this debate, because STEM skills have never been more relevant, and embedding them across the learning journey will be integral to Scotland's future. That is why our STEM education and training strategy is supporting people of all ages to develop their STEM skills. We welcomed the input from the committee's inquiry into STEM in the early years and have responded to its recommendations.

The committee's report underlines the importance of nurturing STEM skills from the earliest stages in the learning journey. Skills such as curiosity in the natural world, investigation, inventiveness and exploration can be nurtured by play-based, active learning in early learning and childcare and early primary. I admit that, as a science graduate, there is nothing that I like more than practising my pipetting skills at nursery.

The expansion of funded early learning and childcare from 600 to 1,140 hours in August 2020 will be characterised by precisely that sort of learning. It is a truly transformational investment that brings an important opportunity to enhance early learning in STEM skills. Crucially, it includes a focus on the need to ensure that we have a well-trained, skilled workforce with a shared understanding of how children can best learn in their early years. The investment also increases access to high-quality training resources for that workforce in order to help them to deliver the best ELC experience for our children. That includes access to high-quality training in how to support learning in early STEM skills.

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister outline what steps the Government is taking in recognition of the STEM work and teaching that is being undertaken by the armed forces among cadets in Scotland?

Maree Todd: The bases work with colleges—I do not really see the relevance of the question to the early years. We do not have early years army cadets just yet. However, I know that the army cadets work closely with the colleges, and, with all the interest in the outdoors and engineering, it is a natural fit.

Members know that I have been visiting colleges the length and breadth of Scotland, where I have seen some wonderful practice. At New College Lanarkshire, I was delighted to join pre-schoolers who were conducting a rainbow density experiment and undertaking lots more practical science, led by the students at the college.

Since the publication of the committee's report, we have launched an online professional learning module on developing skills, knowledge and confidence in delivering early learning and STEM. It is the first module to be launched as part of our new programme of continuous professional learning for the sector. The module is designed to inspire confidence in delivering learning in early years STEM skills and to support the sector to share good practice across Scotland. I launched the module on 30 January, on a visit to Kingsmeadow nursery in Peebles, which is an ELC setting that is showcased in the module. I saw the most fantastic STEM activities in action, with children actively learning outdoors with

curiosity and joy about science and STEM in nature.

The Education and Skills Committee's recommendations on STEM in the early years highlighted the importance of ensuring that training in STEM is accessible to those in private and third sector ELC settings. Our expanded ELC offer is provider neutral, and, regardless of where children access their offer—whether it is with a local authority, with a private or voluntary provider or with a childminder—they can be assured that they are accessing high-quality ELC that supports their learning and development.

By ensuring that the new module is free and that it can be accessed remotely and flexibly, we have helped to address barriers to accessing training for all staff, right across the sector. At the last count, on Monday morning, the module already had 288 participants. We can see that they are progressing well through the course, and 27 learners have already worked their way through the whole module. The feedback from those who have completed it has been very positive.

As well as inspiring play-based approaches to developing children's early learning in STEM, the module will help to ensure that learning is delivered in a gender-neutral way. Children begin to learn about gender roles and expectations from the very early years and quickly pick up messages about what is perceived as normal for girls and boys. They are influenced by their environment, by the adults around them and by gender stereotypes that can place powerful restrictions on what they believe they can achieve in their futures as adults.

Our national induction resource for the ELC sector also addresses gender-neutral practice. It contains some reflective questions, including one on gender-neutral practice, to prompt staff to think about their values in relation to gender and how those might influence the way in which they interact with boys and girls and how they can promote gender equality in their practice.

We recognise the need to diversify the ELC workforce to improve the gender balance. Children pick up cues about gender roles from observing patterns in the world of work around them, so it is important that they see more gender balance in the ELC profession. To that end, we have created a £50,000 fund to explore innovative methods of recruiting and retaining males in ELC-related training programmes. We are seeing some progress; this is apprenticeship week, and 7 per cent of people who undertook ELC modern apprenticeships in 2018-19 were male, compared with 4 per cent in the workforce.

I am about to finish, but I must mention our fantastic new practice resource, "Realising the Ambition: Being Me". As well as supporting all

aspects of day-to-day ELC practice, it sets out how we can support children's development of STEM skills, including digital and learning for sustainability. It is a fantastic resource. The early years are crucial in setting strong foundations and harnessing children's natural curiosity. I see those strong foundations all around me when I visit ELC settings, and I am confident about the future of excellent play-based learning in STEM through high-quality ELC.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. I apologise that there is little time for interventions in the debate. I know that members are keeping their remarks short.

16:34

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I commend the work of the Education and Skills Committee, which I had the pleasure of joining today for the first time, in producing this report into STEM in the early years.

I will start with the context of why it is important to get STEM right in the early years. At the moment, 37 per cent of all Scottish employment is STEM related, and I am sure that that figure will only rise in the years to come. We will not channel people into the specialist engineering or tech roles of the future without getting it right now, when they are three, four or five years of age.

When I joined the Parliament, one of the first debates that I participated in was on digital skills and STEM. Four years ago, I called on ministers to tackle what I thought were shortcomings in their STEM strategy, particularly around the trend of declining teacher numbers at that time. Fast forward four years, and a Parliamentary committee has summed up the thoughts that I had then.

As we have heard, a lot of good work has been done. We now have young STEM leaders, the My World of Work website, the careers hive at the national museum of Scotland and the great work in teacher training that has been done by New College Lanarkshire, to name but a few initiatives. Arguably, though, more can and should have been done by the Government in the past four years.

The committee's report concluded several things that I want to highlight, the first of which is about teacher training and resource. We need to ensure that there is access to appropriate training for teachers and early years practitioners to equip them with what they need to deliver an age-appropriate STEM education. Secondly, we need to enable greater access to STEM by tackling some of the gender, ethnic, social and economic imbalances that affect the take-up of STEM at later stages in life. Thirdly, we need to get the infrastructure right, to physically enable teachers to deliver a truly connected and digital curriculum.

In the short time that I have, I will address those three issues.

On teacher training and resource, the report outlined the specific issue of a distinct lack of confidence among many teachers in pursuing STEM-focused activities with children. The word “confidence” crops up a number of times in the report. In her evidence to the committee, Susan Boyd, who is a teacher from Perth and Kinross, said that, even with

“all the training in the world”,

schools still

“need the staff to deliver STEM education.”

She continued:

“we need to create the resources and then we need to teach them. We do not have enough bodies on the ground to do that effectively.”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 5 June 2019; c 22, 20.]

The committee was told that STEM education cannot just be one teacher’s passion; it has to be everybody’s—every teacher must be able to deliver it to a really high quality all the time. I could not have put it better myself.

When teachers were asked to rate their levels of confidence in STEM disciplines, 50 per cent said they were confident in teaching maths and 45 per cent said that they were confident in teaching science. However, only 3 per cent said that they were confident in teaching engineering and only 2 per cent said the same for technology. Those are not new findings or significant revelations. In 2017, the Scottish Government’s own STEM strategy acknowledged that it

“requires excellence in the education offered in early learning settings”

and that more interventions were needed in the younger years.

On enabling greater access, we know that STEM disengagement begins as early as six years of age, and we know that we have a problem in getting more girls and black, Asian and minority ethnic students into STEM. Therefore, it is vital that we get them interested at an early age. It is important that we encourage and inspire enthusiasm in STEM at every level of education, across gender, race and social backgrounds. Science and technology are things that everyone and anyone can get excited about, and there should be no boundaries to participation in them.

Finally, on infrastructure and connectivity, before we tackle digital innovation, we need to ensure that every school—whether it is a rural, urban, city or island school—has universal access to what it needs to teach: adequate broadband, hardware and technical support. My colleague

Jamie Halcro Johnston will touch more on that subject.

What would we like to see? There is a sensible debate to be had around STEM bursaries, with the specific purpose of increasing teacher numbers in those subjects. The roll-out of the expansion of early years provision, which we have talked about in the chamber, must be delivered sustainably, and it must deliver better early years STEM teaching. We must also get digital infrastructure right in nurseries and schools.

More importantly, STEM must sit at the heart of the curriculum from the early years onward, because it both enables and assists us to get the other basics right. Core subjects can hang off the back of it, teachers can get excited about it and children can be inspired by it. Only then can we be sure that we are giving young people the very best start possible in the economies of the future. If we get it right now, it will pay off later.

16:39

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The debate, which is welcome, takes place in the context of widespread consensus on the importance of improving STEM education, and the number of young people who choose STEM as a path for study and their career. We have heard some examples, and we know that in the years to come we will need thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—of new STEM-based professionals if we are to meet the skills demands of our economy.

We also know that we have to start young. I think that that is widely accepted. The learned societies group on Scottish STEM education said, in its submission to the committee:

“Students with low science capital who do not express STEM related aspirations by age 10 are unlikely to develop such aspirations as they get older.”

Anyone who has taught science in a secondary school, as I have done, will know that the pupils who have decided that science is not for them will have done so long before they got to secondary school. That, of course, is why the committee focused on early years and primary education.

We have heard a lot about the committee’s report and we will hear more. I want to illustrate some of the challenges that we identified by talking about my experience a couple of years ago, when a large primary school in my constituency asked me to go in and do a science lesson with the primary 7 pupils, to mark science week. Never having been one to avoid a chance to get back into the classroom, I agreed. I went into the school and undertook an experiment to measure the speed of light using chocolate

buttons and the old microwave from the staff room.

