



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Tuesday 10 May 2022

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 10 May 2022

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is the Rev Alan Kimmitt, who is the minister of St Columba's parish church in Glenrothes.

The Rev Alan Kimmitt (St Columba's Parish Church of Scotland, Glenrothes): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the privilege of addressing you this afternoon.

When Jenny Gilruth first asked whether she could put my name forward to deliver a time for reflection address, I replied that it would be a privilege, which it is. I add it to my list of privileges as a white, heterosexual, middle class, comparatively affluent, educated and reasonably articulate male minister of the kirk.

The same day that she asked, I sat with a family preparing for a funeral, and I listened as they shared their bereavement story. At the end, I said, as I often do:

"It has been a privilege to share a bit of your journey."

It is a privilege to address members this afternoon, but it is not as much of a privilege as it is to be allowed to journey with people, especially at difficult times.

I presume that members of this Parliament will have taken a keen interest in the council elections last week, campaigning and supporting friends, colleagues or perhaps even family members. Perhaps there were moments when you reflected on what first drew you into politics. I doubt that it was the undemanding working schedule or the stress-free lifestyle; it was probably more to do with people, stories, things that you had witnessed and the sense that you might be able to make a difference.

One of our local councillors described her feelings at watching votes being counted, including those with her name on them. She said it was "humbling".

As a minister, I have the privilege to listen to the stories of others and I know that you share that privilege. I admit that I cry at the "Toy Story" films but, apart from that, I usually only feel emotional after people allow me into their lives. We do not have to have lost a child or suffered abuse or be

living with cancer to listen to and accompany people.

As a Christian, I often look to the life of Jesus. In addition to the stories in the gospels, he must have had thousands of conversations with all sorts of people. Several times in the Bible, we read that Jesus went away to a lonely place, where he prayed. I find that an incredibly helpful example.

Prayer might not be your thing, but I hope that we might all find some time this week to reflect on the very real privilege of caring for, serving and sharing the journeys of others.

Topical Question Time

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is topical question time. In order to get in as many members as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions, and responses to match.

Ineos Group Ltd (Grangemouth Refinery Restructuring Discussions)

1. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Ineos regarding possible restructuring at the Grangemouth refinery. (S6T-00685)

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): Grangemouth is a source of critical infrastructure, energy resilience, skilled manufacturing and high-value employment and, as we would with any business of such significance, Scottish ministers and officials routinely engage with Grangemouth operators.

Regarding the member's reference to the refinery business, it would not be at all appropriate for me to comment on any media speculation regarding commercial matters, or potential commercial decisions, at one specific company.

The Grangemouth cluster, with its world-leading engineering experience, expertise, assets and low-carbon manufacturing potential, should play an important role in our net zero economy and we continue to work closely with the industry and key businesses there to help harness that potential.

Tess White: As the minister said, the Grangemouth refinery is one of the most strategically important employers in Scotland, with hundreds of staff who will, understandably, be alarmed by the prospect of restructuring at the refinery. What discussions has the Scottish Government had with Ineos about the retention of jobs at the site, following the reports? Has the Grangemouth future industry board convened to respond to that worrying development?

Màiri McAllan: I reiterate what I said in my previous answer: it is not appropriate for me or for Scottish ministers to comment on media speculation regarding the commercial operations of a single organisation or company.

The member is right that the Grangemouth cluster and the skills and workforce there are exceptionally important. The refinery and surrounding businesses in the Grangemouth cluster provide a major source of highly skilled manufacturing jobs and world-leading engineering

expertise. Those jobs have tremendous potential to support a just transition towards a net zero economy. As I said, Scottish Government ministers and officials continue to engage with industry and businesses at the complex to foster that potential.

Tess White: The minister recognises that Grangemouth is important. It accounts for 4 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product and 8 per cent of Scotland's manufacturing. It is critical to national infrastructure and supplies two thirds of the petrol and diesel that are used in Scotland, as well as jet fuel for airports. Any change in the outlook for the refinery's future has wide-ranging and wide-reaching repercussions. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the economic impact of potential restructuring and of the impact on energy resilience and fuel supply?

Màiri McAllan: I must once again point out that the member's question is based on media speculation and that it is not appropriate for Scottish ministers to comment on the terms or implications of it.

I am keen to stress to the member and to all in the chamber that our objective is to future proof that vital industrial hub and work in partnership with industry. That will help to support a long-term sustainable and vibrant future for all those who live and work in Grangemouth, for all the reasons that the member set out in her question.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I am aware of the Grangemouth future industry board, which has already been mentioned. We can all agree that Grangemouth is a hub for skilled manufacturing and high-value employment. Will the minister give a little more detail about the role that the board will play in ensuring that, regardless of any restructuring, Grangemouth continues to be a key part of the transition to net zero?

Màiri McAllan: The member raises an important question. I hope that my answer will deal with the part of Tess White's question that asked about the board, which I neglected to answer, for which I apologise.

The Scottish Government established the Grangemouth future industry board in recognition of our continued commitment to the cluster both now and in the future as part of our net zero economy. The board brings together key partners and decision makers to work with industry and to actively plan that all-important just transition for the complex. In doing that, we are seeking to unlock investment that will boost the innovation, longevity and competitiveness of the site.

The board will initiate and lead on the design of a just transition plan for the Grangemouth industrial cluster, in line with the principles of a just

transition. That plan for the complex will be built collectively and in consultation with a wide range of invested stakeholders, which will of course include industry.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I grew up in Grangemouth and I know how important a just transition will be for workers, the planet and the communities that surround the refinery. The community needs the Scottish Government to do everything that it can to deliver a just transition. Does the minister agree that the future of Grangemouth depends on a just transition away from fossil fuels that is led by the local communities and trade unions, which must be involved in future decisions around the plant and should be represented on the Grangemouth future industry board?

Màiri McAllan: I thank the member for the question. I know that her connections with the area will make her feelings on the subject very acute.

The Scottish Government's position on the need for the fastest possible just transition to net zero is clear. As I have said, Grangemouth, with its skills, engineering expertise, manufacturing potential and assets, could play a very key role in enabling Scotland's just transition to net zero. To help to realise that, as I said, we recently established the Grangemouth future industry board.

On the next steps, as I said to Michelle Thomson, the board will lead on the design of a just transition plan for the cluster, which will be built in line with just transition principles. On trade union dialogue, the Scottish Government will always engage closely with trade unions as a matter of course where their interests are concerned.

Fuel Poverty (Support)

2. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests as an owner of a rented property in North Lanarkshire.

To ask the Scottish Government what preparations it is making to support people in Scotland, in light of the reported comments by the chief executive of Scottish Power warning that 10 million United Kingdom homes could potentially be in fuel poverty this winter. (S6T-00688)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Energy costs lie at the heart of the cost of living crisis, and this Government is committed to doing everything in our powers to support those who need it. That includes the £150 cost of living award to support households with higher fuel costs, but also the further £10 million that is being provided to continue our fuel insecurity fund.

We are set to invest almost £770 million this year to tackle cost of living pressures through family benefits and other unique social security payments. Crucially, we are also committed to investing at least £1.8 billion over the next five years in heat and insulation for Scotland's homes and buildings, with programmes already being enhanced and increased.

More needs to be done. Powers relating to energy markets sit at the UK level, and we have repeatedly urged the UK Government to take urgent and decisive action to support households in both the immediate and longer terms, such as a one-off windfall tax on companies that have benefited from significantly higher profits during the pandemic and the energy crisis, and the temporary removal of VAT from energy bills.

We are actively engaging with the sector and stakeholders—for example, through the Scottish energy advisory board, of which the chief executive of Scottish Power is a member—to explore what more can be done. We believe that all four nations should be involved in planning to address the crisis, which affects people throughout the UK.

Mark Griffin: The first part of the solution to rocketing fuel costs is to put money into the pockets of the people who need it most. Scottish Labour had a plan to do that, but the Government ignored it in favour of mirroring the unfair UK scheme.

The second part is to make people's homes cheaper to heat as soon as it is humanly possible. Last week, the Existing Homes Alliance set out a framework of practical and financial support to decarbonise our heating systems. However, the energy cap will go up in just four and a half months' time, so the underlying principle of reducing heat demand ahead of time is even more urgent this year. Will the Government come before Parliament before the recess and set out how many homes it can insulate before the coming winter?

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that Mr Griffin knows that we already have a very active programme of work in this area and we have already announced significant expansions of it over the course of this year in response to the cost of living crisis.

Responding to the crisis this year, we boosted support through our long-standing programmes, which have already supported over 150,000 households that were in, or at risk of being in, fuel poverty. We are widening the eligibility criteria for the £55 million warmer homes Scotland fuel poverty programme, which will provide an offer of support to over 7,500 households this year.

We are also increasing the level of funding for individual fuel-poor households through the £64

million local authority-led, area-based schemes, and we are expanding the Home Energy Scotland advice service to help households to keep their homes warmer and reduce bills. There is capacity to support an extra 12,000 households a year, and we are doubling the offer to vulnerable households.

Mark Griffin is correct in saying that energy efficiency is one of the most urgent things that we need to do, so I hope that he will join me in calling on the UK Government to revise its woefully inadequate energy security strategy, which says nothing at all about energy efficiency.

Mark Griffin: That is, indeed, a glaring omission on the UK Government's part, which I hope it rectifies as soon as possible.

However, it has been reported that the insulation equity loan scheme has left home owners out of pocket and solicitors who have looked at those agreements absolutely shocked. The number of homes that the warmer homes Scotland programme has helped with the installation of energy efficiency measures has fallen every year since 2016. Just two weeks ago, in response to a parliamentary question, the Government admitted that the Home Energy Scotland marketing scheme has wound up, for now.

Will the Government reboot its campaign and ramp up direct engagement with every home owner and landlord in Scotland so that householders can get financial support to make improvements before the winter?

Patrick Harvie: In my previous answer, I gave several examples of how we have expanded and are continuing to expand not only the eligibility for but the scale of our support to households who face fuel poverty—and to all of Scotland in the transition to renewable heat as well as to high energy efficiency. Mark Griffin knows, I think, that we are committed to doing that at as big a scale and as fast a pace as we can. However, to achieve that throughout Scotland is a multidecade task that cannot be compressed into the space of a few months.

I am quite happy to write to the member with any other information that he requires about our ambitious programme of work in that area. I hope that colleagues on the Scottish Labour benches will work with us constructively—not demanding the impossible, but pushing us to go as far and as fast as we can. We are committed to doing that, for which, I hope, we have the support of the whole Parliament.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Does the minister agree that, although the Scottish Government can, to a point, use our devolved social security powers to put

more money into people's pockets and mitigate the harms of escalating fuel poverty, together with signposting assistance that is available through organisations such as Citrus Energy in Ayrshire, the UK Government holds the levers for delivering meaningful support to citizens and that, if it fails to do that, it sends a strong message to all struggling families that it just does not get it or it just does not care?

Patrick Harvie: It is a matter of fact that the powers to regulate energy markets remain reserved. For example, the proposal for a £1,000 cut to energy bills that came forward from the Scottish Power chief executive in his recent interview is deliverable only through the powers that rest with the UK Government. We have repeatedly called on it to take other actions, including a temporary cut in energy bills through VAT, a review of the levies on bills, action on the warm home discount scheme and the creation of a four-nations discussion to develop an effective response to the energy bill increases.

The Scottish Government is disappointed that the UK Government has failed to support hard-pressed households and to engage with us multilaterally to achieve more, such as could be achieved with a one-off windfall tax on excessive profits in the oil and gas industry or anywhere else. That scale of work is needed, and I hope that the UK Government feels that it is not too late to change direction and listen to such proposals.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Given the failure of the UK Government to support—even in today's Queen's speech—those on fixed incomes with the horrendous rise in the cost of living and energy, and given that 40 per cent of pensioners who are entitled to pension credit—currently £182.60 a week for a single person and £278.70 for a couple—do not claim it and that the Treasury keeps more than £300 million a year in unclaimed pension credit in Scotland alone, rising to almost £1.8 billion in unclaimed benefits UK-wide, does the minister agree that the level of money that is retained by the Treasury in unclaimed benefits is a disgrace, that it should direct its energies into helping people to claim those benefits to which they are entitled, and that that would at least give them some help in meeting those living costs?

Patrick Harvie: Christine Grahame is not the only one who was slightly surprised at the lack of action in the Queen's speech today on the cost of living crisis. She is right to point to action on unclaimed and underclaimed benefits as a very obvious thing that could be done to maximise household incomes. We need to make sure that people are accessing the money that they are entitled to.

It is a disgrace that there is £1.7 billion—that is the figure that I have, but if it is £1.8 billion I stand to be corrected—sitting in UK Government coffers instead of in the pockets and purses of pensioners who need it so badly.

The Scottish Government will continue to place an emphasis on income maximisation schemes, and there is a great deal that we can do to support people to have the information that they need about the benefits that they are entitled to. I hope that the UK Government will take similar action.

New Mothers (Mental Health Care)

3. Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to provide local support to new mothers who require a specialist mental health bed with their baby, following recent reports that many are having to travel hundreds of miles in order to receive the treatment that they need. (S6T-00687)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): All women who require a specialist mental health bed with their baby are able to access regional mother and baby unit provision. Mother and baby units provide treatment and support to approximately 115 patients per year. The treatment that the units provide is highly specialised care for the small number of women and their infants who experience severe perinatal mental health difficulties and require more intensive support than can be provided in the community. Mother and baby units are open to all women across Scotland, based on clinical need, not on geography.

We recognise that there are barriers associated with receiving treatment away from home, which is why we opened the mother and baby unit family fund, which supports partners and families with the costs of travel, accommodation and other expenses that are incurred while visiting a mother and baby at an MBU.

We are currently undertaking an options appraisal that will evaluate potential options for increasing mother and baby unit capacity. We have a live consultation, which is open until 31 May, to hear from parents, partners, families and practitioners from across Scotland. The consultation is on the Scottish Government website.

We have been working closely with colleagues in health boards in the north of Scotland to support the development of community services in their areas, so that the right support can be provided at the time when it is needed. In recent months, NHS Highland and NHS Grampian have launched their community perinatal mental health teams, which will improve access to specialist treatment.

Beatrice Wishart: There are no dedicated in-patient mental healthcare beds for new mothers north of Livingston. Hospitals in Shetland and Livingston have a contractual agreement for perinatal mental health services; my constituents are expected to take a long journey by air or sea with their newborns.

Does the minister agree with the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland that new mothers face a postcode lottery when it comes to perinatal services?

Kevin Stewart: As I pointed out in my first answer, we are talking about very specialised care that has been accessed by 115 mothers and their babies in the recent year.

We are considering what expansion is required. One thing that we need to do—which we are doing—is ensure that the right community support is in place across the country. We are making sure that we can provide that support in the communities where it is required, and that services in the north of Scotland are as good as they can be.

I ask Ms Wishart to encourage her constituents in Shetland to respond to the current consultation, which is extremely important. We will take cognisance of what people across the country have to say about the services.