I had a great time. However, when I think about the experience, I realise that it illustrates a number of the problems that the committee identified. For example, the report talks about teacher confidence. The staff at that school felt that they had to ask someone who had—in the distant past—been a science teacher in a secondary school to come in to deliver a science lesson. They should have been much better placed than I was to deliver a science lesson in primary school, but they did not have the confidence.

Secondly, the event was a one-off. It was a special occasion to mark science week, and the whole of primary 7 was marched into the hall. It was certainly not a normal Friday morning in the school.

Finally, only I got to play with the microwave—and I was certainly the only person who got anywhere near the chocolate buttons—because the school does not have the resources to enable pupils to experience doing experiments for themselves.

The committee identified all those problems in our report. On the plus side, my previous professional experience having been with older young people, I found that the younger pupils' enthusiasm for the science was tremendous, and it was just as evident among the girls as it was among the boys. Also, the experiment was real science: I hope that it was appropriate for children, but it was not dumbed down in any way or trying to appeal to children in the way that the committee convener referred to in her quote about

“making chemistry about making a perfume kit”.—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 27 March 2019; c 9.*]

There were positives in the experience.

The long and the short of it is that the committee recommends that, when it comes to STEM education in primary schools, we need to do an awful lot better than we do by getting someone like me to go in and do an experiment with a microwave. We need teachers to be confident, we need STEM teaching to be consistent and embedded in the curriculum, and we need STEM education to be participative so that all young people get the experience of proper, hands-on experimental science. Only then will we get the step change that the report demands and that—in fairness—the Government's STEM education strategy seeks.

16:43

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Science, technology, engineering and

mathematics have been at the heart of Scotland's historical success as a nation. Our world-leading expertise and skills base were integral to our status as a global hub of manufacturing and home to many great scientific advancements. Knowledge and expertise in the same fields are key to tackling the climate crisis that we face today, for example by embracing a green new deal, seizing the advantage of our abundant capacity for renewables and reindustrialising as a centre for green manufacturing.

At the moment, that potential is not being harnessed as it could be. The Government's STEM strategy goes some way towards addressing that and was broadly welcomed by all the parties in this Parliament when it was published, but it can do only so much. It is a supply-side measure, aimed at providing the skills and the workforce, but without a clear Government strategy directing investment into the economic strategy to go alongside that, or a real industrial strategy, there will not be enough jobs for those skills. It is not something that the market will provide, given the right input of skills and people. The Government cannot allow the STEM strategy to stand in isolation, or to presume that things such as the innovation strategies, although those are welcome, are adequate economic plans to sit alongside it.

I urge the Government to consider how education and economic strategies can come together, but there is clearly still substantial work to be done around the STEM strategy itself, as the committee found. There continues to be a gender imbalance in STEM subjects and gender stereotypes that result in women being underrepresented are already established by the time that children reach school age. All the evidence shows that after the age of seven we are simply undoing the damage of expectations that have already been set.

Therefore, emphasis on the early years is essential, not just to inspire and enthuse children about STEM but to tackle the often unconscious biases of parents, carers, teachers and other staff, as well as portrayals in popular culture and the media, including the gendered advertising of toys. Campaigns such as Let Toys Be Toys have been doing great work, particularly with STEM toys, and I encourage the Government to work with them and others on that area.

We need to ensure that everyone who engages with children is aware of how gender stereotypes manifest and how their own actions and expectations, whether conscious or unconscious, impact on children and change their expectations of themselves and of society as a whole. That means making sure that sufficient training is available to early years practitioners and teachers

and that they have time to engage with that training.

A common theme in the committee's inquiry, which was mentioned by Jamie Greene, was a lack of confidence among early years staff and primary teachers in delivering STEM education; that lack of confidence is particularly acute in engineering and technology. That does not necessarily mean that they have a lack of ability or knowledge; in some cases, it clearly did not mean that because teachers had both. Therefore, it will be critical to ensure that training tackles the specific issue of confidence among the teaching and early years workforce.

In early years settings, that cannot be separated from the issue of access to nursery teachers. Early years practitioners are trained to a high standard, but ensuring that all children genuinely have access to a qualified nursery teacher benefits not only them but other early years staff as well. However, we know that in practice, for too many children, that access is nothing more than a nursery teacher travelling between a number of early years centres to meet staff without having direct involvement in the delivery of education or even, in many cases, the time to deliver training to early years staff in areas such as STEM. Like every other area of training that we have come across during committee inquiries, effective STEM training needs to take place in both initial teacher education and continuous professional development. I hope that we will have the opportunity to consider that during our upcoming initial teacher education inquiry.

The committee heard that, unsurprisingly, deprivation impacts on STEM in early years. Activities that promote STEM tend to cost a bit more, whether it is for more resource-intensive practical experiments such as that mentioned by Iain Gray or for travelling to events. Many schools rely on parent and carer donations to fund those activities, which inevitably disadvantages the communities that are more deprived. That is compounded in deprived rural communities, where more travel means greater expense. The evidence provided by the Glasgow Science Centre on its roadshow programme, which takes its offering directly to schools, is very welcome. However, we cannot rely on such organisations getting everywhere.

There are clearly lessons to be learned from the committee's inquiry and I welcome the Government's commitment to many of the conclusions that we reached. Like other members from across the chamber, I look forward to working with the Government to take forward the STEM agenda that we all have for Scotland.

16:48

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I echo Clare Adamson's thanks to the committee clerks and all the contributors to the inquiry.

I had intended to start with a quote, but Iain Gray beat me to it. On the other hand, it is important so I will read it out again:

"Students with low science capital who do not express STEM related aspirations by age 10 are unlikely to develop such aspirations as they get older."

The importance of this debate on the Education and Skills Committee's report into STEM in early years education is captured by that finding from the learned societies group. Developing curiosity in the early years is crucial in order to foster a lifelong interest in science and technology.

A number of important issues were discussed during the committee's inquiry, but I will focus on just one. There is a desire among early years teachers to improve their confidence and practice in teaching STEM.

I recognise that there is some good uptake of continuous professional development courses across the country and a good collaboration with businesses. In its briefing ahead of the debate, BT described its young engineers and science club programme to support learners aged three to 18, and its Barefoot computing programme, which teachers from 75 per cent of schools have signed up to.

However, for many practitioners, the desire to upskill is not always met with the ability to take up places on courses. That is a systemic issue that needs to be addressed. Simply pointing out all the courses that are available makes no difference if teachers are not able to go on them.

The committee heard worrying evidence from the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre that one local authority has put a blanket ban on anybody travelling to professional learning outwith that local authority area. It is important that we find out whether there is any justification for that approach.

One important factor that prevents uptake is workload. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report that was published last September confirmed that Scotland's teachers work some of the longest hours in the world. With teachers spending so much of their time in front of the class, they do not have time for the personal development that helps them to continue to improve as teachers. It is no wonder that one attendee of the Education and Skills Committee's workshop at the Scottish learning festival said:

“The root of many issues is class contact time. If you want teachers to engage with the CPD necessary to deliver high quality STEM education you have to give them time.”

Therefore, it is disappointing that workload is not being considered specifically by the OECD in its review of curriculum for excellence, despite the Scottish Liberal Democrats’ call for it to be included.

I remain concerned about the ability of private and third sector ELC staff to access STEM training. In the chamber yesterday, we discussed the importance of quality early learning and childcare, and good work is being done. The Scottish Childminding Association is working hard to promote STEM to its members, but perhaps the minister could indicate what measures are being developed to increase uptake among the wider ELC workforce.

Scotland has strong STEM ambitions for our pupils and our economy, and rightly so, but we need to get some of the basics right to achieve them.

16:52

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this important committee debate on STEM in early years education. It is vital that, as a nation, we promote the value of having fully inclusive STEM education, and I am pleased that the committee undertook its thorough inquiry.

The acronym STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which are vital, equally important, standalone subjects that should perhaps not be put together as one entity. As our report states, doing so can present

“one overall confidence level”,

which can

“mask the low levels of confidence”

that we encountered in some aspects of teaching engineering and technology.

One witness, Lorna Hay, who is a primary school teacher, emphasised the importance of ensuring that teacher confidence in STEM is considered in its constituent parts. She said:

“You will find that probably the majority are very confident about teaching maths and, possibly, about science and basic information and communication technology, but they are not confident at all about teaching computer science and engineering.”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 27 March 2019; c 10.*]

The committee report produced some clear recommendations, namely that we must improve access to professional training to increase teacher and early years practitioner confidence, especially in the areas of technology and engineering. I was

therefore pleased to hear in the minister’s opening speech of the progress that has been made in that regard.

I note the collaborative work that is being done by further education institutions and their willingness to be part of a wider learning strategy. For example, a module that was developed in partnership with the University of the West of Scotland is the first in a suite of free continuous professional learning modules that are being rolled out as part of the drive to increase the quality of early learning and childcare services.

Another of the report’s findings is that we must improve

“access to adequate internet connectivity”

and technology

“to support STEM learning”

generally, and particularly

“in remote and rural areas.”

During the excellent evidence sessions with a variety of witnesses, I focused my questions on gender discrimination and gender stereotyping. In that area, there needs to be a focus on long-term interventions in school and early learning settings when the Government is measuring progress in the STEM strategy’s aims. That could take the form of regional improvement collaboratives mapping cluster work between early learning and childcare settings and primary schools, as well as mapping collaborative work between primary and secondary schools.

We need to measure tangible progress in this area. It is vital that girls are not hampered by stereotyping and that they are encouraged to participate and excel in all aspects of STEM subjects. The committee heard about encouraging work in the area from early years practitioners, most of whom said that the emphasis was not put on girls’ play and learning or boys’ play and learning, and that children were encouraged to participate in any activity that they wanted to take part in. We were told that much of the play activity incorporated all aspects of STEM learning in an informal and enjoyable way for children. However, it was acknowledged that gender stereotyping often starts at home and that it can sometimes be difficult to encourage new habits and interests during learning when that is not encouraged at home.

As part of its initial work, the committee heard that children’s perceptions of what type of job they can perform can be defined at as early an age as six, as the convener said. If we are to tackle equity gaps, we must tackle conscious and unconscious bias if we are ever to give our girls the best start in life.

It is definitely not all gloom and doom. Good things are happening and encouraging progress is being made. In my constituency, Millersneuk primary school in East Dunbartonshire has a working group that is devoted to building the science curriculum, which gave teachers the freedom to plan lessons so that they could deliver science as a distinct subject or as part of an interdisciplinary experience. That resulted in greater professional learning, increased staff confidence and engagement of learners in better planned and structured investigative and collaborative learning experiences.

I am optimistic that we are on the right trajectory when it comes to STEM learning, but there is still work to do.

16:56

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I begin by thanking my former colleagues on the Education and Skills Committee for the work that they undertook on STEM in early years and paying tribute to Clare Adamson, to whose heart I know that the issue is close.

Like other longer-serving members of this Parliament, I am very conscious that, despite the fact that STEM issues have been on our agenda for a long time, we have not yet made the significant progress that we want to make and which our young people deserve. How often have we said that there will be transformational developments in this area? How often have we said that we must create the right educational, intellectual and long-term job opportunities for all ages? How often have we said that it is from the earliest ages that our young pupils should feel inspired, seek solutions, push boundaries, ask questions, inquire about how things work and take full advantage of all the things that we can teach them in science, technology, engineering and mathematics?

From all the evidence that we have heard over several years, there are some really key issues, the most important of which, as far as I am concerned, is the quality of science teaching in the early years. Members know that I have long been an advocate of dedicated science teachers in primary school, following the strong evidence that the Royal Society of Chemistry submitted to us some years ago. I was and remain very persuaded of the unquestionable benefits of specialists in the classroom, whose ability to create that first spark of science enthusiasm can do so much to put our young people on the right road.

I fully understand why the Government talks about the broad curriculum and cross-curricular subject learning in the curriculum for excellence, but I think that there are strong reasons for trying

to increase the number of dedicated science teachers in our primary schools. It is important that young children can start learning to think in specific ways to help them to engage with an increasingly technological and digital world. Furthermore, without changes to the structure of training and teaching, I do not think that it will be easy to develop the appropriate career trajectory for STEM teachers and to provide that innate attraction to the job, which lies in the impact that they can have in the classroom.

The Scottish Government has poured vast sums of money into focusing on STEM, and although that is a welcome development, changes to the framework of training are crucial. I hope that that will come through in the committee's investigation into teacher training.

The Scottish Government is absolutely right to argue that local authorities must have autonomy in managing funding but, as has been the case in music tuition, it is clear that there are issues with resource provision, especially for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, on a recent visit to the Roslin institute, I was told that a number of local authorities had been unable to afford the bus hire to enable their pupils to go on what is one of the best and most imaginative school science visits that I have ever seen. That is a big worry, and I agree with the learned societies group, which believes that we should collect more data about who is having to bear the brunt of the cost of science education.

Looking back at all the Scottish Government-commissioned reports on STEM, of which there are several, the good intentions are there for everybody to see, as are the ambitions with regard to what needs to happen to ensure that our young people have a better STEM experience.

Those ambitions are not the problem; changing attitudes is a different story. If there is one lesson from the committee's work, it is the essential need to break away from the constraints, which seem constant when it comes to STEM education.

As I leave the committee, I suggest that we need better coherence between what the science experts are telling us, what teacher training programmes involve, and what local authorities can commit to on dedicated science teachers in our primary schools. That is a big job, but a very important one.

17:00

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As we have heard, the Education and Skills Committee took extensive evidence and recognised the growing seriousness with which schools across Scotland take STEM in the early years. Scotland can flourish as a science nation

only if science is embedded in education from the earliest stage, and there is much across Scotland's education system that seeks to do just that. It is only right that we take an opportunity to celebrate that.

I have been delighted to see some of the positive steps that have been undertaken in recent years. We have made STEM education a clear priority in Scotland through emphasising the importance of numeracy and mathematics education, lessons in the natural sciences, and coding and technological understanding for students in the early years, which other members have alluded to. We are doing that by putting millions of pounds towards boosting STEM education and encouraging people to pursue STEM careers. We are putting those funds towards promoting the programmes of our partner organisations and supporting STEM educator training, and we are seeing some results, with year-to-year percentage increases in important metrics, such as Scottish STEM educator training entrants and female scientific apprenticeship participation.

One reason for the report—it was certainly not the only reason—relates to the wide understanding among teachers of the need to overcome continuing barriers to young women taking up careers in STEM. As Clare Adamson mentioned, we still have to tackle lingering perceptions that are gained at a very early age about whether science is for girls. Research has identified that children as young as six report gendered differences in relation to levels of interest, confidence and self-efficacy regarding STEM learning.

With that in mind, the report recommends that the improving gender balance and equalities programme monitor

“the capacity to provide support that can reach schools and early learning settings”.

It also recommends that the Scottish Government develop

“a means of measuring tangible progress in schools and early years settings in relation to gender balance”

in its STEM initiatives.

The need to ensure that teachers have confidence about teaching STEM subjects in the early years is closely related to all those aims. Although 63 per cent of teachers said that they were confident in teaching STEM subjects overall, their confidence levels became more complicated when the component subjects of STEM were separated out. Rona Mackay alluded to that. At the Scottish learning festival workshop, teachers and early years practitioners were asked about which element of STEM they felt most confident in. Forty-five per cent said science; 2 per cent said

technology; 3 per cent said engineering; and 50 per cent said maths.

Education Scotland's £1.4 million STEM professional learning grants are clearly a step that is intended to address some of those issues. Education Scotland has said that the technology side clearly

“needs more support, especially engineering, but .. we also still have work to do in terms of mathematics and numeracy. That is why the second round of the grants programme, which we launched last week, continues to have an extremely strong focus on mathematics and numeracy.”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 5 June 2019; c 8.]

I suspect that the committee and the Government have a shared understanding of the need to address all those matters through emphasising those subject areas in future enhancing professional learning grants and in initial teacher education. The Government has already responded to the committee's recommendations, and I welcome the positive tone of that response.

To conclude, the report is a constructive one that has, likewise, received a constructive response from the Government.

17:04

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank the Education and Skills Committee for its work on STEM education. Its inquiry and subsequent report have shown the scale of the challenge that is ahead. I hope that the committee will continue to press the Government to take the necessary steps to address the issues and to improve equity in and the availability of STEM education.

I welcome the recommendations made by the committee and the conclusions drawn from its inquiry. Its 22 recommendations, all of which are evidence based, must be accepted and acted upon by the Government. They include that STEM subjects should be at the heart of the education system, and that the focus that is placed on them should be equal to the focus on literacy and numeracy. Further, such subjects should be introduced into the curriculum as early as possible. I am pleased that the Government agrees with such views and is creating more opportunities for children to learn through STEM from the age of three. However, as we learned through the committee's inquiry, such opportunities are not afforded to all children, because of gender bias, poverty, geography and the availability of resources for teachers and practitioners in education settings.

Before I address those issues, I turn to the points that were identified in relation to teacher and early years practitioner confidence. I believe

that increasing the confidence and ability of primary teachers and those in childcare settings will help to tackle the systemic problems in STEM education. The committee has recommended that, as was highlighted by many stakeholders in its inquiry, confidence levels should be expressed over the four individual STEM disciplines. That is an absolute must if the Government wants to target resources on the disciplines about which there is particular concern, which, as the report highlights, are engineering and technology.

Gender bias and stereotypes must be eradicated if we are to see real change in gender equality, and that aim extends to STEM education. Children as young as six are aware of gendered differences. That should not be happening; all children should have access to the same educational opportunities, and equity in their career paths. The committee's report tells us that

"A whole school or whole early learning and childcare setting approach is key to countering the ingrained pattern of early stereotypes limiting people's aspirations and informing future career decisions and attitudes."

The inquiry shows that deprivation is a major barrier to delivering and improving STEM education. We know that resources in schools have been scaled back over the past decade, that teachers themselves are buying equipment, and that parents are being asked to help to fund classroom resources. The SNP is quick to take credit for many things, but even though cuts to local councils have been sustained for more than a decade, which has resulted in teachers and parents having to fund STEM activities, it is quick to absolve itself of any responsibility.

A range of the committee's witnesses gave evidence that the lack of so-called STEM capital is creating more barriers for children. Asking parents to help to fund classrooms places further pressure on those from the poorest backgrounds, compounding the financial stresses that many parents face every day. The Government should, without hesitation, accept and act upon all the committee's recommendations on deprivation and gender.

We all want Scotland to be the best place for children to learn and grow. The roles of science, technology, engineering and maths are crucial in creating the jobs of the future, which we hope will be sustainable and will improve the lives and opportunities of everyone.

I again thank the committee for its valuable report. I hope that we will see the Government taking action to meet the many challenges that it highlights.