Beatrice Wishart: I will encourage my constituents to do just that.

The Press and Journal has been campaigning to raise awareness of perinatal mental health services, with one report highlighting the difficulties that are faced by partners travelling to support their loved one and see their newborn baby. It is easy to see how costs can rack up for families with grandparents and other children visiting. Every family is different, so healthcare provision should strive for equitable support where there are big differences in respect of the travel that is required.

The maximum level of claim-back costs from the family fund is £500, which is almost the cost of one air fare from Shetland. The money should cover travel, subsistence and accommodation. Will the Scottish Government improve the criteria and increase financial provision for families who engage perinatal mental health services, especially for families who live furthest from services?

Kevin Stewart: Our first aim is to strengthen community services so that women do not have to access a mother and baby unit unless doing so is entirely necessary. I hope that Beatrice Wishart supports us in our efforts in that regard.

On the costs of visiting mother and baby units, we have, as I outlined in my first response, put in

place the mother and baby unit family fund. I am more than willing to have further discussions with Ms Wishart about her constituents' experience of accessing the fund, and to look at whether we can do anything else in that regard. I am happy to correspond with or to meet Ms Wishart on the issue.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): The minister is aware of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's report on perinatal mental health, and of my interest in perinatal mental health services in Grampian.

Can the minister say more about how the increased community support for new mothers' perinatal mental health is improving outcomes for them and their babies? Will he outline any new measures that are being taken to identify and treat the symptoms of mental ill health early in new mums and mums to be, particularly in rural areas?

Kevin Stewart: I acknowledge Ms Martin's interest in the issue. She is not only the convener of the committee that held the inquiry but has, as a North East MSP, been in contact with the Let's All Talk North East Mums—LATNEM—mothers group, as have I.

The Government is putting in additional funding for community specialist mental health services in every health board in Scotland, and in-patient services for women and families with the highest level of need. We are also investing in 33 third sector organisations that provide perinatal mental health support to women and families, and we are providing funding to support voices of lived experience, which have been vital in helping us to formulate our current consultation on how we move forward with perinatal and infant mental health in this country. Once again, I encourage everyone out there who has an interest to respond to the consultation.

I applaud the work of LATNEM and other women's groups across Scotland for bringing the issue to the fore.

Scottish Government's International Work

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-04294, in the name of Clare Adamson, on behalf of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, on its inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work. I would be grateful if members who wish to take part in the debate were to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

14:27

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): As convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, I am delighted to bring the debate to the chamber.

This is a large area to cover, and we are grateful to everyone who gave evidence to the committee. I am grateful, too, to our clerks for organising our evidence sessions and my committee members for their endeavours in this area.

We should, perhaps, take a step back and widen the lens to see the bigger picture. External affairs is one part of the committee's remit, but it is one that represents a vast policy area. The themes from our inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work are fivefold. I will not be able to do justice to them all, but I am sure that my committee colleagues will pick up some of the issues that I miss.

In outline, our report highlights the importance of adopting a strategic approach, the need for prioritisation of policies to flow from that approach, and an emphasis on effective collaboration across government.

The report also highlights challenges inherent to measuring impact and the not small matter of how we improve parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's work in this area. I will offer some context for each of those, while also setting out our key findings under the headings of: updating the international framework; our relationship with the EU; international relations more widely; and international development.

Since devolution began, successive Scottish Governments have sought a European presence as well as wider international engagement.

Scotland's international framework was published five years ago and had not been revisited since Brexit. The Scottish Government had committed to publishing a revised document and yesterday it published "Scotland's Global Affairs Framework". That is a very welcome development. However, as, I am sure, the cabinet

secretary will appreciate, the committee has had neither the time nor opportunity to consider its content. I look forward to hearing more on that this afternoon, but by necessity, I will keep my own remarks within the parameters of the committee's inquiry.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Yesterday saw the publication of "Scotland's Global Affairs Framework", which few of us have had time to look through. As the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, is the member expecting more from the update of the international framework, which, as she said, is now five years old?

Clare Adamson: The committee is looking forward to all developments. It is important that we have up-to-date information from the Government. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will elaborate on that in his speech.

It is not simply a question of who we engage with, but also how and why. A focus on Europe is expected to be a priority, but we also take the view that wider external engagement is necessary. That engagement must be informed by a strategic approach and with a clear geographical and thematic rationale.

We believe that a revised international framework should link to and flow from the national performance framework. It should be at the heart of the Scottish Government's approach to external affairs and it should provide a foundation for all other relevant frameworks, strategies and policy documents. Such an approach will provide a better understanding of the Scottish Government's priorities.

We also recommend that the revised framework sets out values and objectives; stipulates a long-term timeframe; prioritises countries, regions and themes and provides a clear rationale for that prioritisation; links to relevant aspects of economic, cultural and education policy; integrates international offices into its strategy; explores how to better inform the public and media of that work; takes into account the findings of our report; and is published as a draft for consultation. Furthermore, with so much of the focus on trade, we suggest that there should be read-across with key economic strategies, including the report of the advisory group on economic recovery; Scotland's national strategy for economic transformation; and "Scotland Outlook 2030—Responsible tourism for a sustainable future".

We consider it to be crucial that Scotland continues to have a strong relationship with the European Union. The situation is evolving post Brexit and I believe that the Queen's speech contained more developments in that area. I look

forward to the cabinet secretary's response to those.

We recommend that the Scottish Government publishes a strategy setting out how it intends to approach that engagement. That strategy should include the Government's priorities in relation to alignment with EU law; operation of the trade and co-operation agreement; engagement of Scottish institutions in EU programmes; a United Kingdom-wide approach; and soft power and informal engagement.

Until today, the Scottish Government was still to respond to the committee's report on the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021. Given that we published that report in November, we are concerned about that. I hope that the cabinet secretary will be able to elaborate on the matter during his remarks.

I turn now to wider international relations and soft power. Dr Kirsty Hughes, of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, told us that

"Scotland's trade, cultural links, soft power reputation and more extend globally, so prioritising some external affairs work beyond the EU is clearly necessary."

James Hampson, director for the UK region and external affairs of the British Council said:

"We are in the optimism business ... we help people to realise their ambitions and aspirations."

The British Council spoke about research undertaken with Creative Scotland and Universities Scotland that showed the impact of soft power on business, tourism, international study and diplomacy.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): As a former Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, I wonder whether the member agrees with me that soft power is something that a Government projects but is not something that a Government advertises in a soft-power strategy?

Clare Adamson: The committee wants to be able to understand the Government's priorities and celebrate the good work that is being done out there, which deserves more coverage in the media so that the public is aware of it.

A recent study that was carried out by the British Council in conjunction with the University of Edinburgh discussed the potential returns from investment in the area of soft power. A 1 per cent increase in the locations that are covered by a cultural institution, for instance, showed an almost 0.66 per cent increase in inward investment for the parent country, which is a figure that would have generated £1.3 billion for the UK in 2016.

The Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance highlighted our reputation on climate policy, digital economy and human rights legislation but pointed

to areas where improvement is possible. Professor Murray Pittock, who is a co-chair of SAHA, pointed to the—

“relatively poor recognition ... of Scotland’s cutting-edge position in science, as one of the most cited countries in the world”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 25 November 2021; c 13.]

In SAHA’s view, the aim was to modernise the image that we present to the world while not losing the vitality of its appeal. We pride ourselves on being a science nation, but perhaps we have to promote that a bit more widely. As someone who recently introduced Professor David MacMillan—a Nobel prize winner from Scotland—at the Royal Society of Edinburgh, I know that those opportunities are there for us.

The Scottish Government plans to produce a cultural diplomacy strategy. We recommend that it includes a clear rationale setting out priorities and objectives that link to and flow from the revised international framework, and that it sets out how it will interplay with the UK’s approach to foreign policy.

Our view is that issues that are prioritised in external relations ought to be driven by, match and inform domestic priorities. “Policy coherence” is the phrase that is used by academics and commentators. According to the United Nations,

“Policy coherence can help policy-makers better understand how their policy choices today can affect the future population, and how their choices could impact on wellbeing and sustainable development elsewhere.”

That harmonisation of policy will be important for mainstreaming the international agenda across Government. However, that is not just an issue for policy makers; we all need to understand how our actions and behaviours impact on other communities, however far from these shores. Professor Kurt Mills from the University of Dundee and Dr Andrea Birdsall from the University of Edinburgh told us that human rights should be embedded in all aspects of international engagement. They commended the Scottish Government’s commitment to develop a feminist foreign policy, and highlighted initiatives around climate justice, human rights, and peace building.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):

The member refers to human rights and, as she has alluded to, there was reference to UK human rights legislation in the Queen’s speech today. Can the member indicate whether she feels that that will have implications for Scotland’s human rights work, given that we do not really know why the UK intends to replace that legislation?

Clare Adamson: Scotland has shown its commitment to human rights, and the committee will be considering the issue following the Queen’s

speech, but I am afraid that I have not been able to take on all the detail of that yet.

The committee is concerned that any tensions between ambitions and commitments, whether in the realms of trade, education or cultural exchange, are subject to parliamentary scrutiny. We need good information to gauge where there is policy coherence, where it may be lacking and where the case can be made for trade-offs or compromise.

The Law Society of Scotland argued for greater transparency; it told us that a clearer and more detailed strategy would be easier to assess in terms of outcomes and delivery. Similarly, the Royal Society of Edinburgh said that more regular and detailed reporting would enable further scrutiny.

We recognise the challenges in measuring the impact of diplomacy and soft power. Such work can be difficult to quantify in direct and immediate benefits, but there are initiatives that seek to address that, including the now formally launched Scottish council on global affairs, which is an independent academic network that is supported on a cross-party basis. As Professor Phillips O’Brien, the chair of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews, has said:

“It’s the right institution at the right time.”

We encourage the Scottish Government to keep exploring how it can measure the impact of its international work. We also recommend that it publish an annual report that details the contribution of the international offices.

The final area that I want to cover is international development. We acknowledge the importance of international development within the international strategy. Written responses to our inquiry suggested that policy should be based around developing thematic expertise in areas such as climate change, gender and migration—the latter including support for refugees.

The committee has been looking separately at the humanitarian response to the crisis in Ukraine. We have taken powerful evidence from the Disasters Emergency Committee, the Scottish Refugee Council, the Red Cross and others. However, in the wider context of international development policy, we recognise that the budget—welcome as the recent increase in funding has been—remains relatively modest.

I have run out of time. I have not been able to cover everything that I would have liked to cover but, as I have said, I am sure that members of the committee and other members will pick up on some of those areas.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's 3rd Report, 2022 (Session 6), *Inquiry into the Scottish Government's International Work* (SP Paper 154).

14:41

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I thank the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee for her remarks, and I very much look forward to debating her committee's excellent report and hearing from members across the chamber who serve on her committee.

First, I want to reflect on how much the world has changed between my committee appearance in early February and now. I am sure that all colleagues are sickened by the evidence of war crimes committed by Russian forces in Ukraine that continues to emerge, and I welcome the decision to suspend the Russian Federation from the United Nations Human Rights Council. Russia must be held accountable for any abuses that it commits on Ukrainian territory, and it must fulfil its human rights obligations, including its on-going liability for breaches of the European convention on human rights. Above all—I am sure that I speak for everybody in the chamber when I say this—we salute the courage and perseverance of the Ukrainian people, and we will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with them for as long as it takes.

I warmly welcome the publication of the committee's report and this debate. The Scottish Government will respond to the report as a whole in the coming weeks. There are four main areas of the committee's report that I will focus on in the time that has been allotted to me: the programme for government commitment to publish a new global affairs framework to guide Scotland's international engagement; the role of the Scottish Government's international offices; Scotland's relationship with the European Union; and the Scottish Government's international development work.

I am pleased that the committee and the Government agree on a number of areas in regard to the global affairs framework—in particular, but not limited to, the importance of ensuring join-up between our various domestic and international strategies. In the face of the invasion of Ukraine, nations are being tested on whether they support not just the principle but the reality of a rules-based approach to protect their values. That is why it is so important that we set out clearly what our values are and what we hope to achieve through our international work.

Scotland's commitment to internationalism and upholding those values can be found in

“Scotland's Global Affairs Framework”, which we published yesterday. The framework sets out the values and principles that underpin our international activity, and recognises in particular that the global and regional context increasingly impacts the achievement of domestic objectives. For that reason, it is imperative that Scotland becomes more active internationally on issues that matter most in helping Scotland to flourish.

We are a nation that prides itself on being open, welcoming and connected, and we have demonstrated that we can make a constructive contribution to addressing global challenges. We have an important role to play in demonstrating high international standards and showing global leadership. I believe that Scotland's contribution on the global stage would be increased with the powers of independence, but we must work within the limitations of the devolution settlement in the meantime. The global affairs framework shows how we can best do that. It highlights our determination not simply to make Scotland a fairer and more prosperous country but for Scotland to play its part in building a fairer and more prosperous world.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The document that was published yesterday is rather thin, if not a bit flimsy. Why does it not mention the Scottish Government leveraging Scotland's place in the United Kingdom by working within the United Kingdom to promote the values and so on that Angus Robertson talks about? Why is the United Kingdom not mentioned as a partner?

Angus Robertson: I am delighted to do that—in fact, I did that only last Thursday, when I was at Scotland House London to promote Scottish culture in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is something that we take seriously in that area and in others.

On the international network, I was delighted to see the committee's enthusiasm for and consensus on the excellent job that Scotland's international offices do day to day. The committee asked how we measure the contribution that the international offices make and recommended an annual report. It also recommended the production of detailed justifications for why specific locations were chosen for our international offices and how they fit in our strategic objectives.

We support the idea of an annual report. All the Scottish Government's international offices measure their activities, output and successes on an on-going basis to inform the focus, prioritisation and rationale for work. We have a continuous process to ensure that our work is measurable, transparent and available to the public.

On future locations, the programme for government commits to reviewing our approach to

future policy and economic engagement with a view to enhancing Scotland's global reach and presence. That will build on the processes that we have in place and will go alongside our work to establish new offices in Copenhagen and Warsaw.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This is all fine, but we really need to get to the substance of where the Government has not been progressing. As *The Herald* reports today, Scotland still has no replacement for the Erasmus scheme, while Wales has had one for a year already. Why is the Scottish Government dragging its feet on setting up the Erasmus scheme's replacement?

Angus Robertson: I will come to that point later. Incidentally, I am also summing up, so I will be able to reflect on members' contributions.

To return to the international offices, which I was addressing when Willie Rennie intervened on another issue, we will be happy to keep the committee updated on the work that I described as it develops in the months ahead.

In preparing its report, the committee heard from our offices at first hand. The visits that I have made in recent weeks to Ireland, the United States, Canada, Germany and indeed London entirely support the committee's conclusion. Not only was I impressed, I heard and saw at first hand what a positive impact our external network makes.

In March, I visited Dublin to meet the Irish Government for the first annual review of our bilateral co-operation framework. Scotland and Ireland have an ambitious joint work programme to deliver improved Government relations, business and economic ties and health collaboration, as well as co-operation in the fields of academia and research, community and diaspora, and rural, coastal and island communities.

In early April, I visited the United States and Canada. There was a focus on businesses that are involved in high-tech and high-value jobs in digital markets from infrastructure to gaming, as well as on other high-growth areas such as sustainable tourism. I was able to build on engagements from the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—and to take part in tartan day, which was a timely reminder of the importance of friendship and community between Scotland and the United States and between Scotland and Canada.

In late April, I visited Bavaria to take part in the Ludwig Erhard summit—the German Davos—which brought together top decision makers from politics, research and industry. Being part of that high-profile event ensured that we could reinforce the potential of Scotland's considerable renewable resources, including green hydrogen, to contribute to security of energy supply in Europe. That is a

good example of promoting Scotland's excellence in science and technology, which Clare Adamson highlighted the need to do.

Those visits emphasise the breadth of work that our international network covers, which is the product of sustained long-term in-country engagement. That ranges from health collaboration in Ireland to high-tech industry in North America and green hydrogen in Germany. Those areas of focus will help to create domestic opportunities, broaden our horizons, attract interest and investment and ultimately benefit the people of Scotland.

On our relationship with the European Union, the EU represents what might be the most successful peace project in world history, and we will continue to advocate for Scotland's place in it and the world. As a fully integrated part of the EU for half a century, Scotland was woven into the very fabric of Europe. Our economy benefited from access to the world's largest market, and our social and regulatory protections reflected the highest global standards. Scotland shares its fundamental values with the EU, including the rule of law, democracy, human dignity and equality. That is why the Scottish Government is committed to remaining close to the EU. We will continue to do that with constructive engagement on our priorities with the EU institutions through the work of Scotland House Brussels, bilaterally with member states and through our expanding network of international offices in Europe.

Consistent with that is Scotland's commitment that we will seek to align with the European Union in a manner that contributes towards maintaining and advancing our world-class standards across a range of policy areas. Doing so helps to protect the health and wellbeing of people in Scotland and maintains Scotland's international reputation. Further, by protecting the standards that Scotland enjoys, we will ease the process of Scotland's return to the EU.

Until that point in time, we will where possible maintain alignment with the EU through primary and secondary legislation, including through the powers granted under the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021. That act provides the Scottish ministers with an essential power to maintain their ability to align with the EU where other legislative methods might not be available or the most appropriate. Our approach to using that power was set out in draft for Parliament's consideration on 29 October 2021.

I also thank the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee and the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee for their helpful consideration of the draft documents and the continuing engagement

between our respective officials in support of that. The comments received will improve the effectiveness of ministers' consideration of the use of the 2021 act power and the overall alignment policy. I am pleased to report that, this morning, we laid in Parliament a revised policy statement reflecting Parliament's contributions.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I am glad that the policy statement will be on the Parliament's website, but it is not quite there yet. Would it not have been helpful to have put it out before this morning, so that we could have reflected on it in the debate?

Angus Robertson: I apologise that Sarah Boyack has not had the revised policy statement in good time and I agree that it would be good for all members to have such documents at their disposal before debates.

The revised policy statement includes revisions in respect of a number of key areas, all of which are designed to improve transparency. They include a commitment to provide regular information on our legislative intentions that will assist Parliament, stakeholders and the people of Scotland to better understand and scrutinise how ministers will approach decisions about alignment. I look forward to engaging further with the committee to consider and work towards implementing those commitments.

I pay tribute, as ever, to the cross-party support that the Scottish Government's international development work finds in the Parliament. We do not take that support for granted, particularly in light of the cuts to aid that the UK Government has made with devastating impact on the ground in the global south, particularly during a global pandemic.

The committee raised a number of important points, including the importance placed on policy coherence by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations. Our commitment to policy coherence for sustainable development—PCSD—is well documented. It already forms a key plank of our international development strategy.

We are clear that international development finance is only one part of the development toolkit. The impact that global north countries can make is equally, if not more, important than their financial investment. They can achieve that not only across their Government policy but through encouraging their populations to think about the impact of their actions on others, whether in relation to climate change behaviours or fair trade choices.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Cabinet secretary, could you bring your remarks to a close, please?

Angus Robertson: I will be happy to.

We have been taking a strategic approach to PCSD across Government and ministerial portfolios—climate, energy, education, health, trade and procurement.

As I said in response to Willie Rennie's intervention, I will be summing up at the end of the debate so, in my closing speech, I will be happy to reflect on any ground that I have not been able to cover or that other members have yet to cover in the debate.

14:54

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the committee's report on its inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work, and I note that the Scottish Conservatives support the findings of the report. I also thank the clerks and committee members for their contributions.

Scotland has so much to offer the world through our business exports, our culture, our ideas and our innovations, as well as through being a destination for tourism and investment. We wholeheartedly agree with the stated objectives of Scotland's international offices, which are

"improving Scotland's international profile ... attracting investment to Scotland ... helping businesses to trade internationally ... promoting and securing Scottish research and innovation capability, partnerships and funding",

and

"protecting and enhancing Scotland's interests in the EU and beyond."

Anything that promotes Scotland in that way is welcome. However, the degree to which the Scottish National Party Government appears to be operating the offices outwith those stated objectives is a concern.

The Scottish Government has outlined its intention to use its international relations to develop a separate foreign policy from the rest of the UK. We strongly oppose that, given the strength and global reach of the UK's diplomatic service. If the SNP Government wants to serve the interests of Scotland best, its international activities should work in conjunction with the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to best promote Scotland by utilising and maximising the collective resources of the Scottish and UK Governments.

We know that the SNP Government's underlying agenda is the promotion of independence, and the degree to which it is using its international work to promote that agenda is of significant concern. The SNP has stated on its website that it is seeking to keep close ties with Europe to prepare for an independent Scotland:

“We will prepare to rejoin the EU by keeping a close relationship with Europe. ... We will strengthen our Brussels base and make Scotland House the hub of our diplomatic representation across Europe.”

Strengthening Scotland’s Brussels base to promote independence should not be the focus of our interactions with the EU. Angus Robertson further reiterated that approach when, in an interview about the SNP Government’s international work, he said:

“for those governments that are particularly interested in the future of Scotland, the future of the UK, they want to know what is happening in relation to the forthcoming independence referendum.”

Furthermore, according to the Centre on Constitutional Change, the SNP sees developing an international persona as a key part of its plans for independence.

We know that the SNP is using and will continue to use its international work to promote independence, contrary to the stated objectives of its international offices. That makes it even more important that the findings of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee’s report are implemented.

On the committee’s findings, we agree that Scotland’s approach to international work should be centred on a revised international framework that is linked to the national performance framework. That would enable a better understanding of the Scottish Government’s international priorities and would allow for greater scrutiny of its activities. It is therefore disappointing that the SNP Government broke its promise to publish its updated international framework in the previous financial year, although I recognise that it has now published it.

Although working closely with the EU will remain a key priority for the Scottish Government’s international work, the Scottish Conservatives share the committee’s view that the Scottish Government should publish a clear strategy and priorities in relation to its engagement with the EU. That is necessary to allow for effective scrutiny of its interactions with the EU and to ensure that it is promoting Scotland’s interests across the EU.

Although it is right that the EU remains a key engagement partner, there are global opportunities, networks and cultural links that should be further developed. We agree with the committee that the Scottish Government’s global outreach should be informed by a strategic approach with clear geographical and thematic rationale.

A 2009 Scottish Government paper put the global number of those claiming some degree of Scottish ancestry at between 28 million and 40 million. The Scottish Conservatives outlined in our

2021 manifesto that we would like to see the Scottish Government make better use of the Scottish diaspora, so we welcome the committee’s call for more detail on how the Scottish Government intends to maximise its engagement with the Scots diaspora and for the inclusion of that approach in the revised international framework.

Many of the report’s recommendations focus on transparency and accountability. We know that providing transparency and accountability is not the Scottish Government’s strong point, but reform is needed. The Scottish Conservatives are aligned with a number of the committee’s recommendations on transparency and accountability. As the Scottish Government looks to expand its international work, it is right that the Scottish Parliament has a role in scrutinising that work.

The Scottish Government should make the objectives of its international work clear and detail how it will measure the impact of, and report on, its work. It is important that all the Scottish Government’s international offices are part of that process. Up to now, evaluation reports from each office have been available only through freedom of information requests. As the committee recommended, scrutiny would be supported by the publication of an annual report that sets out the contributions that are made by the international offices and how those contributions measure up against the aims and objectives of the revised international framework.

Transparency and accountability throughout the Scottish Government’s international work are required more than ever, because those offices should not be used to discuss and promote the SNP’s independence agenda. Any attempt to do so would be contrary to the Government’s stated aims and objectives and would be an abuse of taxpayers’ money.

15:01

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): As an advanced developed nation, we have a moral and political duty to develop and implement a progressive approach to international development and to build relations to support the wider ambitions of tackling our climate emergency, building our recovery from Covid and eradicating inequalities both in Scotland and through our relationships with our neighbours and the countries that we want to trade with and support.

I thank the parliamentary staff who supported our committee by helping us to reach a range of stakeholders, who were able to give us their views, and to scrutinise the Scottish Government’s work. As our convener said, we have a very wide

brief and we cover a lot of ground in this report, so it is important that other subject committees see the details.

The committee is clear that the Scottish Government needs to do a lot more work to deliver a strategic approach, address the priorities and deliver more effective collaboration and coherence within the Government's work, whether it is on trade, climate change, delivering human rights or tackling inequalities.

For example, we export 15 per cent of our waste. That does not sound like an awful lot, but it has increased by four and a half times since 2004, so we are going in the wrong direction.

Lack of progress by the World Trade Organization means that countries in the global south that urgently need vaccines are not getting access to them.

We need to ensure that we not only make good statements but deliver in practice. That is why the committee was so focused on the need for impacts to be demonstrated. At the end of the day, what difference does the Scottish Government's spending and work on international development deliver in terms of long-term systemic change on the ground?

Martin Whitfield: Does Sarah Boyack agree that it is disappointing that we do not have a Government response to the committee's report? That would have allowed us to explore, in this debate, those issues and how we hold the Government to account.

Sarah Boyack: One or two of us have already commented that the process has been slow. In November last year, we asked for an update on the trade and co-operation agreement, which was published this morning. I had looked forward to the new "Scotland's Global Affairs Framework", which was published yesterday, on the eve of this debate, but I then realised that it had been published at that point just so that the First Minister could jet off to the US. We need a much more coherent approach.

With intergovernmental relations between the UK and the Scottish Government, and with post-Brexit work, it is absolutely vital that we get clarity and transparency so that businesses, the agriculture sector and environment and climate experts can help us to look at what the Scottish Government is doing. People need to be able to track progress on and input into the trade and co-operation agreement. Therefore, it is disappointing that the follow-ups that we requested have been so slow in coming.

Witnesses told us that schemes such as Erasmus, which has been mentioned, and education and cultural relations are absolutely

critical to success for us as a country. As a range of witnesses requested, we urgently need information on how we will build and rebuild relationships post-Brexit and post-Covid. The stakeholders were clear and gave us constructive evidence that a lot more needs to be done on academic and cultural links. That would deliver on the soft power agenda, which has been mentioned, and would benefit the economy and our academic and research networks.

Much more needs to be done. I have mentioned "Scotland's Global Affairs Framework". It does not answer many of the issues that we have raised, and, disappointingly, it focuses on independence rather than on interdependence, which should be our focus. In many ways, that is what Scotland is particularly good at. We have lots of neighbours and we have capacity in that regard, whether it is in pushing the UK Government to do more on international work or in working with states in the EU and with other European nations.

One thing that I support in the global affairs framework is the statement in favour of a feminist international approach. Of course, that should be baked into all the Scottish Government's work as a matter of course. Tackling gender inequalities means taking practical action on developing clean water supplies, particularly in the four countries that the Scottish Government is working with; helping to deliver basic health infrastructure, not just vaccines; and helping to deliver training and development as well as sharing best practice and knowledge to ensure that girls and young women get access to education that gives them the skills and knowledge that are absolutely critical to success. Such an approach would give us the solidarity that we talk about but that we need to deliver in practice, and it is all the more important given the cuts that the Tory Government is making to international development investment.

I return to the point that the committee makes about the need to focus on cross-departmental and cross-Government work. That applies to trade, culture and environmental policy, and all those issues also need a gendered perspective. It is not enough just to talk about that; it has to be delivered in practice. If we do not tackle the climate agenda, the inequalities that women currently face in many countries will get much worse and huge numbers of people—the most recent estimate is 216 million people—will be impacted by climate change because their countries will not be able to produce food.

There is so much more that we need to do. The committee's work covers a broad area. As has been mentioned a couple of times, we are looking for a more co-ordinated approach from the Scottish Government's international offices. We want a focus on the purpose of each office, not

just a general comment that they are doing good work. We do not disagree with that, but what are the actual priorities, what are the funding implications and where are the clear performance indicators and reporting mechanisms? Those should be accessible to everybody.

I will finish by talking about sustainable development, which also has to be baked into all the Scottish Government's international development work and which is critical in relation to scrutiny. The cabinet secretary mentioned the United Nations and OECD frameworks. We need transparency not just for us, as MSPs, but to enable key groups across Scotland to question what is happening on the ground.

For example, the Scotland Malawi Partnership was critical of the ending of small grants, given their multiplier effect and potential to develop in-country infrastructure, both in terms of people and the physical infrastructure that is needed to bring about radical change. The committee does not accept that there is a conflict between small grants and bigger investment, and we want more scrutiny of that issue. Scotland's International Development Alliance made the key and powerful point, with which the committee agreed, that

"We cannot see value for money unless we see it as connected to everything else that is going on in the Scottish context".—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 13 January 2022; c 21.]

Such joined-up thinking on delivery has to be there. If we are to have soft power globally, to deliver transformative change in trade, to address the climate crisis and to give young people in Scotland opportunities, we must take a joined-up approach with on-the-ground changes in the countries whose international development programmes we are supporting.

We need a clear strategy, greater transparency and scrutiny and a focus on priorities such as rebuilding relations following Brexit and Covid. Those must be the key outputs that we see from the Scottish Government in answering the raft of questions in our committee report. We very much look forward to receiving its detailed response.

15:10

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am an internationalist and I believe in forging strong, lasting and progressive relationships across the world. In principle, therefore, I support the committee's report and the Government's intention to work across the world. There could be less said about independence and more about progressive and lasting relationships, but nevertheless it is important.

However, yesterday's document was a rather flimsy attempt at an international strategy. Instead

of the grand words that we heard from the cabinet secretary in his speech, I would like to see more substance on the delivery. As Sarah Boyack set out, an awful lot of progress is required. The cabinet secretary's speech was a masterclass in evasion. He completely avoided my question about the Erasmus programme, which I will come back to.