17:08

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley)

(SNP): I am not a member of the Education and Skills Committee, but I take a keen interest in STEM whenever the opportunity arises. The committee and those who have provided evidence to it are to be congratulated on producing the report, which in many ways reinforces issues that have been around for a while.

The report probably hits the nail on the head at the outset when it talks about confidence within the profession in the four key areas in STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths. As other members have mentioned, if we separate those elements, we see a different picture emerging in confidence levels in teaching science and maths and in teaching technology and engineering.

Lorna Hay, who is mentioned in the report, highlighted the fact that confidence is not so high in teaching computer science and engineering, and that view seems to be supported by others who contributed. For me, the surprising thing about that is that anyone should actually be surprised by it. It has been an issue for a long time and regularly features as a discussion point when computing in the curriculum is mentioned. How should we train our teachers and early years practitioners about the wonders of computing and the possibilities that it can open up for our children, and for them, in the digital world that we live in?

I am pleased to see that the Scottish Government is aware of that and is taking action through its STEM professional learning grants, which seek to help 14,000 practitioners this year. How will we know whether those grants work? We will clearly have to see an improvement in confidence levels; I hope that we can look further than that at the impact of those grants on the children and young people themselves. Will they become more enthused with STEM, to such an extent that they feel that they want to stick with it in later years—particularly the girls?

Jamie Greene: I know that the subject is of great interest to the member. Why is the lack of confidence in STEM subjects still such a big issue, given that it has been one for a long time?

Willie Coffey: There are social and cultural issues around that. That lack of confidence sets in at a very early age, so we need to do more to intervene at a much earlier age to turn that around.

I hope that I am not overdramatising the issue. It is crucial to provide that confidence, through giving our teachers and early years staff the ability to enthuse our youngsters to such an extent that they

see STEM as a fantastic option with great opportunities for their future.

What more can we learn about the gender imbalance issue, which is a concern for a number of members? The committee correctly focused in on the issue in order to bring it to our attention once more. A few weeks ago, I welcomed a group of school students from Dundee to the Parliament, all of whom were bright and enthusiastic about developing a career in software development. All of them were males—with not a single female among them.

We know the social, cultural and stereotyping issues—science is for the boys, as are engineering and oily rag pursuits—and that we have to keep working on that. I had to laugh at one of the comments from Talat Yaqoob and Toni Scullion, who lamented that they had seen an attempt to make chemistry attractive to females through a demonstration of how to make perfume.

As usual, I am indebted to East Ayrshire Council for providing me with a little insight into the region's STEM agenda. The children get to engage with STEM experiences both indoors and—increasingly—outdoors, in all the region's early childhood centres. Community engagement works well there too, and local STEM ambassadors from Spirit AeroSystems are involved. There is a lot to be proud of across all the East Ayrshire communities.

The committee is to be congratulated on its wide-ranging and thoughtful report, which touches on the many issues that we face—on confidence building, resourcing, equality of access and the continuing issue of attracting more females into science. The Scottish Government has put in place really good initiatives, and there is really good practice in East Ayrshire. The report is a welcome acknowledgement that there is much more work to do to take the STEM agenda forward.

17:12

Iain Gray: As one would expect, we have heard a fair bit about the challenges that the committee report identified in improving STEM education and learning in early years and primary schools. We have also heard about the driver for that, which is the need for skills for the future and for what the committee convener always likes to call the fourth industrial revolution—the STEM-based industries that we will need in the future and which will create prosperity.

The briefing that BT provided for us tells us that the tech sector needs 13,000 new skilled professionals each year. We will have to do something different soon if we are to come anywhere close to meeting that demand. The

briefing is a case in point, because it also tells us about the very significant resources that BT is developing to support teaching of STEM in primary schools. That is very good, but the problem is that we cannot leave something as important as that to the efforts of a private company such as BT. It is incumbent on companies that need STEM skills to play their part in making that possible, but it cannot be the foundation of STEM learning.

STEM learning must be consistent across the board, as we have heard from many members. That is also true of the young engineers and science clubs programmes that are run by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, STEM ambassadors, Scottish Engineering's young engineers programmes and the work that was mentioned by Ross Greer that science centres do.

All of those are first-class initiatives, but they are all too randomly dependant on enthusiastic teachers to run and engage with them, on local enterprises being there to engage with schools, or on access to facilities, which is less likely in schools in rural areas or very small schools.

It all comes back primarily to ensuring that all primary teachers have confidence in teaching STEM. Evidence to the committee from the Royal Society of Edinburgh's learned societies group clearly states that

"Teacher expertise has the greatest effect on student achievement."

That is one of the reasons why the committee's next major report will be on initial teacher education.

The truth is that we do not even know the scale of the problem because, as Willie Coffey and Mary Fee said, surveying confidence in STEM actually hides the problem. Often, a high level of confidence in teaching maths masks a very low level of confidence in teaching science and engineering. The Government needs to start collecting that baseline information in a disaggregated way. That is a very easy thing that it could do.

Of course, it is not just about initial teacher education; it is also about continuing professional development. Ross Greer spoke about that. The committee heard that the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre is already providing high-quality STEM teacher training for primary teachers, and would like to do so for more, indeed for all, of them. I know that the convener is already involved with that excellent organisation.

How disappointing, in that case, that SSERC responded to the committee's report by saying that discussions with the Scottish Government about making its programme more comprehensive have

not been positive, and that funding is not forthcoming for expansion of its activities. I know that some members will groan at the suggestion, but Mary Fee was right to say that we will not make progress on that unless we are prepared to pay for it. That is the crux of the issue.

Liz Smith was right to say that we know all that and that we know much of what we have to do but are not doing it fast enough. The committee heard from Professor Ian Wall how previous reports that he had been involved with—for example, those that have been prepared by the science, technology, engineering and mathematics education committee—have made similar recommendations in the past, but the Government has not progressed them with the required urgency, consistency or investment. If we are serious about creating opportunities for our young people in the technology sector, and about investing in the future economic prosperity our country, that has to change, and it has to change now.

17:18

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): We have heard many times in the chamber and in the debate about the importance of encouraging and promoting STEM education, particularly for our youngest generations. The debate has shown that a truly lifelong approach to STEM learning is required. There must be a radical change in how we promote and deliver skills.

Of course, things are by no means bleak. Over many years—decades, in fact—there have been numerous initiatives from schools, charities, volunteers and even from national institutions including the BBC, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh festivals, which have fired the imagination of young people in STEM fields. Many people will remember their first glimpse of a new technology or their first chemistry experiment. Those are often events at which horizons are opened, when the world and its building blocks suddenly become real and the everyday somehow becomes special.

The challenge for us, for educators and for parents is to open our youngest children's eyes to the incredible range of possibilities and opportunities that are available to them. I have previously raised the importance of careers guidance at all stages of children and young people's lives. We know that in STEM, as in other areas, early impressions of jobs and work can stick. Very young children can still identify certain careers as being for men or women, as other members have mentioned. Once established, those impressions can be difficult to break, so we see significant gender divides throughout

schooling, in universities and apprenticeships and, inevitably, in careers. I was delighted to meet two female modern apprentices earlier today who are working in the automated engineering sector and the construction sector. There are, obviously, exceptions to the rule.

As a new member of the Education and Skills Committee, unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to participate in the inquiry into STEM in the early years, which reported in November. The report is a serious and well-considered piece of work, and some of the concerns that it raises will not be straightforward to address.

As Jamie Greene and Ross Greer highlighted, there are questions of confidence among teachers and early years practitioners about delivering age-appropriate STEM teaching and the initial training that they receive. Of course, the term "STEM" is a generalisation and is, as technology enters so many fields of our lives, an increasingly imprecise term. The breadth of the STEM field means that it becomes a question of priorities. We need to consider what knowledge we emphasise, and what we signpost and when. The committee touched on some of those underlying issues in its recommendations.

The issues relating to early years practitioners will be even more important as provision of funded childcare is rolled out and new entrants are increasingly required. As I mentioned, STEM is, by its nature, evolving, so it is important that resources and flexibility are available to provide continuing training and development for teachers and early years practitioners. We should also look to questions about knowledge sharing, collaboration and interdisciplinary learning.

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I want to talk briefly about the committee's conclusions on remote and rural areas. Local authorities in my region are, by necessity, using learning technology in innovative and impressive ways. Equally, they suffer from poor connectivity and central-belt bias when innovation is brought from outside. That must be addressed. Central initiatives clearly should not stop in the central belt.

Members from across the chamber have made good speeches. I am sorry that I do not have time to cover them all, but I will briefly mention a few. My colleague Jamie Greene spoke about STEM being at the heart of the curriculum. Iain Gray spoke about his experience; I am sure that I am not the only member who wants to learn how he demonstrates the speed of light with a microwave oven and chocolate buttons.

Liz Smith talked about the resources that are going into STEM and said that we have not made the progress that needs to be made. She highlighted the need for dedicated science

teachers in primary schools, which she has spoken about previously.

The debate has been a considered one on an important subject. It is a positive thing that we are having it and that Parliament is pushing forward on STEM, even in less-obvious areas of our education and skills landscape. It is vital for the future of our young people that we get it right.

17:22

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Richard Lochhead): I, too, welcome the debate and congratulate the committee, its members and everyone who gave evidence on an important subject and a challenge that our country faces.

I pay tribute to all STEM practitioners across the country. Many members will have had the opportunity to visit schools and early years settings, as well as colleges and universities, and to witness the really good work that is being done across Scotland, thanks to the input of the enthusiastic people who support the STEM agenda. Of course, I also pay tribute to the enthusiastic children and young people to whom Iain Gray referred. Just in the past few months, I have visited many schools and early years settings in my constituency. It is truly a sight to behold to see just how enthusiastic young people are about STEM activities.

The Government is committed to ensuring that we have a highly skilled and educated population who are equipped with the STEM knowledge and capability that are required for them to adapt to and thrive in a fast-changing world and economy. All members have accepted that STEM skills are more relevant than ever. Ross Greer highlighted the global climate emergency, which is but one of the big challenges that we all face. STEM skills will drive the creativity and innovation that Scotland will need in order for it to thrive in the global marketplace and to meet the challenges, including those that arise from the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

As many members have said, all the evidence points to the need to start engagement with STEM early. As the committee's report suggests, children's perceptions of who can do what kind of job form at an early age—perhaps six or seven—so, if we want to tackle ingrained gender disparity in the workforce, which many members have mentioned, we need to start young. Learning in mathematics, science and technology is progressive and needs to be built on in each stage of education. Therefore, the earlier young people can start to get to grips with the concepts and principles of the subjects the better. That is why the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre,

which many members have referred to and which runs a science and technology programme for primary teachers, has been funded for many years by successive Administrations.

Next week, I will publish the second annual report of the five-year STEM strategy—I am sure that all members will pay attention to that—which will show how we are making progress on STEM.

I turn to issues that have been raised by members and are in the committee's report. I am pleased that the committee found high levels of commitment to and enthusiasm for STEM in our schools and early years settings. I acknowledge the amount of innovation that is currently under way around the country in relation to STEM. The committee said that that must be consolidated and that we must ensure that everyone, everywhere, benefits. I could not agree more.

Jamie Halcro Johnston mentioned the need to reach out to rural and remote communities. There are a number of ways in which that is happening now. A fair proportion of grants go to rural settings for professional development for practitioners, schools and early years settings. The science centres, which the Scottish Government funds, have specific outreach programmes for rural and remote communities, and there are public transport subsidies available to ensure that schools and other groups can pay for bus travel to the centres.

A number of members mentioned teachers. We continue to provide more bursaries for career changers, so that we can get more STEM teachers into the education system. There were 108 such bursaries awarded in 2018-19, 111 in 2019-20, and the Scottish Government will, in the next couple of weeks, announce the next round of bursaries for 2020-21. Professional learning and STEM grants of nearly £2 million have assisted education practitioners in all parts of Scotland, and have involved more than 700 educational establishments and nearly 14,000 practitioners this year alone.

We have continued to support the raising aspirations in science education—RAISE—primary science development programme, and the SSERC primary cluster mentoring programme.

We have STEM advisers working with Education Scotland. They are dedicated to supporting STEM education in each of Education Scotland's six regional improvement collaboratives, and they work alongside advisers who specialise in mathematics and digital skills. Digital skills were mentioned by many members.

We have a specific initiative that is dedicated to improving gender balance and equalities. We have taken action to raise awareness of gender bias among parents, families and teachers at all stages

of the education process. We want to build on that: up to December 2019, Education Scotland's improving gender balance and equalities officers engaged with 50 school clusters and held more than 200 engagements with practitioners. There is a lot more happening on that agenda that I could talk about. We will continue to build on our work in that area.

It was mentioned that we should be giving more funding to SSERC: I confirm that its activity around the country will expand and will not contract.

A lot is happening at all stages of education so that we can transform Scotland into a STEM nation. We are going in the right direction, but there is a lot more to do, so we welcome the committee's report, which provides signposts to how we can make things even better.

The Presiding Officer: I call Daniel Johnson, the deputy convener of the Education and Skills Committee, to conclude the debate.

17:28

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I am mindful that decision time is scheduled for half past 5, so I will attempt to sum up rapidly.

The Presiding Officer: There is some flexibility in that.

Daniel Johnson: I thank the clerks and my fellow committee members for the work that has gone into the report. It is a useful and instructive report, which has been reflected in the debate. I thank fellow members for engaging with the outcomes of the work, because I joined the committee at the tail-end of the inquiry. Indeed, my main input was in taking part in the hackathon that the convener, Clare Adamson, referred to. It was great fun and, in a sense, it summed up what we need to do, which is to demonstrate that science, technology, engineering and mathematics are not about dry numbers but that what is important is applying them to achieve creative outcomes.

I will not cover all the following points, but there are four or five broad areas that have been covered by the report and members during the debate. Those areas are the undoubted importance of culture with regard to STEM; issues to do with teacher education and the structure of the profession; the structure of the institutions in support of STEM activities; access to STEM; and, above all else, the importance of measuring outcomes as we seek progress.

It is important to highlight the importance of tackling the cultural issues. A number of members, including the minister, the convener, Ross Greer and Willie Coffey, quite rightly pointed out that we need to demonstrate to people that science is for them. Our biggest task is to prevent people from

thinking that science roles are not accessible to them or appropriate for them. Above all else, doing that work with girls is hugely important if we are to tackle gender imbalances.

Liz Smith spoke very well about teacher education and the structure of the profession, and some of those issues, which Beatrice Wishart and Jamie Greene also raised, are reflected in the report. We must treat with caution calls for initial teacher education to be altered. If we were to include everything that people have called for to be included in initial teacher education, we would never have any teachers entering the profession, because by the time they had finished their training, they would have to retire. However, we need to look at the content of continuing professional development and initial teacher education for STEM subjects.

Rona Mackay and others quite rightly pointed out the need to differentiate between the different elements of STEM, and that should take place as the basis of any structural change. The training of early years teachers is also important, particularly given the complex structure of that part of the education system.

We could have covered at greater length issues such as collaboration through school clusters, regional improvement collaboratives and the future role of SSERC. Alasdair Allan made some good points about the progress that has been made in literacy and numeracy, and the need to make similar progress in STEM.

I do not think that it is possible to address this topic without noting the geographical, social and financial issues relating to access. The concept of STEM capital, which a number of members mentioned, is useful when contemplating all those issues.

Above all else, we need to ensure that we measure progress. Given that the report is on science, it was only appropriate for the committee to take a scientific approach to its recommendations. Out of a total of 22 recommendations, nine require improved measurement of progress. I hope that the Government will take forward all nine of those recommendations in the report that it will announce next week.

Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill

17:32

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of a legislative consent motion. I call Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S5M-21087, on the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 5 June 2019, relating to ticket touting, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Point of Order

17:33

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I raise a point of order under standing orders rule 7.3.1, which says:

“Members shall ... conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner”.

That carries through to the guidance for section 7 of the code of conduct, which says:

“Members shall ... ensure that their choice of language in the Chamber is appropriate and meets the high standards expected by the general public.”

As I understand it, that particularly applies to terms that people find offensive.

I checked the *Official Report* today, in case I had misheard, and I am clear that, in his speech yesterday during the annual international women’s day debate, Patrick Harvie used the term “cisgendered”. “Cis” is an offensive term for many women, myself included. Indeed, I have already respectfully and privately asked a male MSP not to use the term in the chamber, because I find it offensive. It is limiting, confusing and divisive. It is imposed on women, many of whom find it inappropriate and inaccurate, because they do not want to adopt socially determined ideas of masculinity and femininity, and they believe that sex is observed at birth and is not assigned.

In its paper to the Scottish Affairs Committee, Murray Blackburn Mackenzie, the well-respected policy analysis collective, said:

“The term is highly contested and rejected by those who critique the underpinning assumption of innate gender identity.”

The term imposes an identity, regardless of the true lived experience of sex. It rejects the right of women to determine their own identity, and it implies that, since they are “cis”, they are somehow entitled or privileged. It minimises, and even erases, the oppression that women face from birth.

Language in the chamber is important, and we must be clear that, for many women, “cis” is an offensive term that has become weaponised, and that imposing it invalidates the rights of women to identify as women. Patrick Harvie referred to choice in his speech but, ironically, he is choosing terminology about women that many women find completely offensive, disturbing and upsetting. It is a particular affront that a man chose to do that while making a speech during the annual international women’s day debate, which, generally, is consensual and is a chance for women MSPs to contribute as sisters, across party

divides. We do not usually have to contest provocative language that is used by men during an international women's day debate, but perhaps Mr Harvie is not aware that that term is offensive to many women.

Given that sex is a protected characteristic and that there are women in the chamber and among the general public who find the term "cis" deeply offensive, I ask you to ensure that it is not used again in the chamber or in any parliamentary proceedings.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I thank Elaine Smith for giving me advance notice of her point of order—at least, I was given notice of it just before I took the chair.

First, the respect that members are supposed to show one another in the chamber is a matter of order for the chair to rule on. I have had a chance to review the contribution that Mr Harvie made yesterday, and it is clear to me that the term was not used in an inappropriate way. It was not an insult—quite the reverse: it was used in a very thoughtful contribution about intersectionality in what was a consensual debate.