It was rather insulting of the Government to launch the document on the keeping pace with the EU approach this morning, just before this debate on the committee's report, which deals with a major part of that. We would have expected an opportunity to scrutinise the Government's response before the debate, so it was rather disrespectful of the cabinet secretary to wait until this moment, six months after the committee had asked for a response to its report. It means that we have not been able to scrutinise the Government's response or to look at whether it has eventually caught up with its grand and lofty ambitions to keep pace with the EU, as it set out during the Brexit negotiations.

We support the measures on keeping pace with the European Union, but we thought that the Government knew what it was saying when it talked about them. Therefore, we are surprised that it has taken so long after the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 was agreed by Parliament for the Government eventually to come up with a prioritisation strategy that will deliver what was originally set out back in 2021, and before.

Turning to Erasmus, I am just flabbergasted at the Scottish Government. It made lofty claims that it was going to replace the Erasmus scheme for Scotland, saying that the Turing scheme was inadequate because it was only a one-way scheme, rather than a reciprocal one. A year ago, thanks to Kirsty Williams, who was the Welsh Liberal Democrat education minister at the time, the Welsh launched a reciprocal scheme worth £65 million, which is better than the Turing scheme and works within the UK context. However, as has been revealed in *The Herald* today, we still do not even have a date for the consultation for Scotland's replacement for the Erasmus scheme. This stuff matters. We can have great and lofty speeches such as the one that the cabinet secretary delivered earlier, but unless we deliver on the substance it means nothing at all.

The Government talks about things such as independence rather than getting on and delivering for people right now. Young people could be getting educated right now in other parts of Europe and the world if we replicated the scheme that they have in Wales, but the Scottish Government still does not have a date for consulting on a Scottish version of the scheme.

Let us get on with this stuff, rather than making lofty speeches such as the one we heard earlier.

There was also an acceptance, somehow, that Scotland has a great record on international human rights. That is not what I remember from six years ago, when Parliament was debating the £10 billion SinoFortone Group and China Railway Company No 3 Engineering Group deal and the human rights abuses in Africa. We have not heard about those things today, but we heard about them six years ago. The Government shamefacedly had to rip up its agreement, which the First Minister had signed even though the Norwegian oil fund had blacklisted the China railway group several years before because of widespread corruption, and even though Amnesty International had published a report that tied the China railway group to illegal forced evictions in Africa.

Even though all that had been on the record and available, the Scottish Government turned a blind eye and signed the £10 billion deal with SinoFortone. It turned out that all it owned was a pub in the middle of England so, even then, the Scottish Government was duped.

Consider the treatment of the Dalai Lama when he visited Scotland a few years earlier: the First Minister at the time refused to meet him after pressure from Chinese officials. So much for human rights.

Consider the jailed Qatari poet who was not mentioned by Humza Yousaf when he visited Qatar in 2013—he was advised not to mention that very important human rights issue.

It seems quite clear that, at the time of those events, the Scottish Government was prepared to turn a blind eye in order to secure finance from those countries. That is not a glowing human rights record. We should hear less about Scotland's global reputation on human rights, especially when that is this Government's track record.

We should perhaps focus more on developing a progressive internationalist approach, working together and keeping pace with Europe, developing the Erasmus scheme, getting on and delivering rather than making lofty, evasive speeches in the chamber.

I hope that the cabinet secretary will respond to every single one of the points that I have made. He said that he would respond on the Erasmus scheme, but I also want to hear his response on human rights issues and on how on earth his Government will improve its reputation globally rather than publishing flimsy documents, as happened yesterday.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we move to the open debate, I remind members who wish to speak in the debate to ensure that they have their card in and that they have pressed their request-to-speak button.

15:17

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I, too, thank my fellow committee members and the clerks for the collegiate way in which our work was conducted. I thank all the organisations and individuals who provided written evidence and those who provided thoughtful answers to our questions in evidence sessions.

As Clare Adamson and Sarah Boyack said, the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee has a wide-ranging remit. Some might suggest that it ranges from hard power to soft power; the committee's inquiry on the Scottish Government's international work certainly covered that full range.

The inquiry covered international strategy and international development, and considered the Scottish Government's policy implementation and policy coherence, how Scotland now maintains its relationship with the EU as a constituent part of a non-member country and how Scotland can nurture and grow wider international relations. I am going to concentrate on wider international relations in my speech.

I note that, in evidence, the Royal Society of Edinburgh said:

“there is no clear dividing line between domestic and international policy.”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 25 November 2021; c 12.]

The Royal Society called on the Government to prioritise areas in which Scotland can offer expertise, such as in the transition to net zero and the protection of human rights.

Most respondents who addressed the question of international relations suggested that the Scottish Government should use culture and soft power to promote Scotland internationally. In his evidence to the committee, the cabinet secretary said that the Scottish Government would pursue an

“internationalisation agenda to influence the world around us on the issues that matter the most.”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 3 February 2022; c 32.]

Joseph Nye introduced the concept of soft power about 40 years ago, suggesting that a country's soft power rests on three resources: culture, political values and foreign policies.

In oral evidence, the British Council described soft power as “a very competitive space”. Other

organisations have urged Scotland to rise to that challenge.

Glasgow Life highlighted the role of culture, sport and major events as key drivers of soft power and the Scottish brand. It encouraged the Scottish Government to develop

“an explicit soft power strategy integrated with other economic, environmental and social strategies underpinned by the National Performance Framework”,

suggesting that more clarity and planning could deliver on better outcomes. I would suggest that we are already doing that; we have great cause for optimism.

Two weeks ago, I attended an event at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, hosted by the Alliance for Scotland’s Rainforest. The minister, Màiri McAllan, described the fantastic support that the Scottish Government is providing to preserve the biodiversity and expansion of Scotland’s rainforests. That is the policy element of soft power.

As the Scottish Parliament’s champion for the Celtic rainforests, I was there to introduce the premiere of a film—film-making being another great soft power that Scotland has. “The Ghost Rainforest” tells the story of five indigenous leaders from the Amazon rainforest who came to Scotland to attend the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—and to stand up for their rights as indigenous peoples and the important role that they play in looking after nature.

Those leaders took some time out to visit and bless the Cormonachan rainforest near Lochgoilhead in Argyll and Bute. In the village hall afterwards, the Scottish ceilidh tradition took on an Amazonian twist with songs from our two cultures intertwining like the worts and lichens, or passion flowers and orchids, of our respective rainforests. The commitment to restoring our environment was shared by different cultures on two different continents, showing the cultural element of soft power.

The connections made by the Scottish Government at COP26 and other events help the internationalisation agenda that the cabinet secretary talked about in his evidence to the committee and are great examples of mainstreaming international principles—in this case, the principle of preserving biodiversity both within Scotland and around the world—across portfolios.

As Scotland’s International Development Alliance said in its evidence, Scotland, despite its limited funds, could become a world leader in areas such as food security, educational outcomes for women and girls in the global south and the cancellation of debt. The alliance spoke of a need

to change narratives and support new ways of thinking, saying:

“It takes leadership from significant small sub-state actors, such as Scotland, to change that narrative.”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 13 January 2022; c 19.]

The Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance suggested that Scottish Government policies should focus on promoting the distinctive qualities of the Scottish brand, proposing moving that brand on from nostalgia to the reputation that Scotland now has for climate policy, the digital economy and human rights legislation.

That got me thinking about my own constituency. Argyll and Bute has both nostalgic and modern international connections. Lachlan MacQuarrie from Ulbha was the fifth governor-general of New South Wales, moving it from being a penal colony to a free settlement. Major General Alexander McDougall, an Islay man, was described by George Washington as one of the five pillars of American independence. Although those two islanders are examples of hard power, they also link into the awareness of Scotland and Scots throughout the world, which is soft power.

Added to those are the families who left Argyll and Bute for America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, many creating reminders of home with the place names that they used in new countries they settled in. The Scottish diaspora now serves as fertile ground in which to develop new international partnerships.

The whisky industry combines nostalgia with the modern in its approach to tourism and the work that it is doing to become carbon neutral by using new power sources, reducing its use of water and changing its packaging. Meanwhile, the Scottish Association for Marine Science in Oban plays a major role in GlobalSeaweed, a project creating an ambitious network of partners tackling emerging issues in seaweed cultivation by using a combination of two-way knowledge transfer and community-oriented research activities.

The evidence we heard highlighted the distinctive approach that Scotland can achieve in international relationships such as the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which described its work as being based on

“friendship, human understanding and dignified partnership”.—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 13 January 2022; c 5.]

It is clear that Scotland has a lot to offer the world in culture and policy. The Scottish Government, as the committee recommends, must provide a clear rationale, including priorities and objectives, for its approach to international relations.

15:23

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

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the committee's inquiry and begin by agreeing with one of the report's central recommendations,

"that the Scottish Government should prioritise its international engagement through both a thematic and geographic focus."

The report also highlighted increasing trade as being fundamental to the development of Scotland's future international relationships. Given that, I would like to focus on three interlinking trade themes that are covered in the report: exports and trade, international trade offices and the important role of the Scottish diaspora.

I turn first to exports. We really must do more to promote exports from Scotland because, at the moment, just 70 companies account for more than 50 per cent of our international exports. We clearly need to expand that export base. We also need to do more to increase our exports to the fastest growing economies around the world. At the moment, only 2 per cent of our exports go to China, less than 2 per cent go to Singapore and only 1 per cent go to India. We clearly need to do more on the export front. To do that, however, a number of things need to change.

First, as the report highlights, we need domestic policy to be much better aligned with international policies. I do not have time to discuss domestic economic policy, so I will leave that for another day, but I want to touch on the Scottish Government's approach to free trade as a means of developing international relationships.

Alasdair Allan: The member talks about promoting trade by ensuring that we are aligned with international practice. Does he feel that a good way to do that would be to keep pace legislatively with Europe, in order to ensure that we are aligned in just that way?

Dean Lockhart: As the member will know, 60 per cent of Scotland's trade is with the rest of the UK and only 16 per cent is with Europe. I am okay with keeping pace, but if keeping pace with EU regulations means diverging from the rest of the UK, that would harm the Scottish economy. With that caveat, I think that keeping pace should be considered, but not to the detriment of Scotland's trade with the rest of the UK.

I was talking about free trade as a means of developing international relations. The SNP's approach to that is confusing. We hear SNP members talk about attending events such as tartan day in New York and increasing our international exports, but the reality is that SNP members have failed to support a series of major free trade agreements that would do precisely that at both the EU and UK levels. We hear constant

scaremongering from the SNP over a free trade agreement with the US, which is our single largest export destination market and accounts for 8 per cent of our exports.

I say to the cabinet secretary that voting, campaigning or agitating against free trade agreements sends a highly negative message to our trading partners and does not help to build or encourage international relationships. I encourage the cabinet secretary to bear that in mind in respect of future free trade agreements, including the very important one that we hope to secure with the US.

We see further confusion when it comes to the SNP's strategy surrounding international trade offices. There is simply no strategic logic behind the location of Scottish Development International offices worldwide. We have an office in Taiwan, which accounts for 0.5 per cent of our trade, but we do not have one in New York, the financial capital of the US, which, as I said, accounts for 8 per cent of our trade.

The report rightly highlights that lack of strategic planning and recommends that the Scottish Government be required to provide a detailed justification for any new international offices and report on their contributions. That is all the more necessary because the offices cost the Scottish taxpayer up to £10 million a year, and there is no way of measuring the return on that investment.

It is interesting to look at where those trade offices are based. Of the 35 international SDI offices, 26 are located in a British embassy, consulate or high commission. I am okay with that, because it shows the unrivalled strength of the UK's international network. What is not acceptable is the Scottish Government's practice of signposting Scottish companies to SDI offices alone, excluding the unrivalled global connections of the UK trade network. Time after time, we see Scottish companies being directed to SDI and not to the UK's Department for International Trade. Scottish companies can, should and need to take advantage of both networks, and the Scottish Government should be doing much more to promote Scottish companies' access to the global network of the Department for International Trade.

The final point that I will address is the important role that could be played by the global Scottish diaspora. I was a bit surprised by how little attention that gets in the report. When considering international trade, it is tempting to look only at the Government agencies, but the Scottish diaspora could play a much more significant role in driving international trade and relationships.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Dean Lockhart: I am about to conclude.

The reality is that we have failed to leverage the massive potential of the diaspora for decades. In 2019, there were only 650 members of the GlobalScot network. I know from personal experience that there are countless senior and very well connected Scots around the world whom the network has not tapped into, while those who are members are rarely, if ever, contacted by Scottish exporters.

I know that the Scottish Government has introduced the GlobalScot digital platform. That is a welcome development, although it remains to be seen how it will provide an open-ended and dynamic global platform to connect overseas Scots who have expertise with Scottish companies that are looking to export.

I will finish on a topic that the report seems not to have covered: the massive potential for Scottish university alumni to grow our international relationships. More than 50,000 international students attend Scottish universities. The vast majority will eventually return home overseas, and a great many will end up in senior positions in business, Government or academia. However, we do very little to stay connected or to build relationships with those future decision makers. That is an area of huge potential. The cabinet secretary is shaking his head, so I will be interested to know precisely what we are doing to build on that network of alumni.

I had more to say, but I appreciate that I am up against the clock, so I will just say that the overall impression of the Scottish Government's approach to international relationships is one of confusion and a lack of strategic direction. I hope that the cabinet secretary will address some of those issues in his closing remarks.

15:30

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank the committee for its work and welcome the publication of the Scottish Government's eagerly anticipated global affairs framework, which sets out the key principles that will guide and focus Scotland's international engagement as we move out of a post-Brexit and post-Covid context. Since the UK left the EU, the world has endured significant shocks and international crises as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which we are only now beginning to come out of.

In Scotland, as we move forward, we have the opportunity to re-evaluate our international engagement and priorities. The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee set about doing that, and yesterday's publication of the global affairs framework addresses the calls for the Scottish Government to provide clarity of

strategy and principles in the post-Brexit international climate.

The committee requested that there be "alignment between domestic policy and external action" and

"a clear geographical and thematic rationale"

in any forthcoming strategy. I strongly agree with that recommendation. Moreover, I was glad to see the articulation of principle 5 in the new framework, which emphasises the upholding of human rights and the rule of international law. That draws our attention to the fundamental principle of protecting citizens' peace and security.

Right now, as we watch the war unfold in Ukraine, all of us across the Parliament are acutely aware that the people of Ukraine and, potentially, the global community face a new and significant international security crisis. The people of Scotland have responded admirably by opening homes to refugees who are fleeing the conflict.

However, aside from that important domestic response, we must remain conscious of the international security ramifications that the war may have in Europe. The threat reinforces the importance of our domestic discussions on how we carefully approach international security and peace, and on how Scotland engages with the international community on that. We have yet to see what Putin's response will be to the fact that he has not won victory in Ukraine, despite yesterday's events across Russia to promote the propaganda that his mission to take over that country has somehow been successful.

In today's debate on Scotland's approach to international relations, I prefer that, as a nation with a unique perspective on and role in nuclear disarmament—and considering the threats that have been made by Mr Putin—we engage with the forthcoming first meeting of states parties to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and that all political groups in the Parliament consider sending representatives to those events. As the prospect of Scottish independence grows, we in the Parliament must remain attuned to the diplomatic negotiations of the TPNW and be proactively engaged in that matter. To that end, in Vienna next month, I will lead a contingent on behalf of the Parliament's cross-party group on nuclear disarmament.