The term itself is not a banned one in the Parliament. However, I recognise that this is a very polarised debate. I also recognise the point that the member made about the fact that language is particularly sensitive in this debate. Therefore, I take this opportunity to say to members on both sides of this argument—and in general—to be careful that they do not stray from using provocative terms to using pejorative or insulting terms. I am quite confident that that was not the case yesterday, and I have confidence in the chairmanship of the Presiding Officer yesterday.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I do not mind taking the point of order, but I would rather not pursue this argument, if at all possible.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful. I hope that it is in order for me to state briefly on the record, so that all members are aware of it, that, when I made my speech yesterday, I was conscious that there are people who reject the term "cisgender" and do not identify with it and would not welcome it being imposed on them. I quite consciously and deliberately phrased that part of my speech in a way that reflected the fact that some do and some do not, and that some have no relationship at all to the socially constructed concept of gender, as many people would understand it. I fully respect that, but I am also someone who is, like many men and women, quite happy to say that I am a cisgendered person, and I hope that others are willing to respect that self-chosen identity.

The Presiding Officer: I did not wish to share this with the chamber, but I am also aware, because he has raised it with me, that Mr Harvie is particularly concerned about the sensitivities around language on this issue. I am conscious that members on both sides of this debate are very aware of the sensitivities around language. In this case, it is clear to me that Mr Harvie did not use the term as an insult. It may have been provocative, but it was not an insult. It was used as part of a balanced contribution.

I am not ruling in favour of Elaine Smith's point of order, but I note that she has made her point forcefully on the record.

Business Motion

17:38

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-21101, 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 10 March 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2020

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Scottish Biometrics Commissioner Bill

followed by Appointment of Auditor General for Scotland

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 11 March 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 12 March 2020

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 Ministerial Statement: Independent Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Tayside

followed by Portfolio Questions:

Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 17 March 2020

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 18 March 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Justice and the Law Officers; Constitution, Europe and External Affairs

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 19 March 2020

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: Economy, Fair Work and Culture

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 9 March 2020, 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.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:38

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S5M-21103 to S5M-21110, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, motion S5M-21128, on referral of the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2020, and S5M-21129, on the appointment of an acting convener.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Specified Type A Procedures) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Tax Rates and Tax Bands) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 (SSI 2020/24) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Treatment of Consumer Scotland as Specified Authority) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Amendment of Specified Authorities) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Act 2014 Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Alcohol (Minimum Price per Unit) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Census (Scotland) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2020 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

That, under rule 12.1A, the Parliament agrees that—

(a) Neil Bibby be appointed as a member of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee; and

(b) an acting convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee shall be chosen for the period 5 March 2020 to 9 September 2020.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:39

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that motion S5M-21089, in the name of Clare Adamson, on science, technology, engineering and mathematics in early years education, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions contained in the Education and Skills Committee's 8th Report, 2019 (Session 5), *Report on STEM in early years education* (SP Paper 624).

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-21087, in the name of Jeane Freeman, on the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 5 June 2019, relating to ticket touting, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is on 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions. The question is, that motions S5M-21103 to S5M-21110, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, motion S5M-21128, on referral of the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2020, and S5M-21129, on the appointment of an acting convener, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Specified Type A Procedures) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Tax Rates and Tax Bands) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 (SSI 2020/24) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Treatment of Consumer Scotland as Specified Authority) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Amendment of Specified Authorities) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Act 2014 Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Alcohol (Minimum Price per Unit) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Census (Scotland) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2020 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

That, under rule 12.1A, the Parliament agrees that—

(a) Neil Bibby be appointed as a member of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee; and

(b) an acting convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee shall be chosen for the period 5 March 2020 to 9 September 2020.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2020

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-20901, in the name of Emma Harper, on eating disorders awareness week 2020. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 2 to 8 March marks Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2020; understands that approximately 1.25 million people in the UK have an eating disorder and that these conditions are serious mental illnesses that can have high mortality rates; acknowledges the importance of organisations such as Beat and the Scottish Eating Disorders Interest Group in providing vital support to families and professionals; notes the valuable work that Diabetes Scotland does to help people who have, or are at risk of developing an eating disorder, and the assistance that it provides to those that support them; commends NHS Lothian and Beat for the development and delivery of nationwide peer-support services for young people with an eating disorder and their families; welcomes the recognition by the Scottish Government in its Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027 of the crucial role that the third sector plays in supporting people, providing services, carrying out research and developing policies; further welcomes the commitment in the Strategy for access to the most effective and safe care and treatment for mental health problems to be made available across Scotland, and commends the Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce for recognising the importance of empowering and supporting families and other carers.

17:41

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to lead this debate during eating disorders awareness week, which runs from 2 to 8 March. This year, the focus is "Why Wait?" I thank colleagues from across the Parliament who signed my motion. For many years, our debates on the subject were proposed by a former member of the Scottish Parliament, Dennis Robertson, who has been a real champion for eating disorders and has undoubtedly played his part in putting the subject on the political agenda. He has been so brave in highlighting that his daughter Caroline died because of an eating disorder. I am aware that he will be listening to the debate.

I particularly thank both the Scottish Eating Disorders Interest Group and Beat, which are represented in the public gallery. Emma Broadhurst from Beat, who has been extremely helpful as I prepared for the debate, has asked for members who speak, if they can attend, to gather for a photo call after the debate. Both charities do fantastic work day in, day out supporting those who are affected by eating disorders, their loved ones and their families.

About 1.25 million people across the UK are living with an eating disorder, and the number is on the increase. Figures show that, in 2018-19, 726 people in Scotland alone were treated for an eating disorder, compared with 436 in 2008-09. Although it is welcome that more people are receiving treatment, it is of course concerning that more people are presenting with eating disorders. It is therefore right that the Scottish Government is taking the issue seriously and has introduced a range of measures to allow for quicker treatment of eating disorders. I will touch on that later.

The definition of an eating disorder is when someone develops an unhealthy attitude to food. It can take over their life and make them very ill. Eating disorders come in various forms, from anorexia, where people try to keep their weight as low as possible by not eating and even overexercising, to bulimia, where people lose control, eat a lot of food in a short time and then make themselves vomit, purging what has been consumed.

A very dangerous eating disorder is diabulimia, which occurs when people with type 1 diabetes—I am a type 1 diabetic—deliberately omit their insulin in order to control their weight. That is very dangerous, as elevated blood glucose can lead to ketoacidosis. I congratulate Diabetes Scotland on its work on diabulimia and encourage anyone who is interested to have a look at its advice and support information.

The key symptoms of the disorders include excessive worrying about weight and body shape; avoiding social situations in which food may be involved; frequently visiting the toilet after meals and returning looking flushed; and not being upfront about what food may be being consumed. It is important for family members, friends and colleagues to be aware of those tell-tale signs.

Eating disorders are complex disorders that can be influenced by many factors. Research has shown that there is a link between eating disorders and depression, low confidence and low self-esteem, and research by many universities and groups continues to point to the relationship between social media and eating disorders, particularly among young people. Social media sites allow young people the opportunity to connect with others on multiple platforms and venues. That is great, as it allows connections to be made and ideas, knowledge and information to be shared. However, as I am sure that members will be aware, social media can also be a dangerous platform for hate and discrimination. Seeing dieting ads or frequently being exposed to images that may provoke body image concerns can be damaging and dangerous to young people. In some cases, the ads and posts may lead to young people developing an eating disorder and

put many others into the at-risk category. Social media interactions are often an extension of an adolescent's life, so being aware of online safety and the issues that young people may face online is so important for families and friends. I ask the Scottish Government to keep that in mind when overseeing the development of any proposed guidance.

I was pleased to hear the Scottish Government's announcement this week that eating disorder services will be subject to a national review that is designed to assess and improve support for people who are living with an eating disorder. The review is due to publish its findings in spring next year, with the aim of providing a full picture of the current support that is available for those with an eating disorder. It will then offer recommendations to inform improvement work throughout 2021.

The review forms part of a programme of work to improve performance in mental health waiting times and to support early intervention in community settings and across the third sector, local government and the national health service. Work on the review will last for six months and will commence following the publication of the mental welfare commission's report on eating disorder services, which is expected this summer. The MWC report will be used as a solid foundation for the review and for future work on eating disorder support services. As co-convenor of the mental health cross-party group, I look forward to continuing to monitor the work, and perhaps we will review eating disorders and the continued work of the Government at one of our meetings.

Recently, I contacted the dietetic team at NHS Dumfries and Galloway, which has a dietician who works specifically with people living with, or at risk of developing, diabulimia, anorexia or other eating disorders. I was interested to hear that, because of Dumfries and Galloway's rurality, some people who are at risk of developing an eating disorder may not be picked up as easily or may be reluctant to access support because of the travel that is involved in attending appointments. I highlighted that issue in the debate last year; I am pleased that it is specifically addressed in the new package of support, but I again ask the minister to ensure that people in hard-to-reach rural areas are supported.

I will briefly mention the Scottish Government's mental health strategy and the children and young people's mental health task force, which was chaired until recently by Dr Catherine Calderwood. The strategy acknowledges the crucial role that the third sector plays in supporting people, providing services and carrying out research. We need to remember the third sector and how important it is that it can contribute. I was therefore

pleased to see that all those points will form a large part of the review work that is being carried out.

I again welcome the opportunity to lead this important debate, and I look forward to hearing from other members.

17:49

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): I thank my colleague Emma Harper for securing this important debate, which acknowledges eating disorder awareness week and the stark reality that more people lose their lives from eating disorders than any other psychiatric condition. As was said by Dr Stephen Anderson, the chair of the eating disorders faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland:

“Eating disorders are the deadliest and most lethal of mental health conditions and we know that earlier intervention saves lives.”

It is imperative to shine a light on the work that is being done, but also the work that needs to be done, not only this week, but week in, week out to improve quick access to the right treatment at the right time. We should always remember that recovery is possible.

I was encouraged by the minister's announcement this week that there will be a thorough but speedy review of eating disorder services. That is a crucial first step to a new programme of action to improve services for those who are living with an eating disorder.

There is growing recognition in the development of public services that changes need to be rooted in the evidence and testimony of those with lived experience. We have seen that in new approaches to tackling homelessness and in building our new social security system from the ground up. Eating disorder services should be no different.

I will share with the chamber the experience of my young constituent and her family. Molly is 16 and she is very bright; her parents are proud of her and her individuality and she is an exceptional young woman. Molly's mum, Lorraine, came to see me last week. She gave a heart-wrenching account of the diligent and persistent attempts by devoted parents, over the course of a year, to try to get help for Molly. There were lots of deeply concerning signs of anxiety and depression, there was regular attendance at the general practitioner, being passed from pillar to post and a lack of treatment options. Although some responses were more positive than others, decisions were made about Molly by people who had never met her. There was poor communication from services and a lack of connectivity between the different services. Thankfully, Molly was eventually seen by a psychiatrist in December—just in time, because

she had to be admitted to hospital because her organs were shutting down due to anorexia.

Molly's mum, Lorraine, described the devastation and anger that she felt at her daughter's life being put in danger due to what she describes as an “absolute failure of systems”. At the end of the day, all that Lorraine wants is for us to do better by our bairns. Any service provider or decision maker would do well to listen to Lorraine's experience of being a mum who has had to battle with the system.

Following a helpful conversation that she had with me last week, I have written to the minister and have asked her to meet Lorraine. I know that the minister will want to identify the best way for the testimony of those with lived experience to be at the heart of the service review.

We have a journey yet to travel to deliver on the principle of “ask once, get help fast”. We need to give serious consideration to how we can meaningfully support parents and carers, especially if intensive home-based treatments are to be developed as an option; I hope that they will be. If funded, there are great opportunities for the voluntary sector to help improve the breadth, depth and connectivity of our services.

Thank you very much to the minister for the conversation that we had last week. I have written to her and I know that she will respond to me very soon.

17:53

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to contribute to Emma Harper's members' business debate. I congratulate her on bringing it to the chamber.

As we have heard, 2 to 8 March is eating disorder awareness week. As we know, about 1.25 million individuals in the UK suffer from an eating disorder of some type. We have also heard that there is a worrying increase in cases in Scotland. I look forward to what the minister has to say about that in her contribution, because I am aware of the situation that she has tackled so far, and a review is a good way forward to try to manage the situation.

These conditions are a serious mental illness. They can and do devastate individuals and families, and, sadly, there is an increasingly high mortality rate. This time last year, I was vocal in my support for eating disorders awareness week when, here at the Scottish Parliament we had Beat's new campaign, sock it to eating disorders, which it promoted in its excellent exhibition in the garden lobby. The campaign recognises and combats the myths and misunderstandings that

surround eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia and binge eating.

In recent years, members of this Parliament have had the opportunity to raise the profile of eating disorders, and tonight's debate is another such opportunity. There is much that we can do to ensure that everyone who is affected by an eating disorder in Scotland can get the help that they need. We can lodge written or oral parliamentary questions to ministers and we can ensure that individuals in our constituencies and regions, including NHS leaders, are aware of the issue.

We heard about the link between eating disorders and social media. We must be live to the concept of body image and the risks that individuals take.

A shocking statistic is that, on average, individuals who have eating disorder symptoms wait for 149 weeks before they seek help. We have to ensure that such people get support and assistance quickly.

The Scottish Eating Disorders Interest Group, Diabetes Scotland, Beat and the NHS all provide vital support to individuals who have or are at risk of developing an eating disorder, but they are under continued pressure and need support if they are to look after vulnerable individuals. The value of such organisations' support and assistance, especially through the delivery of nationwide peer-support services for young people who live with eating disorders and their families, is well understood.

In a recent YouGov survey of adults in the UK, which was conducted for eating disorder awareness week, it was found that more than one in three respondents could not name any sign or symptom of an eating disorder. It is sad that that is the reality. We have to reinforce the message.

It is known that the sooner someone seeks treatment, the better. Treatment is vital, as is acknowledgement of the problem. If individuals are to have faith and be given hope, we must empower them to take action, however long they have had their symptoms.

An eating disorder is a terrible experience for an individual to suffer, whatever their age. I am keen to ensure that, whatever campaign is active at any time, we get the message to as many people as possible, as often as possible and whenever possible, that they require support and assistance if they are to survive their disorders and thrive.

17:57

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Emma Harper on securing this important debate on an issue on which I have long campaigned. I brought a

members' business debate on the issue to the Parliament in February 2008. My former colleague Dennis Robertson led on the issue with great passion during his five years of serving in this Parliament, and I am delighted that Emma Harper has picked up the cudgels.

In 2009, I lodged a motion that expressed concern about the proliferation of pro-anorexia websites, which portray anorexia as a glamorous lifestyle choice rather than a potentially fatal psychiatric illness. More than a decade later, such sites still exist. They offer tips on how to accelerate weight loss and disguise fasting from concerned friends and family, as well as advice on how best to induce vomiting and use laxatives. Pro-anorexia websites reach a wide audience and are particularly aimed at young women.

If we are serious about protecting people from eating disorders, we must do more than just monitor dangerous pro-ana sites. I echo calls from charities such as Beat for social media platforms to act to ensure that content that promotes conditions such as anorexia cannot be posted.

Last year, a study by Youthworks Consulting, which works with schools and local authorities, revealed that eating disorders had overtaken cyberbullying as the top source of online concern among 10 to 16-year-olds. Figures for cyberbullying have remained virtually static since 2014, whereas figures for eating disorders have risen steeply. The data also showed that the proportion of young people who view pro-anorexia sites increases dramatically during the teenage years, from 22 per cent of 12-year-olds to 44 per cent of 15-year-olds.

The numbers are deeply disturbing and completely unacceptable. Beat estimates that around 1.25 million people in the UK have an eating disorder, and it is clear that such disorders are reaching epidemic proportions.

Anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder, from medical complications associated with the illness as well as suicide. Meanwhile, bulimia is associated with severe medical complications and binge eating, and sufferers often experience medical complications associated with obesity.

In every case, an eating disorder affects quality of life, often of not only the sufferer but those who care for them. It is important to treat such conditions as early as possible, rather than when weight is critically low. Family members of people who suffer from eating disorders often believe that their doctor is not well informed. Greater education of the medical profession is required if people are not to be turned away because their weight is "not yet low enough", as has happened in the past.

Specifically, diagnosis and treatment of eating disorders must be taught appropriately and assessed at all Scottish medical schools. The topic of eating disorders is generally overlooked in medical training, with severe consequences for the prognosis and safety of patients. For example, on average just 1.8 hours is spent on teaching about eating disorders, and one in five medical schools in the UK do not provide any teaching on the issue at all. The result is patchy service and inadequate treatment of sufferers. Each of Scotland's junior doctors should gain clinical experience during their foundation training.

Eating disorders are often hidden away from society. I am therefore pleased by the Scottish Government's recent announcement that eating disorder services will be subject to a national review that is designed to assess and improve support for people living with such disorders. At a time when and in a society where much revolves around unrealistic physical representations on television and social media, it can be tempting for girls, boys and adults to negatively change their behaviour to conform to some body-image stereotype. For others, eating disorders are a manifestation of deep-rooted internal issues, trauma or depression. Anyone can be impacted by an eating disorder; such disorders tend to creep up on people, some of whom are not even aware that their relationship with food is unhealthy and that they have a disorder.

Eating disorders awareness week plays a vital role in focusing attention on the causes and symptoms of, and solutions for, these conditions, and I am always keen to support it. I look forward to the publication of the Government's review in spring next year and its recommendations to inform improvement work throughout 2020 and 2021.

18:01

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, commend Emma Harper for bringing this vitally important topic to the chamber, especially during what is, as we have heard, eating disorders awareness week.

As we have already heard, the number people living with eating disorders in the UK is more than 1.25 million. It is a mental health crisis that disproportionately affects our young people, women and girls.

Eating disorders respect no boundaries and pay no heed to status or position. Diana, the late Princess of Wales, spoke publicly in 1994 about the issues and about her battles with bulimia and self-mutilation. She said:

"I am certain the ultimate solution lies within the individual. But, with the help and patient nurturing given by

professionals, family and friends, people suffering eating disorders can find a better way of coping with their lives."

As we all know, Princess Diana fought to increase understanding about bulimia and helped to raise public awareness of eating disorders.

The figure that I referred to is just an estimate, as diagnosis is often delayed or missed entirely. As we have heard, anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness. The start of treatment takes an average of three and a half years from the onset of an eating disorder. That is often due to problems with identification but also because of delays in referral and long waiting times in an already underresourced and overburdened NHS.

All too often, the family and friends of people with eating disorders bear the brunt, offering valuable help to aid recovery but also taking on high levels of psychological distress and their own emotional weight. They, too, are in need of help and support so that they can be fully empowered to help their loved one through the crisis. That is echoed in the theme of this year's eating disorders awareness week.

I welcome the people in the gallery from the charity, Beat, who do outstanding work to support all those affected, as well as raising awareness and looking at better ways to support friends and family members. The support of friends, families and neighbours is key in enabling someone to overcome an eating disorder, but that should not come at the cost of the supporter's mental health.