Although Scotland is a small nation, we have big ambitions to positively shape international affairs and support and promote key global agendas. That is part of our mandate, as set out in the Scotland Act 1998, which allows the Scottish Government to assist the UK Government on international matters that may have an impact on devolved policy areas.

Over the past three parliamentary sessions, I have been delighted to be involved in the running of two cross-party groups with specific international outlooks. I have had the privilege of convening the cross-party group on nuclear disarmament and, just last year, I became deputy convener of the cross-party group on human trafficking. Both groups engage with expertise that is found in Scotland on international matters, and both strongly resonate with the third, fifth and seventh guiding principles of Scotland's global affairs framework—namely, gender equality, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and Scotland's culture.

I would like to highlight that the Scottish Government, as led by the SNP, committed to implementing the A Model For Scotland policy in legislation. That is one of the policy areas in which legislative change could have the most reach in helping those who are truly the most vulnerable, and it could have a pivotal impact internationally in harming the operations of organised crime, while contributing to shifting international norms on how to tackle mass sexual exploitation and abuse, such as prostitution and human trafficking.

Putting the A Model For Scotland policy into legislation would directly tackle the demand for prostitution, which in turn fosters the demand for human trafficking, by shifting criminality on to the men who sexually exploit women and children, and away from those who are sexually exploited for profit and potentially trafficked. It should be articulated that a third of victims who are trafficked for sexual exploitation are children who are victims of child abuse and grooming.

When the legislative change happens, as has been promised to voters, it will engage with the international efforts that are critical to tackling the sophisticated and lucrative criminal activity of mass exploitation that profits on the misery of vulnerable women and children. We are told by non-governmental organisations that traffickers are now targeting Ukrainian refugees, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has found that searches for Ukrainian women for sale have increased by 200 to 600 per cent across multiple languages and countries.

That is an area in which, through domestic policy, we can engage with international efforts to tackle organised crime. I recommend that the Scottish Government works with international and regional organisations such as the OSCE and the UN to determine the most effective strategies to undermine criminal activity and make Scotland hostile to human traffickers and modern slavery.

As we re-evaluate our approach to global affairs, I urge the Government to put nuclear disarmament and tackling human trafficking and

the exploitation of women and girls at the top of its strategic agenda.

15:37

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to this committee debate. I extend my thanks to the committee and the staff who support it for an incredibly wide-ranging report, which speaks volumes and is the reason for this important debate.

Our international reputation, international network and international connections need to be linked to our local economic, educational and cultural connections. The report truly highlights the challenge that the Scottish Government faces in doing that, and it highlights the importance of joined-up thinking. It is not sufficient to sit in separate silos for thinking.

Bill Kidd's speech spoke volumes about why interconnected thinking on the matter is so important. I echo his comments about the Ukraine and the future that Europe is facing. It is a time for clever, imaginative and intelligent thinking to protect our democracies here at home, across Europe and across the wider world.

That brings me to the first aspect of what I would like to discuss, which is the updating of the international framework. It is within it that we should see the Government's vision. However, we need to see not just the vision—not just slogans—but measurable achievement. We need to be able to show people, including people outside this country and those who work for the Scottish Government abroad, where that thinking goes. We need to see the route map for taking the country forward.

It is interesting that "Scotland's Global Affairs Framework", which was published yesterday, says:

"For any government the global and regional context inevitably impacts the achievement of domestic objectives. That is why it is imperative that Scotland becomes more active internationally."

I do not think that anyone can disagree with that, but it is important that we see how the route map leads us forward.

I draw attention to paragraph 36 of the committee report, which invites the Scottish Government

"to clarify its position on the status of the 2013 Concordat ... with the UK Government"

and say whether it agrees that the concordat

"has been superseded by ... the more recently published Review of Intergovernmental Relations."

It is just as important that we see how the relationship is, or—dare I say it?—is not developing with the UK Government.

The major aspect that I would like to talk about, however, is education and young people. In section 2 of “Scotland’s Global Affairs Framework”, entitled “Maintaining the closest possible relationship with the European Union”, the examples of engagement include “supporting young people”. Given that very senior members of the European Union are of the view that Scotland will not be able to participate in Erasmus+, it is perhaps important that statements by the Scottish Government are amended, because there is still rightly—I do not disagree with it—a desire to rejoin Erasmus, but I do not think that that will happen.

What our young people deserve is a proper pathway to study not just in Europe but around the world. They deserve an exchange of lecturers and professors, and an exchange of postgraduate students and postgraduate teams across Europe and the rest of the world. We have heard about the Scottish diaspora and the effect that it can have on improving—

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I was not going to participate in the debate, but Mr Whitfield and other members have mentioned Erasmus. Does he agree that Erasmus+ is perhaps even more significant than Erasmus, because it includes young people from the most deprived communities throughout Europe who might otherwise not leave their city, let alone their country. Erasmus+ is a really positive thing in the European Union, which we must somehow replicate, irrespective of what the UK Government does.

Martin Whitfield: I welcome that intervention, because we should practice in the clarity of language, and Erasmus+ is so important to that.

As has already been said, in Wales, a Labour Government is already investing in our future generation—£60 million, so that, from this academic year through to 2027, young people can travel abroad, study and learn. We frequently hear from Scottish Government ministers and back benchers comments about Wales that are, perhaps, derogatory, so I return the compliment and give the minister the opportunity to say where Scotland’s plan is. Where is our imagination? Where is the fulfilment of the promise to our young people that they can travel, study and make cultural attachments around the world? It is in that outward-looking Scotland that our real strength lies.

Let us reflect on the committee’s evidence on Erasmus+, the Turing scheme and Scotland’s saltire scholarships, and look at what opportunities are available to replicate those and take the

benefit forward, so that supported academic links and opportunities for our students and young people can be developed.

We need an international development strategy that is based on substance and ambition—not on empty words or slogans. That is the only way that we will tackle global crises, help the world’s poorest people and build partnerships with other countries that we can be proud of here and whose effects we see elsewhere.

15:43

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I thank Clare Adamson and the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee for their hard work throughout the inquiry into Scotland’s international affairs. Although I am not a member of the committee, the subject is an area of interest for me, as it should be for every member.

The inquiry underlines the Scottish Government’s work to strengthen our international relationships, increase trade and investment and, ultimately, achieve the overarching objective of sustainable economic growth in Scotland.

Every country takes a slightly different approach to conducting its international affairs, and policies will reflect that country, its culture, its politics and how it sees itself and the world. Scotland is no different.

Scotland faces unprecedented challenges. Whether it is responding to global concerns such as climate change, Covid recovery or the cost of living crisis, the Scottish Government is showing leadership and is amplifying the need for actions that are underpinned by the need for social, economic and climate justice.

We might be a small country, but our values have beacons outwards for centuries. Scotland has forged alliances and become a prominent voice in the global community. Just look at the Scottish diaspora; Scots have bred themselves across the world to become a community of people who are proud of their Scottish roots, who contribute so much to their countries, but who are forever tied to the Scottish nation. Scotland’s diaspora, which is estimated to be more than 40 million people, is a powerful cultural, economic and political tool.

We might not yet be an independent nation, but Scotland’s presence is already strong across the globe. When the First Minister visits the United States next week, she will be visiting a country that is home to more than 20 million Scottish Americans, which is an outstanding foundation on which to further an independent Scotland’s global interests. The UK Government has proved itself to

be incapable, or unwilling, to tap into the significant potential of Scotland's diaspora, and has chosen instead to focus on a failing UK construct.

Engagement goes both ways. Scotland has benefited enormously from people coming here and enhancing and enriching our society. Scotland's message to refugees has been one of welcome: new Scots are treated with dignity and respect, as they settle and flourish in their new home. Compare and contrast that with post-Brexit Britain, where the UK Government continues to conjure up a hostile environment for migrants, restricts trade and movement of labour, and alienates itself from international alliances.

If there was ever any doubt about the need for good international relations, the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and the war in Ukraine have all reaffirmed the fact that international co-operation is essential. The recently published "Scotland's Global Affairs Framework"—which has been highlighted by the cabinet secretary and others in the debate—sets out the values and principles that underpin the Scottish Government's international work, and sets out the basis on which the Scottish Government will prioritise its international activity.

Any nation that moves its political agenda beyond its borders does so based on the issues and politics that people care about internally: international affairs must always link back to our domestic ambitions. As a country that is committed to social, economic and climate justice, with the ambition to rejoin the EU and be part of a progressive international institution, our domestic politics provide the foundation for us to be leaders, alongside other forward-thinking nations, in international development, climate policy and human rights.

I welcome the work in leadership to incorporate the feminist foreign policy framework that Clare Adamson and others have mentioned. Feminist foreign policy is about moving away from what might come to mind when we think about traditional foreign policy—for example, military force and violence—and instead prioritising topics including peace, gender equality, environmental issues and human rights. A feminist foreign policy listens to marginalised voices and aims to remove gender, racial, sexual and socioeconomic boundaries, among others. It is empathetic, sensitive, caring and relational.

Scottish politics are inherently feminist. Scottish voters have noted their interest in politics and policies that emphasise equality of all kinds, including parity, justice and fairness. Scottish policies aim to create a society that is focused on social, economic and climate justice. Enacting those principles in our foreign policy is not only the

right thing to do, but is something that comes naturally to us. With that realisation comes the bitter disappointment that so much of our foreign policy is limited by Westminster.

Finally, for the Scottish Government to realise Scotland's potential as a good global citizen, we must listen and act in response to the voices that are often unheard, including those of the young and those from the global south. The world-first climate loss and damage fund that has been established by the Scottish Government sets an impressive tone. That financial contribution alone will not change the world. However, our role as a small progressive country is to be a leader and to encourage others to follow us in addressing past and present injustices.

We can play an outsized role in international development by drawing on our social, economic and cultural ties. Scotland must seek to establish partnerships with other members of the international development community, especially smaller EU member states, such as Ireland, as well as non-members of the EU, such as Norway. Such strategic partnerships with those donor countries could bring about active funding partnerships that are aligned with our priorities.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the climate and biodiversity emergencies prove in the starkest possible way that we live in an interconnected world. That is why it is imperative that Scotland becomes more active internationally. We have a unique place in the world—one of cultural, social and economic connection, a rich history of alliances and the domestic appetite for global justice. Scottish independence is the number 1 thing that will unlock our potential: that work is well and truly under way.

15:49

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): In the months to come, we will all take part in a fresh debate on the constitutional future of the UK and, as last week's election results across Scotland and Ireland underlined, much has changed since 2014. There have been changes in political circumstances that we would hardly expect to see over two generations, let alone one.

While we brace ourselves for the debate to come, now is an important time to look again at how Scotland is recalibrating its relationship with the rest of Europe and the world in these changing times. The launch yesterday of the refreshed global affairs framework is welcome, and the recognition in that document of the climate crisis as the single biggest international issue of our time is critical.

To deliver on climate, we will need to work even closer with the rest of Europe, seek greater

collaboration with EU institutions and build even stronger relationships with research bodies and universities in areas such as green hydrogen, which has already been mentioned by the cabinet secretary.

Scotland's role on climate was in strong evidence at COP26 last year as a small nation with soft power presence, and the Scottish Government's announcement that it was taking a unilateral lead on a climate loss and damage fund showed leadership at exactly the right time. It recognised the climate debt that industrialised countries such as ours owe the global south and the need for reparation and climate justice. Although the sums of money were small—some may say that they were insignificant—given the scale of the challenge, the symbolic and practical action of being the first country in the world to set up a loss and damage fund was an influential move in the global politics that surrounded COP26 last year.

I am pleased to see relationships between Scotland and the global south develop further, not least through the £36 million climate justice fund and the excellent climate dialogues work in the run-up to COP26. The Scotland Malawi Partnership has been a huge success, supporting communities on the front line of climate change, but I ask the Scottish Government not to lose sight of how important small community funding will be to delivering the improvements and sustainable development that we need on the ground.

We saw at COP how small nation states can repeatedly play a strong role in leading the world. Costa Rica galvanised action through the high ambition coalition, building new initiatives that run alongside COP and driving confidence that more far-reaching agreements are possible and essential. For a Glasgow summit that focused on coal, cars and cash, oil and gas would have been largely ignored were it not for Denmark and Costa Rica working together to launch the groundbreaking Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance. Through the alliance, states and regions have committed to phasing out oil and gas production over time and delivering a just transition for communities that are dependent on those sectors.

It was such a strong show of hope and determination to see the launch of the alliance in Glasgow, right at the point when energy was starting to drain out of the talks and fresh impetus was needed. We saw Green ministers from Ireland, Sweden and New Zealand take the stage with ministers from Wales, France, Quebec and Italy, alongside those from Denmark and Costa Rica, to launch the alliance. I will not pretend: it was disappointing that Scotland was missing from that launch event, but I hope that the Government will join the alliance soon, and in so doing inspire

others including Norway to join the conversation and make the long-term commitment to move away from fossil fuel production. Only by countries learning about the just transition together can we wean ourselves off oil and gas responsibly and justly.

The climate will be a strong focus for the Scottish Government's international work, and I am pleased that the imminent launch of an office in Copenhagen will further cement our relationship with the Danes. The early commitment for the two countries to work together on heat decarbonisation, for example, is critical given the cost of living crisis. Denmark's response to the last energy crisis in the 1970s has given us a big toolbox of solutions, and I know that the Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights, Patrick Harvie, is determined to insulate homes and isolate Vladimir Putin as quickly as possible.

I know that the cabinet secretary sees great potential in our creative sectors, especially television drama, working together. That work with Denmark will be important geographically, linking us to the Nordic countries, and in delivering a wide range of thematic priorities from climate to culture.

The launch of an office in Warsaw will provide a link to central and eastern Europe. If there was initial scepticism from some about the strategic focus of that office, the events of the past three months underlines how important it is that we establish a strong presence in that part of Europe.

The question of Scotland's constitutional future must be revisited. Regardless of how that question is answered, our values and priorities are clear. Scotland will be an outward-looking country that is eager to collaborate, build interdependence, and play an increasing role on the global stage.

15:55

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am not a member of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, so I am speaking today more as a citizen of this country, which Scotland's international work makes me proud to be. I am also proud to be a member and representative of an outward-looking internationalist party that prioritises imagining, building and strengthening links with foreign nations, including Norway, England and Canada.

From the strong but touching remarks that the cabinet secretary has made in explicit support of our European neighbours in Ukraine to the First Minister's repeated, unequivocal support for new Scots here and for women and girls across the world, we can see real leadership being shown within the constraints of devolution—and, indeed, despite them. Our First Minister is a UN global

women advocate. I do not think that that was supposed to happen—I think that Scotland was meant to stay in its box—but our wee devolved Government has gained global influence and global respect. What I am seeing here is not just leadership of a Government and a party but global leadership. It is not just whisky that we are putting out there—although I do not underestimate or underappreciate that particular export. We are seeking to become the first country in the UK to adopt a feminist foreign policy. We know that climate change, wars and unstable economies are gendered issues and that women and girls are worst affected. Feminist foreign policy was not a term that I ever heard growing up, but it is absolutely needed, and it is commendable that the Scottish Government is taking that forward as a pioneer in the UK.

We do not just have a presence on the world stage now; we have an influence. World-leading human rights legislation against racial discrimination and discrimination against women and to improve the rights of disabled people is being taken forward in the Scottish Parliament. It is fantastic that world-leading legislation is coming out of the Scottish Parliament. It is no longer a matter of saying, “Stop the world. Scotland wants to get on”; it is a matter of saying, “Stop the world. Scotland has ideas, and you’re going to want to hear them.”

The Tories call that a waste. It is a disappointment—although not a surprise—that the party of Brexit Britain thinks that it is a waste of money to invest in international relations. However, I have to disagree. We cannot realistically put a number on the value of strong European, Nordic and worldwide connections.

I have no doubt that, in the Highlands and Islands perhaps more than anywhere else, the sharing of knowledge, innovation and talent in sectors from renewable energy and transport to equalities and property and land rights is worth more than the 0.05 per cent of the Scottish Government’s budget that is being invested, because that is an investment—and a worthwhile one at that—in retaining and strengthening the ties that successive Governments down south have treated with disrespect at best.

The efforts that the Scottish Government is carrying out in international work are beneficial in any case.

Maurice Golden: I want to clarify that Conservative members are supportive of international offices. Emma Roddick mentioned that those international offices are a success. Which metric is she using to define that success?

Emma Roddick: If Maurice Golden had listened, he would know that I have just covered

that. I said that it is really tough to put a number on the value of strong connections worldwide, which is what those offices provide. If Scotland becomes independent, they will be the foundation for international relations.

It is still heartbreaking for me to think about the remain vote in Scotland. A European country was torn out of the European Union, despite its citizens showing up at the polls to state clearly that that was not what they wanted. That is not democratic, and it is incumbent on our Government—not simply one of many options—to do what it can to retain in all possible ways the influence, benefits and relationships that we enjoyed as a member of the EU.

I look at examples, such as the efforts on Kenmure Street in Glasgow last year, and do not think that it is out of turn to point out that perhaps, however coherent or incoherent the UK Government’s policy on reserved issues currently is, the people of Scotland are not happy with it.

Our international work is that of a welcoming, progressive and aspirational country. That vision sits in stark contrast to the statements that I hear from down south, which are often insular and laden with world war two metaphors and which display a want to go back to the good old days before the introduction of those pesky regulations and rights that, to put it simply, keep disabled people such as me alive.

My principles and those of the SNP—the party that has won the past 11 elections in this country—are too often not reflected in, or are even contradicted by, the UK’s policies. Brexit is stark evidence of that truth, but it is not the only example. I am delighted to see the work that is going on internationally off our own backs to share best practice such as the baby box and promote human rights around the globe.

I believe that we require independence to be the best that we can be. It is that simple—England is taking the UK in a direction that Scotland does not agree with, and folk’s patience for that is running out. However, in the meantime, it is right to celebrate the progress that we have made and are making with one hand tied behind our back.

16:00

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): It is a privilege to speak in this debate on the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee’s report on the Scottish Government’s international work. I congratulate the committee, led by its convener, Clare Adamson, on a thorough and important piece of work.

The report is wide ranging, as has been reflected by the diversity of speeches that we have

enjoyed listening to. The key themes that emerged from the committee's inquiry were

“the importance of adopting a strategic approach

the need for a prioritisation of policies to flow from that approach

an emphasis on effective collaboration across government to encourage policy coherence in relation both to external affairs and how this interacts with domestic priorities

challenges in measuring impact and

how we enhance scrutiny”.

Scotland is a nation with a strong European heritage, outlook and values. In 2016, people voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU and, at every election following that, people have endorsed the pro-Europe SNP. The committee's report acknowledges the Scottish Government's position that

“The founding values of the EU—human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights—are the Scottish Government's values.”

The publication of the Scottish Government's global affairs framework sets out with clarity the values and principles that underpin the Scottish Government's international work. I agree with the cabinet secretary that it is important to note that the framework has been published at a time when, in the face of the invasion of Ukraine, all nations are being tested on whether they support not just the principle but the reality of adopting a rules-based approach to protect their values.

As the new global affairs framework sets out, and as is consistent with the evidence that was given to the committee's inquiry, Scotland's international work will be guided by key areas of focus, which are good global citizenship, maintaining the closest possible relationship with the European Union, gender equality, climate crisis and climate justice, respect for human rights and the rule of law, the role of our international networks and Scotland's culture. I will focus on gender equality.

The Scottish Government has stated its commitment to employing a feminist foreign policy, which fulfils an SNP manifesto promise. As the first country in the UK to adopt such a policy, Scotland will join a small number of nations around the world that have done so, including Sweden, which was the first to do so, in 2014.

A feminist foreign policy includes moving away from what might traditionally be considered foreign policy and prioritising topics such as peace, gender equality, environmental issues and human rights. The focus is on the wellbeing of the world's most marginalised people, including women and girls. The approach involves thinking about foreign policy and international relations from the viewpoint of the world's most vulnerable groups

and thereby taking an intersectional approach to challenging existing power structures such as racism, colonialism and male domination.

Sweden's feminist foreign policy is based on the conviction that sustainable peace, security and development can never be achieved if half of the world's population is excluded. The policy is a response to the discrimination and systematic subordination that still characterise everyday life for countless women and girls all over the world. Feminist foreign policy is an agenda for change to strengthen the rights, representation and resources of women and girls.

There are many examples of Sweden's feminist foreign policy contributing positively to the world, including new legislation to prohibit the purchase of sexual services in several countries. Sweden has co-operated closely with countries that have been reviewing their legislation on prostitution and, in recent years, Ireland, France and Northern Ireland have adopted legislation that is equivalent to the legislation in Sweden.

Sweden has improved opportunities to combat domestic violence in China by co-financing a study on employee and employer knowledge of China's legislation prohibiting domestic violence, with the aim of strengthening the private sector's efforts against violence.

There have also been hundreds of thousands fewer unwanted pregnancies in east Africa because Sweden has intensified its work on sexual and reproductive health and rights. A Sweden-backed programme is estimated to have prevented hundreds of thousands of unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions in the region. Sweden has also helped thousands of new midwives per year in Afghanistan, Myanmar, South Sudan, Zambia and other countries by funding training for them, which has led to perhaps millions of women being able to give birth with the support of trained staff.

I endorse the remarks that my colleague Bill Kidd made on nuclear disarmament, trafficking and sexual exploitation. I understand that the Scottish Government will review its policies and programmes that have an international dimension to ensure that they reflect a feminist approach to foreign policy and that it will seek to learn from other countries on that. In doing that, our Government needs to be alive to our domestic policies as well as international ones.

Although Scotland approaches the matter from a relatively privileged position, with some world-leading legislation and with many sound policies, we have not yet eradicated the discrimination and violence that are everyday realities for far too many women and girls in Scotland. There is still a gap between policy intention and legislative reality

in some areas—for example, the equally safe strategy is work in progress that requires some urgency.

Scotland's international work can create domestic opportunities and attract investment. Being a good global citizen and strengthening relationships with countries and continents can only be of benefit to the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I remind members that we still have a little bit of time in hand, so, if you take interventions, you will get that time back. I call Stephen Kerr, to be followed by Paul McLennan. You have around six minutes, Mr Kerr.

16:07

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow Ruth Maguire's speech, which I greatly appreciated. The fact that she is a fellow member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee is another reason why I am grateful to follow her.

I am also grateful to be able to respond to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's inquiry report on the Scottish Government's international work. However, I say straight off the bat that there is a slightly surreal feel to many of the speeches from SNP and Green members. They seem to be living in a parallel reality: they never mention the United Kingdom. They seem to have made some kind of solemn, binding oath that they will not mention it.

I remind members that foreign policy is a reserved matter. Do members understand that? I hope that we do.

Alasdair Allan: Does Stephen Kerr feel that it is his or his party's role to tell us our place on such matters only days after his party was trounced in local elections in Scotland?

Stephen Kerr: I do not think that we have been trounced in any elections. That is another surreal remark, if I may say so.

The purpose of my remarks is to remind members that, in the United Kingdom, we are part of the most successful partnership between two countries in the history of the world. I remind members again that foreign policy is reserved and that Scotland already benefits from a superlative global network through the work of the United Kingdom's diplomatic service and associated trade missions.

One of my finest memories of being a member of Parliament at Westminster was the opportunity to—*[Interruption.]* Would the cabinet secretary like to take the floor? He seems to be muttering.

Angus Robertson: I would be absolutely delighted to do so. I would be grateful if Stephen Kerr could tell us when his comments will move on to the committee's report, which is the subject of this afternoon's debate.

Stephen Kerr: Ironically, while the cabinet secretary was muttering and waving papers in a sedentary position, I was moving on to the subject of the debate. I feel as though I have been talking about the subject of the debate since I stood up, but I understand that the cabinet secretary wishes to distract me through his antics from a sedentary position.

As I was saying, one of my finest memories of being a member of Parliament at Westminster was the opportunity to visit Kenya with colleagues from the all-party parliamentary group on malaria and neglected tropical diseases. On that trip, I saw up front and at close quarters the horrors that millions of people around the world face in their everyday lives. That suffering will never depart me. I also got to see the positive impact of the British overseas aid that was being dispensed and its effect on those who were most in need. The duty, diligence and care that were shown by the foreign, diplomatic and aid services made me incredibly proud to be both Scottish and British.

As part of our United Kingdom, Scotland is part of the strongest and most well-regarded foreign, diplomatic and aid services in the world. The Scottish Conservatives believe that the Scottish Government has a responsibility to work with and in support of the UK's foreign, diplomatic and aid services, to promote the interests of Scotland's business and culture overseas.

Angus Robertson: Will the member give way?

Stephen Kerr: Of course I will give way to the cabinet secretary. I would be disappointed if he did not intervene.

Angus Robertson: We are now four minutes into Stephen Kerr's contribution and he still has not addressed the subject of this afternoon's debate, which is consideration of the Scottish Government's international network. When will he start to address that?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, it is for the Presiding Officer to determine whether any speech is relevant to the motion. I do not think that Stephen Kerr's speech has deviated from the motion any more than some of the other contributions did.

Stephen Kerr: I am very grateful for that, Presiding Officer. Clearly, I have excited Angus Robertson this afternoon. He is quite agitated simply because I am reminding those in the chamber about what policy is reserved and of the tremendous part that Scotland plays in—and how

it benefits from—the United Kingdom’s overseas activities.

The Scottish Government should not be using international activities to undermine the United Kingdom Government’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; nor should it be using those activities to push its independence agenda. The SNP’s stubbornness in refusing to adapt to the UK’s departure from the European Union is limiting the trade, cultural links and soft power of Scotland around the world.

Presiding Officer, how many minutes do I have left in my speech?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can have time back for the interventions. I said that you had around six minutes. We have a little bit of time in hand.

Stephen Kerr: I cannot always tell from the clocks—as you know, that is one of my pet subjects, Presiding Officer.

Our departure from the European Union has changed our relationships with countries across the world. Any Government wishing the best interests of Scotland would have adapted its international framework to reflect that changing position. The new framework that was released yesterday does not do that. The SNP has not updated its framework, meaning that it does not actively seek the benefits that leaving the European Union can provide.

Although it is important to have a focus on Europe, it is vital that the Scottish Government seeks to engage with countries around the world. In her submission to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, Dr Kirsty Hughes from the Royal Society of Edinburgh wrote:

“Scotland’s trade, cultural links, soft power reputation and more extend globally so prioritising some external affairs work beyond the EU is clearly necessary.”

In Government, the Scottish Conservatives would adopt an international framework that would focus on boosting Scottish trade, cultural links and soft power across the world, not just in the EU.

The SNP is too busy playing constitutional politics with international policy, and with its surreality, to promote and implement such a positive vision for Scotland. In an interview with Euronews last December, Angus Robertson made it clear that taxpayers’ money is being used to discuss a future independence referendum with foreign Governments. The Scottish Government is using our international connections to further the cause of the Scottish National Party and not that of the Scottish people. It is shameful for a Government of a modern democracy to put party before country. The Scottish Conservatives would

push aside that party political separatist obsession and develop a forward-looking and truly global international framework that would allow Scottish trade, cultural links and soft power to increase in all parts of the world.

16:15

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Now, that was a surreal speech, Mr Kerr.

I am delighted to speak in the debate, and I thank the committee’s convener, Clare Adamson; the committee; and, of course, all those who contributed to the inquiry.

The inquiry underlines the Scottish Government’s work to strengthen our international relationships, increase trade and investment and, ultimately, achieve the overarching objective of sustainable economic growth in Scotland. I will touch on that later on.

Scotland is, always has been and always will be a European nation. As a good global citizen, the Scottish Government has to listen and act in response to those who need our help. The new global affairs framework sets out with clarity the values and principles that underpin the Scottish Government’s international work.

The committee’s report considers

“the current approach to that engagement with the EU and beyond, the interaction of the Scottish Government’s external affairs policies with those of the UK Government, and how Scotland supports international development.”

Devolution is still relatively young in its development, and the framework needs to look into the future as best it can. Our constitutional arrangements within the UK and within the European Union have changed so much in the past few years. Following this weekend, the largest party in Scotland and the largest party in the north of Ireland oppose the union. The implications of Sinn Fein’s success last week are still to be felt; time will tell of its impact in the months ahead.

Just now, Scotland still has its place in an unbalanced union as it looks to promote its culture. Only last week, Labour peer George Foulkes said that Scots is not a real language, so we have a long way to go before we can promote our culture to others, when others talk us down.

Scotland as a nation is still evolving—evolving its cultural, trade and international links. I want to focus on how we increase trade and investment and on what more can be done in that regard. Scotland’s international network creates domestic opportunities, attracts investment and, ultimately, benefits the people of Scotland.

The Scottish Government maintains a worldwide network of eight offices, which work to promote Scottish interests overseas and strengthen relationships with countries and continents. The offices are all over the world—in Brussels, Berlin, Dublin, London, Paris, Beijing, Ottawa and Washington DC. The committee's report acknowledges the good value for money of the international offices, and the Scottish Government recognises the excellent work that has been undertaken by representatives in Scotland's offices around the world.

In 2021-22, the external affairs budget totalled just 0.05 per cent of the overall Scottish budget. In the latest programme for government, the Scottish Government committed to opening up new European hubs, first in Copenhagen and then in Warsaw, while strengthening the role of the office in Brussels. The Copenhagen office builds on existing efforts to tighten relations with our northern European neighbours following the renewed Nordic Baltic policy statement in 2017. The office will increase Scotland's economic and cultural visibility in the Nordic regions by promoting co-operation on shared challenges and opportunities. As Mark Ruskell touched on, such opportunities relate to energy transition, decarbonisation and renewable technologies.