Beat's "Best practice guidance in the engagement and empowerment of families and carers affected by eating disorders" is a rallying call to arms for healthcare professionals, with eight steps for them to adopt in order to best support everyone involved. I am proud to have signed up and pledged my support to stand with Beat this week, to call for the best care, support and information for people with eating disorders and their friends and family.

As I mentioned, the gap between the onset of an eating disorder and the start of treatment is often too long and can impede recovery, as early support is highly beneficial for long-term recovery.

According to Beat,

"The Scottish 10 Year Mental Health Strategy details a commitment to delivering on the principle of 'ask once, get help fast'. Yet this is far from a reality for many people in Scotland with an eating disorder."

Even once a diagnosis has been given, the care that a patient receives is down to a postcode lottery. A freedom of information request that Beat submitted just last year showed that one NHS health board does not have an adult eating disorder service, one only provides day-patient

services, and one can only treat those with severe anorexia nervosa. That situation is inevitable, given that so little time and so few resources are spent on training medical staff on the issue. One in five medical schools do not provide any training at all, and in those that do, an average of only 1.8 hours is spent teaching about the issue.

This national eating disorders awareness week, let us join together in supporting the call for better care for people with eating disorders and for the family, friends and carers around them, who are also affected, and let us say that, no matter where they are on their road to recovery, we support them.

18:06

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I thank Emma Harper for securing the debate. Today, we raise awareness of a national issue that is estimated to affect 1.25 million people in the United Kingdom. It is an issue that is rarely discussed in our open spaces because of the societal stigma that renders those affected unable to recognise their illness or voice their struggles.

Eating disorders are a medical illness—they are serious, can be fatal, and can affect anyone. Whether or not we are personally affected by eating disorders, this week is about becoming better, more considerate and more informed. Our empathy and understanding can be lifesaving for those who suffer from anorexia, bulimia, binge eating and other specified feeding or eating disorders.

Organisations such as Beat and the Scottish Eating Disorders Interest Group have been tremendous resources in demystifying the complexities of the illness. We are able to understand more about eating disorders despite not having any reason to know about them outside of what is shown in the media. The media has portrayed a particular story about who gets eating disorders, what causes them and what the symptoms are. Although the media can open the public up to more understanding, it perpetuates a stereotype that only young females are affected, which does not reflect the full spectrum of the issue. According to Beat, eating disorder stereotypes make the illness even harder to spot among older people, men and boys and ethnic and cultural minority groups. Inaccurate depictions of eating disorders can cloud the reality that all demographics might be facing.

Diabetes Scotland founded a campaign after noticing the lack of emotional and mental health support for people with diabetes. Diabetes and food are closely linked, so having diabetes can lead to an unhealthy hyperfocus on food that leads some people to feel negative about their diet,

weight and body image. Most people do not recognise the emotional impact that diabetes can have, which can possibly lead to an eating disorder. Diabetes UK reported that patients have felt that they cannot get the emotional and mental health support that they need. Mitigating those frustrations is something that we can all take part in as a community.

The Mental Health Foundation found that one in three people with eating disorders had experienced stigma or discrimination in the workplace, and more than 80 per cent said that they did not feel that their employer was informed about eating disorders or how to handle them. Such reports highlight just how highly stigmatised eating disorders are. People are reluctant to talk to someone because they feel that their disorder is not serious enough, fear that they will worry people or waste their time, or feel guilty or ashamed. Our dialogue and conversations can help to break the stigma that often acts as a barrier to recovery.

NHS Fife has two incredible programmes to help those of all ages who are dealing with eating disorders. Fife child and adolescent mental health service established Scotland's first intensive therapy service in 2002. Of the children and young people who have been seen by the ITS, approximately 50 per cent have been diagnosed with an eating disorder. The service provides high levels of therapeutic support to young people and their families.

NHS Fife is also lucky to have the anorexia nervosa intensive treatment team, which is made up of a small number of multidisciplinary professionals—a psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist, a dietician, assistant clinical psychologists and a team administrator. NHS Fife is committed to continuing its support of and treatment for all who present with an eating disorder.

For people with eating disorders to feel safe enough to disclose their pain, they need our understanding, compassion and acceptance. In the light of eating disorders awareness week, I encourage everyone to prioritise their mental health and treat it with urgency. People deserve to have their concerns acknowledged respectfully, to be taken seriously and to be supported in the same way that they would be if they were affected by any other illness.

18:10

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): I am pleased to respond to the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government. It is right that we hold this debate each year to mark eating disorders awareness week, as it allows us to raise

awareness of eating disorders and the terrible impacts that they can have not just on those who are diagnosed but on their family and friends.

I want to acknowledge a few people, in particular, for their work in continuing to raise the profile of this devastating illness. First, I thank Emma Harper for lodging the motion and for continuing to focus minds on how important the subject of eating disorders is. That includes her continued work to raise awareness of eating disorders in relation to diabetes and to draw our attention to the important work that Diabetes Scotland does to help people who have, or who are at risk of developing, an eating disorder.

As I mentioned last year, I want to continue to honour our former colleague Dennis Robertson. Dennis opened many of these debates in the past, and I want to assure him that we will continue to fight for the right help and support to be available across Scotland.

I thank Beat, which continues to campaign tirelessly to raise awareness of eating disorders and to provide guidance and support for those with an eating disorder and their families and friends. I know that representatives from Beat are in the public gallery, and I hope that they are heartened by the cross-party interest in their work.

Lastly, I extend my thanks to those people across the country who work day in and day out to improve the lives of those with an eating disorder and their families.

On Monday, I visited NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to mark the start of eating disorders awareness week and to announce the Government's commitment to a national review of eating disorder services, which I will return to later in my speech. I was really moved and inspired by what I heard during that visit. I spoke to young people and their families to hear about the support that they had received from the Connect-ED service, and two things were very clear. The first was the life-changing impact that our NHS staff can have on young people and their families, and the second was the fact that recovery from eating disorders is possible. It was a common theme throughout the visit that, even when things are at their darkest, the right help and support can make the world of difference.

Last year's debate focused on tackling discrimination and breaking down the stereotypes that are associated with eating disorders, and many of the members who have spoken in this evening's debate also spoke in that debate. As I outlined last year, eating disorders do not discriminate—anyone can be affected by them. They are serious illnesses that can change the lives not just of the people who are directly impacted by them but of those who care for and

support them. That is why the theme of this year's awareness week is incredibly important. This year, Beat is raising awareness of eating disorders and the support that it can provide to anyone who is affected. In particular, Beat wants to highlight the impact that eating disorders have on families, friends and everyone who cares for people with such a disorder. As we have heard, approximately 1.25 million people in the UK live with an eating disorder, but many more lives are impacted by each individual illness, and it is crucial that we recognise that.

Beat wants to highlight the fact that people with eating disorders are much more likely to recover with the support of family and friends. However, we need to ensure that people who support individuals with an eating disorder are also provided with appropriate support and information. That was another of the recurring themes that I heard during my visit to Connect-ED on Monday—the power of peer support, especially for parents, was brought up time and time again. Knowing that someone else is going through the same thing can be transformative, and the families to whom I spoke only wish that there had been more such support available.

That is one of the reasons why, last year, we committed to an expansion of NHS Lothian's and Beat's national digital peer support service for people with an eating disorder. We also launched Echo, which is a telephone coaching service for parents and carers. Through hundreds of hours of telephone support and emails over the past year, those support services have ensured that young people and their parents and carers have been provided with the support and guidance that they have required.

I have mentioned the Scottish Government's commitment to a national review of eating disorder services, which is a game-changing piece of work that I hope is supported by all members across the chamber. We will build on the work of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, which is currently conducting themed visits of eating disorder services across Scotland and will publish its report in the summer this year. That will include a review of adult services and child and adolescent mental health services as well as out-patient, NHS and independent eating disorder care in Scotland.

Following the publication of that report, we will begin our six-month review, which will be independently led and will cover eating disorder services for adults and young people from the age of 12 upwards. It will conduct a needs assessment of the services that are provided by the third sector and community eating disorder support across Scotland, and it will make recommendations for a best-practice structure for specialist eating

disorder services in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. It will also make recommendations on what age limit—if any—there should be for an eating disorder service.

We will make a further announcement about who will lead the review in due course. Our ambition is that the review will inform a second phase of investment and improvement work following the publication of its report in early 2021.

I want to talk about the excellent contributions that we have heard.

Emma Harper raised the issue of social media. We will publish social media and screen-time guidance in the coming weeks. That guidance has been developed by young people for young people, and the advice will include advice on the impact that social media can have on young people's body images.

Angela Constance gave a very moving and concerning account of a constituent's experience of services. She has written to me, and I will write back to her in due course. On the back of what I heard from parents and carers on Monday at Connect-ED and from Angela Constance's constituent's experience, I have also undertaken to write to the Royal College of General Practitioners, to discuss how we can work together to raise awareness in primary care settings of eating disorders, their signs and symptoms, and their diagnosis and treatment.

Alexander Stewart made a very considered speech, and Kenneth Gibson spoke about his passion for raising awareness of eating disorders over many years.

David Stewart gave us a very important and pertinent lesson in recognising the contribution of families, carers and friends to the recovery process.

I thank David Torrance for his measured contribution and his congratulations on the fine work that is being done by his local NHS board.

I again thank Emma Harper, Beat and everyone else who is involved in campaigning for the right help and support to always be available for anyone who is affected by an eating disorder. I assure them that they have the Government's full support.

Meeting closed at 18:18.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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