As I said, the budget for external affairs is 0.05 per cent of the Scottish Government's overall budget. However, Tory members have made comments about that in the past, and, only today, Andrew Bowie MP argued that visits such as the First Minister's visit to the US this week are a waste of money. This must be the only Parliament where members argue against trade opportunities.

I am proud of telling people I meet in this job that Scotland will always aim to be a good global partner, and I want Scotland to be so as an independent country that is able to make its own decisions. That would allow us to stop selling arms to the likes of Saudi Arabia, to move nuclear weapons away from the Clyde and to not export refugees to Rwanda. That would count as being a good global partner.

COP26 showed that the Scottish Government must follow through on its commitment to listen and act in response to often unheard voices, especially those of women and young people and those from the global south. To be a true global partner, we must also do all that we can to ensure vaccine equity.

The global affairs framework commits us to

"strive to ensure that Scotland's global environmental footprint is sustainable, playing our full role in tackling the global climate and nature crises."

It says that the Government is

"working to ensure that no one in Scotland is denied rights or opportunities because of their gender"

and that

"our policies and actions abroad should be consistent with our focus on equality, inclusion and human rights at home."

I commend the Scottish council on global affairs, which will provide a hub for world-leading expertise on international issues. The council, which was launched at the end of April with the support of the universities of Glasgow, St Andrews and Edinburgh as its founding partners, promises a new forum for global affairs in Scotland. Let us not forget that our universities are world beating.

The Scottish Government's vision is for Scotland to be a thriving, inclusive and entrepreneurial country that is delivering a just transition to a net zero and nature-positive wellbeing economy. We should all be determined to ensure that Scotland is seen to be a good global citizen that makes a constructive contribution to the world. We can make progress through the actions that have been proposed, but we can make even greater strides when we become an independent nation soon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches.

16:20

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): It is a pleasure to close the debate for Scottish Labour. I join all those who have thanked the committee members for their hard work on the report, which is a considered and valuable look at the Scottish Government's approach to external affairs and international development.

I appreciate the committee's overall view that the Scottish Government needs a more strategic vision of external affairs. The convener of the committee emphasised the reasons why that is important. We have heard from my colleague Sarah Boyack about the Scottish Government's moral duty to engage in international development in a cohesive and transformative way, particularly in the current situation.

Martin Whitfield and Willie Rennie highlighted what more needs to be done after the withdrawal from the Erasmus scheme. That is just one area where Scotland's soft power can be used to try to bolster international relationships and opportunities for our young people.

Maurice Golden made the point that the Scottish Government should not duplicate the resources of the UK Foreign Office but should instead leverage its own advantages. I note that the committee's report recommends that new international offices should be justified against strategic objectives. The Scottish people and the Scottish Parliament

need transparency to see that money is being well spent and that the international offices are achieving objectives rather than existing for their own sake.

Several witnesses to the inquiry called for more scrutiny by the Parliament, commensurate with the Scottish Government's greater emphasis on external affairs, and the committee encourages the Scottish Government to assess the impact of its external affairs work. I suggest that that should be a matter of urgency.

Sarah Boyack highlighted the point about transparency. The Parliament, including the committee, must have confidence that the Scottish Government knows what it is seeking to achieve and is providing the level of transparency that will allow us to measure progress towards those achievements.

Several members raised the issue of soft power, and Jenni Minto highlighted the importance of the Scottish diaspora as one source of that soft power. It is certainly one area on which any strategic vision should focus, to promote Scottish interests and values across the world.

Bill Kidd spoke powerfully about the importance of Scotland maintaining a role in international security structures, particularly in relation to protecting women and girls against abuse and human trafficking. Several members have highlighted the issue of Scotland having a feminist foreign policy. Emma Roddick spoke to the value of that as a symbol of Scotland's values.

Many of us have heard about or seen at first hand the value of the empowerment of women when it comes to international development. The committee highlights that there needs to be a coherent policy approach that is based on human rights and not just a brand—and we agree.

International development is an issue dear to my heart and I thank the committee for again highlighting the issue of policy coherence in that regard. I last raised that issue in the debate on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, noting the absence of policy coherence in the bill. It remains a loose thread in the Scottish Government's programme. The Scottish Government rightly makes sustainable development prominent in its rhetoric. However, although the committee's report noted the importance given to the matter by the OECD and the UN, it highlighted the lack of coherence in tying that together across policy areas. The Scottish Government's actions on sustainable development must match its warm words, and the apparent lack of a strategy for implementing it coherently across government needs addressing with some urgency.

In conclusion, I again thank the committee for bringing the report to the Parliament and for its on-

going scrutiny of this increasingly important aspect of the Scottish Government's work. Since devolution, Scottish Labour has been in favour of the Scottish Government having a role in the world and we continue to be in favour of that. However, we agree with the committee that that must be part of a strategic vision and be backed up with the openness and transparency needed to see whether that vision is being realised.

I hope that the Scottish Government pays close attention to the committee's report and its recommendations, as many members have done in the debate.

16:20

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. Many of my colleagues in the chamber have raised numerous critical points concerning the committee report's findings, which I will come back to at the end of my speech.

The Scottish Conservatives recognise the importance of Scotland having an overseas presence. However, that is only true if that does not jeopardise the work of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and provided that the Scottish Government is not using UK taxpayers' money to push its independence agenda abroad, as mentioned in the new international framework.

Bob Doris: I thank the member for acknowledging that Scotland has an international role, unlike Stephen Kerr. It is really important that the Conservatives put that on the record. However, the member said that that work could jeopardise the work of the UK. Can she give an example of that?

Sharon Dowey: The independence agenda will do that, because we need to work together. We will achieve more if the two Governments work together than if we have a separate agenda for independence.

The Scottish Government must also recognise the significance of being part of the UK on the global stage. The UK benefits from having seats in every major multinational organisation including NATO, the World Bank, the G7 and the UN Security Council. Given that the Scottish Government is attempting to increase Scotland's soft power, I am perplexed by its desire to separate itself from the international work of the UK Government, particularly since the UK was recently ranked second in the world for soft power, after the United States.

Scotland benefits greatly from the UK's soft power, including through education, revenues from tourism and foreign investment and an increase in

its political influence. For instance, it was the UK's influence and leadership in tackling climate change that brought the COP26 climate summit to Scotland.

Alasdair Allan: Will the member take an intervention?

Sharon Dowey: I want to make some progress.

If the Scottish Government is as ambitious as it claims to be in its new international framework, it should do everything in its power to follow the lead of the UK. The UK was the first country in the G7 to legislate for net zero emissions.

The FCDO takes advantage of the UK's combined wealth and power to implement a wide range of humanitarian programmes around the world. As it demonstrated in the recent crisis in Ukraine, the FCDO takes a lead and provides an effective response to global crises. It also supports the wonderful work of Scottish charities such as the Halo Trust, EMMs International and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund. Scotland plays an important role in the FCDO's plans, which include bringing around 1,500 additional roles to East Kilbride by 2025.

I want to raise several important points in my speech that need to be reiterated. The first is that the Scottish Government has stated repeatedly that it wants to build and pursue a Scottish foreign policy, distinct from that of the UK, as well as making various commitments to increase its international activities.

We did not see an updated international framework until yesterday, yet it was supposed to be released in 2021. It appears that the cabinet secretary did not approach the issue with sufficient urgency and that the framework was published for the sake of it, as it is too general and does not include any Government commitments. The committee discovered that the publication delay has made it difficult to answer basic questions on the what, why and how of the Scottish Government's delivery of its international work.

I agree with the committee's conclusion that the SNP Government must take the required steps to improve transparency and oversight of its international objectives. Among other things, actions should include delivering annual reports on the operation of overseas offices and updating the international framework that was, ultimately, completed yesterday.

Martin Whitfield: Does Sharon Dowey agree that, as well as an annual report, an annual debate would be helpful in holding officers to account?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give the time back for the two interventions.

Sharon Dowey: I totally agree with what Martin Whitfield said.

I will elaborate on the distribution of Scotland's worldwide offices and the Scottish Government's transparency on that. According to the Scottish political analysis firm, European Merchants, there is a lack of a defined plan to justify the opening of an office in Warsaw. The firm's founder, Anthony Salamone, described the plan as a "strange allocation of resources". I understand why. If the Scottish Government's goal is to improve strategic connectivity in the EU, more sensible choices would be Rome, Madrid or The Hague. I had hoped that a new international framework would provide some answers and justification, but it did not.

It is worth acknowledging that, in 2019, the UK had 149 embassies and high commissions abroad, which is the sixth-highest number in the world. Scotland already enjoys the benefit of having a presence in dozens of British embassies and high commissions.

Furthermore, the functioning of Scotland's international offices must be completely transparent. As we all know, the goals of the offices are, among other things, to encourage investment, assist Scottish enterprises in foreign commerce and raise Scotland's international profile. However, the SNP sees cultivating an international profile as a major component of its independence goals, which is an obvious waste of taxpayers' money.

The new international framework goes on about culture being at the centre of everything that the Scottish Government does, but I did not see such ambitions reflected in this year's budget. For instance, the Scottish Government states that it will continue enhancing Scotland's international profile

"by promoting our world-leading festivals ... through international touring and festival appearances by the National Performing Companies",

but the budget for the companies has decreased in real terms over the past two years.

Several critical points were raised in the chamber during the debate. Maurice Golden stated that the SNP Government should work in conjunction with the UK's FCDO, utilising and maximising the collective resources of the Scottish and UK Governments.

Dean Lockhart highlighted the need to increase our exports into the fastest-growing economies. However, the SNP has failed to support every single free trade agreement that the EU or the UK has entered into over the past 15 years.

Stephen Kerr said that we are part of one of the most successful partnerships in the world.

Clare Adamson mentioned the need for a strategic approach and collaboration between Governments.

Sarah Boyack pointed out that the report covers a lot of areas, so other committees should be involved and much more needs to be done.

Willie Rennie said that we have to get on with delivering rather than making lofty speeches, so he will be glad that I will be finished soon.

Jenni Minto talked about the need to provide a clear rationale with priorities and objectives.

Bill Kidd asked for a focus on the exploitation of women and girls to be at the top of agenda, which was echoed by Ruth Maguire.

Martin Whitfield commented on the challenges that we face and the need for joined-up thinking.

I look forward to seeing the progress that is made following the committee's report, and hope that progress is made at pace.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that the SNP Government should make better use of the UK's international infrastructure to promote Scotland, boost trade and help our businesses. Instead, the SNP is preoccupied with developing a foreign policy separate from that of the UK and is focused on its ambitions for independence.

The recurring theme that I have heard from across the chamber is the lack of transparency, which must be addressed. The SNP Government cannot continue promoting its independence plans abroad, and must provide more clarity and detail on its objectives. Given the Scottish Government's heightened focus on international relations, we need more scrutiny from the Scottish Parliament and greater transparency from the Scottish Government.

16:35

Angus Robertson: I begin by taking the opportunity to reflect positively on the contributions made by most speakers, particularly Clare Adamson, Jenni Minto, Bill Kidd, Stephanie Callaghan, Mark Ruskell, Emma Roddick, Ruth Maguire and Paul McLellan. It was good to hear the encouragement in those contributions for the dozens of people who work internationally and tirelessly to promote Scotland abroad. It is worth putting on record, as the Government certainly does, our appreciation for everyone working in both Scottish Government and Scottish Development International offices around the world.

In addition, all parties made good points about the opportunities for environmental leadership and trade promotion and regarding the Scottish Diaspora and alumni. Speakers referred to the

feminist foreign policy that the Scottish Government is introducing and to the importance of combating human trafficking.

Much was said about the importance of delivery. I agree. That is why the Scottish Government is not only talking: we deliver, and we do that strategically when it comes to external affairs. For example, there has been huge progress in relation to hydrogen and renewable energy in Germany. We have memoranda of understanding with four of Germany's Bundesländer and a series of delegations will come here in the weeks and months ahead. Many regions and towns around the world have been persuaded to sign up to the Edinburgh declaration on post-2020 biodiversity, more than 30 of them from France alone. We delivered a very successful COP26 with unprecedented international engagement and made real progress in persuading other countries to sign up to our declaration on women's leadership on climate and to a path-breaking commitment on loss and damage.

We are worldwide leaders in the group of wellbeing economies and are opening up new opportunities in the Nordic and Arctic areas, including as a partner to the Nordic Council, with new offices about to open in Copenhagen. There has been a 50 per cent uplift in our international development. We have reported annually and publicly on our impact and will do so again this year.

Our cultural offer has had a huge international impact, with a series of very successful culture summits and the presence of many high-quality Scottish performers at international festivals and at the excellent cultural activities organised by our overseas offices.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: Forgive me, I have quite a way to go in talking about the successes that are important to put on record. I have said that I will make some progress and that is what I intend to do.

Transformative trade and investment support has resulted—*[Interruption.]*

I know that the Tories do not want to hear this, but it is important to put it on the record. I have already said that I am going to make some progress with my list, because it is important that it is on the record.

Transformative trade and investment support has resulted in Scotland being the most attractive part of the United Kingdom, outside London, for foreign direct investment.

We immediately stepped up to the mark on Ukraine, generously and innovatively giving £4

million of crucial humanitarian finance and opening a supersponsorship scheme.

Our response to Brexit was widely admired and supported our much-valued European citizens. We have worked jointly with Ireland on many issues, including health, culture and our world-leading civtech scheme, all driven by an unprecedented bilateral framework.

Those are just some of the issues that have been strategically delivered, not just talked about.

It is worth putting on record my appreciation for the members who are genuinely interested in supporting the improvement of the Scottish Government's international work. I echo committee members' thanks for the organisations and individuals who took the time to provide the written and oral evidence that helped to inform the inquiry.

I am pleased that today's debate has been largely in keeping with the Government's warm welcome for the committee's work. The debate has emphasised the largely constructive cross-party nature of the report and the ambition to make the most of our international activity.

Willie Rennie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angus Robertson: I still have to make some progress before I get to Erasmus, which I suspect is what Willie Rennie would wish to ask me about. I will be answering his points.

The report emphasises the prioritisation of policies, effective collaboration and coherence across Government. Underpinning that is a recognition of the value that a continuous process of improvement in measurement of impact adds to our work.

Scotland is determined to be a good global citizen. The publication of "Scotland's Global Affairs Framework" yesterday underlines that point and provides that focus as a strategic approach for our international work. As the committee's report emphasises, Scotland has a huge range of businesses and civil society groups that are either operating overseas or focusing on issues of global importance. Collectively, our country has huge strengths not only in international affairs, but in related areas such as human rights, conflict resolution, international development, climate justice, energy security and public health. The framework provides a structure for the Government to promote those strengths internationally.

This is the first time that we have met since the foundation of the Scottish Council on Global Affairs—I was pleased to see representatives of all the parties at its launch—so I take the opportunity to say that it is great news, given that Scotland

has lacked a central institute that could bring together knowledge and expertise in an international context, that we have now delivered the council, which was explicitly stated as an aim in our programme for government. I greatly look forward to its work in the months and years ahead.

Before concluding, I return to the query that Willie Rennie posed in relation to Erasmus+. The Scottish Government was hugely disappointed by the decision of the UK Government not to associate with Erasmus+, which currently prevents Scotland from participating fully in its own right after 2022-23. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of educational mobility, and since the UK Government decision we have continued to engage in dialogue with the European Parliament and the European Commission on how we can maximise our institutions' access to the EU programme.

In our programme for government, we have committed to developing a Scottish education exchange programme to support the international mobility of staff and learners and work to resecure Scotland's access to the Erasmus+ programme, and that is exactly what we will do.

Stephen Kerr: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Willie Rennie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angus Robertson: I will not. I am winding up now.

In conclusion, Presiding Officer, engagement, partnership and collaboration are cornerstones of the committee's work, and we are proud that they are also existing cornerstones of this Government's approach to our international work through the great work of our staff in our international offices. I note the sharing of good practice such as our fair and inclusive policies at home, the drawing of influence from constructive partnerships overseas, the continued maintenance of alignment with the European Union, and the supporting and empowering of our partner countries through our international development programme.

Sarah Boyack: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angus Robertson: I ask the member to forgive me. I am winding up.

We are playing our part in tackling global challenges including poverty, injustice and inequality, and we are continuing to amplify global south voices on issues such as climate change and vaccine equity. We will continue to strengthen Scotland's engagement with partners across Europe and around the world.

I commend the committee for its report and I look forward to continuing the positive relations with the Scottish Government. Constant improvement is a shared endeavour and I look forward to it taking place in the weeks and months ahead.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary has would up slightly earlier than anticipated. I would be grateful if Donald Cameron, who will conclude the debate on behalf of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, could take us up to round about 5 o'clock and decision time.

16:44

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. That is about 15 minutes. I will try my hardest.

As deputy convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, I am delighted to close what has been a very wide-ranging debate that has covered different themes and different parts of the world, much in the spirit of the committee's recommendation that the work be done under a policy of taking a geographic and thematic approach.

There have been a lot of lofty speeches to keep Willie Rennie happy, but it is the committee's hope that both the report and this afternoon's debate will help the Scottish Government in its consideration of the many important issues that we raise.

Before I respond to the contributions that have been made, I will add a couple of comments on some of the topics that were mentioned by the convener in her opening remarks. I will focus on the role of international offices, on how the work of the Scottish Government interacts with UK foreign policy and, in the context of international development, the approach to funding—including the matter of small grants, which was raised by various speakers.

First, on the important issue of how we judge the impact of the work of the Scottish Government's international offices, the Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance told the committee:

"we need some measures—key performance indicators, if you like—of hub activity that has led to successful outcomes in driving forward trade relationships, positive research funding and so on."—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 25 November 2021; c 28.]

That view was echoed by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Law Society of Scotland and European Merchants, all of which felt that a clear strategy would promote accountability and transparency. That has arisen this afternoon. How do we measure the efficacy of those international offices—what metrics do we use? I am not quite

sure that we have been able to answer that, but it is of concern to the committee, and the Scottish Government should take it away and consider it.

Accordingly, we recommended

"a detailed justification for any new international offices,"

including location choice, the fit with the international office's strategic objectives and, in turn, the objectives of the revised international framework, the national performance framework and Scotland's national strategy for economic transformation.

Sarah Boyack: It is helpful that the deputy convener has outlined the range of different witnesses who made those comments, because, just to clarify to the cabinet secretary, the committee's recommendation was not about criticising staff, who do fantastic work in those offices, but about being clear, having set priorities and enabling some kind of transparency.

There have been a couple of comments about the international budget not being as much as we would like it to be. There have to be priorities and trade-offs. The more clarity that we can get, the more we will see where the political priorities could be, not just in the international offices but in international projects across the world, through which Scotland can make a distinct and important contribution.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That should help with your 15 minutes, Mr Cameron. [Laughter.]

Donald Cameron: Sarah Boyack was more than welcome to carry on. I acknowledge what she said and I endorse those views entirely. As the convener mentioned, the committee also recommended that the Scottish Government publish an annual report, setting out the contribution made by international offices when it comes to promoting the values, objectives and priorities of the revised international framework.

Our witnesses felt that the Scottish and UK Governments share many of the same priorities when it comes to UK foreign and diplomatic policy. It was suggested that, with developments in intergovernmental working, the devolved Administrations could play a more significant role in shaping the UK Government's post-Brexit foreign policies. Dr Kirsty Hughes, who has already been quoted, thought that

"In many ways, there is clear complementarity"

between Edinburgh and London. She said:

"In principle, both"

Governments

"want to support and promote"

the same things:

“notably trade, human rights”

and net zero.

We therefore recommend in our report that the forthcoming culture and diplomacy strategy—

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way on that point?

Donald Cameron: I will in a moment.

We recommend that the culture and diplomacy strategy sets out how it will interact with the UK Government’s strategy as detailed in the document “Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy”.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way on that point?

Donald Cameron: I will give way first to Stephen Kerr and then to Fiona Hyslop.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to my friend for giving way, and I hope that this is helpful to him in his pursuit of the hour of decision time. He quoted Dr Kirsty Hughes in reflecting on the commonalities that exist in priorities around those foreign policy objectives.

The member might not be able to comment on this, because he is speaking as deputy convener, but does that not make it even more bizarre that, in the framework document, there is not one reference to the United Kingdom or working in partnership with the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office?

Donald Cameron: Speaking neutrally as the deputy convener, I cannot properly comment on that, but I acknowledge what Stephen Kerr said just now and in his speech.

Fiona Hyslop: In my experience, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is very good at dealing with the Scottish Government, compared to other departments. Perhaps that is because it is very used to operating and dealing diplomatically with lots of Governments across the world. Does the member agree with that?

Secondly, is the member aware that, in the development of the UK Government’s global Britain approach, there is a real controversy internally as to whether we should be so explicit in setting out what our diplomacy is, whether that is cultural diplomacy, soft power or anything else? Actually, the Scottish Government should be very careful in how it sets out its cultural diplomacy assets. As I said in my intervention on Clare Adamson’s speech, sometimes soft power and cultural diplomacy is what you do to make an impact, so broadcasting it is perhaps like a football manager sharing their tactics.

Donald Cameron: I listened carefully to Fiona Hyslop making that intervention and it is a fascinating point. I am not sure that I entirely agree—I am speaking personally here—that it matters whether the elements of soft power, if we call it that, are outlined. Actually, the issue is about how that policy is enacted in practice, day to day across the world. However, it is a really interesting point and I acknowledge what Fiona Hyslop says about the work of the FCDO and its role.

On international development funding, there are a couple of issues that I would like to highlight. The Scotland Malawi Partnership suggested that competitive calls were the

“most transparent and effective mode of grant-making”.

The committee invites the Scottish Government to give a breakdown of its current international development grants, in terms of competitive and non-competitive awards, and provide the rationale for that approach.

We heard quite a lot about the cancellation of the small grants programme. We ask to be kept updated on any developments, including what may flow from meetings with the core-funded networking organisations.

Although the committee acknowledged the logic of the process and the criteria applied, our view is that there should still be a role for small initiatives, by which we mean those innovative community-led projects that have the potential to grow and attract more funding.

Bob Doris: I do not sit on the committee, but I was fascinated by how it wrestled with the balance between small grants and doing things at scale with partner countries. Did the committee look at small grants in relation to international aid for countries in emergency and crisis? I know a lot of small organisations in Scotland that would not necessarily have the scale to apply under a pan-UK approach for international aid for emergency and crisis organisations. I can think of charities in my constituency that support Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, for example. Did the committee look at international emergency aid as well as international development?

Donald Cameron: We certainly looked at emergency aid in general, but I am not sure whether we looked at the specific point that the member raises. However, I will take that away and try to clarify that for him after the debate.

The committee asks the Scottish Government what support it plans to provide for grass-roots initiatives.

I will cover some of the excellent and thoughtful speeches that were made this afternoon. Maurice Golden spoke about the Scottish Conservatives’ support for the report and the party’s belief that the

Scottish Government's international efforts should act in conjunction with the UK Government's approach.

Sarah Boyack spoke about the focus on the need to demonstrate impact, which was a recurrent theme, and the importance of gender inequalities and the Scottish Government's commitment to a feminist foreign policy.

Willie Rennie gave his view that it was disrespectful of the Scottish Government to delay its response on keeping pace with the EU and its announcement regarding the replacement for the Erasmus programme.

Willie Rennie: Was the member surprised that the minister did not respond to the fact that the Welsh Government has gone further and announced a £65 million equivalent to the Erasmus scheme, which is now a year old? What was the committee's discussion about the Welsh programme? Could the programme be applied to Scotland?

Donald Cameron: Speaking neutrally, as the deputy convener, I cannot express a view on that. However, the committee took evidence on Erasmus and Turing. I cannot remember whether we specifically addressed the issue of what Wales was doing, but I acknowledge the member's point.

Martin Whitfield: On that point—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no end of help, now, Mr Cameron. [*Laughter.*]

Martin Whitfield: No end of help and assistance. In paragraph 80 of its report, the committee talks about the evidence that it took on Erasmus+ and the Turing scheme and said that it asked the Scottish Government

"to outline what work is being undertaken to support academic links and develop opportunities for students and young people."

Does the committee hope to get a more positive response from the Scottish Government than some of us did today?

Donald Cameron: The point has been powerfully made by Willie Rennie and Mr Whitfield, so I am sure that the Scottish Government will respond in due course.

Dean Lockhart rose—

Donald Cameron: I am not entirely sure how much time is left.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If you could take us up to about a minute before 5 o'clock, that would be helpful.

Donald Cameron: I will quickly run through contributions from other members. Jenni Minto spoke about the cultural elements of soft power

and a visit to her constituency during COP26 of some indigenous Amazonian people, who shared her constituents' commitment to environmental recovery. Jenni spoke powerfully about nostalgia on the one hand and, on the other, modernity driving international affairs policy.

Dean Lockhart agreed with the committee on the need for a thematic and geographic approach. He spoke about trade, exports, trade offices and the diaspora. His view was that there was a lack of a strategic plan and a failure to leverage the power of the diaspora.

Bill Kidd spoke of the shocks of Covid and Ukraine, and said that it was now time to re-evaluate strategy and policy. He made a compelling speech about his work and experience on various CPGs, including on nuclear disarmament and human trafficking, where he engaged with the expertise found in Scotland. He focused especially on the trafficking of women and girls.

Martin Whitfield stressed the importance of joined-up thinking and focused on education and young people, and the need to speed things up. He asked where the Scottish Government's plan and imagination are.

Stephanie Callaghan spoke about Scotland's strong presence across the world, her belief in an independent Scotland and her view that new Scots were treated with respect and dignity here, in contrast to the approach of the UK Government.

Mark Ruskell spoke about climate change. His view was that, to deliver on climate, we need to develop even closer links to Europe. He spoke about Scotland being the first country to set up a loss and damage fund, as well as the benefits of the Copenhagen office.

We heard from Emma Roddick, who was one of many members to speak about a feminist foreign policy and her belief that the Scottish Government is a pioneer in that regard. Ruth Maguire, too, spoke about that, and focused on gender equality, and thinking about foreign policy from the perspective of vulnerable groups.

Stephen Kerr expanded his view that the Scottish Government was living in a parallel reality, given that foreign policy is reserved to the UK Government. He also spoke about his visit to Kenya, working with those suffering from malaria, and how UK aid is being dispensed in practice.

We heard from Paul McLennan about how we must increase trade and investment. He spoke about the Scottish Council on Global Affairs, which is backed by the University of St Andrews, the University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh. It was launched recently—a launch that I was delighted to attend.

Foysoil Choudhury summed up eloquently for Labour and concentrated on sustainable development and the need to tie that together across various policy areas. He said that we need more than warm words. Finally, Sharon Dowey spoke about her view that it was the UK Government that brought COP to Glasgow and was the first country to legislate for net zero emissions. She spoke about cultural performances, as well as the need for increased scrutiny of Scottish Government work.

To sum up, the committee welcomes today's wide-ranging and stimulating debate of our report on the Scottish Government's international work. I suspect that it is a subject that we will return to before long. I support the motion in the convener's name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Cameron—with the assistance of colleagues, 15 minutes goes by in a blink of an eye. That concludes the debate on the inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work.

Business Motion

16:59

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-04333, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to this week's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) that the Private Landlord Registration (Modification) (Scotland) Order 2022 [draft] and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2022 [draft] be considered by the Parliament;

(b) the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 12 May 2022—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Ministerial Statement: Update on
Cladding Remediation Programme

and after

followed by Financial Resolution: Coronavirus
(Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Appointments to the Scottish Fiscal
Commission—[Stephen Kerr]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-04334, on committee meeting times. I ask Stephen Kerr to move the motion on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 1.00 pm and 2.55 pm on Thursday 12 May 2022.—[*Stephen Kerr*]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-04294, in the name of Clare Adamson, on behalf of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, on the inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's 3rd Report, 2022 (Session 6), *Inquiry into the Scottish Government's International Work* (SP Paper 154).

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-04334, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on committee meeting times, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 1.00 pm and 2.55 pm on Thursday 12 May 2022.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Women in Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-03137, in the name of Michelle Thomson, on women in business. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons or put an R in the chat function as soon as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges what it sees as the vital role played by women in business, including in the Falkirk East constituency; believes that diversity in business leadership is vital for a healthy economy; notes reports that female entrepreneurs and business leaders often face particular barriers in accessing finance and investment; recognises what it sees as the pioneering research undertaken by Women's Enterprise Scotland; understands that the research shows that women reportedly start their businesses with 53% less capital than men do, ask for 30% less funding and consequently, it believes, are often hugely under-capitalised from the outset; further understands that, according to the research, only 14% of all capital raised went to women-led businesses, and that less than 15% of the UK's business angels are women; notes the initiatives taken by the Scottish Government to support and promote women in business, and further notes the growing recognition that removing barriers to women will enhance leadership, decision making, ethics and performance in the business community.

17:03

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Before I start, I draw attention to the sunflower for Ukraine that I am wearing. It was made under the auspices of Space Art Scotland, which is a rehabilitation programme for prisoners—a wonderful idea.

The late Dr Jacob Bronowski argued that the feature that distinguishes human beings from other animals is that we have not only a significant biological history but a cultural history that helps to define who we are. Of course, women have a different biological and cultural history from men. I sum up the problem for women in business as follows: the cultural approach to business has been framed by men for men and simply does not reflect our wider society.

The motion speaks to what I think is an essential truth. If Scotland is to reach her economic potential, the power of women must be unleashed, and for that to happen we will have to see a major cultural shift. We need a culture for business and enterprise that enables women as well as men. There are real strengths in difference, and research literature demonstrates that diversity, particularly cognitive diversity, aids effective group-based decision making in

business. On that point, although today's debate is about women, I believe that we need more inclusive diversity across the board, and indeed on the boards.

There is much to commend in the progress that has been made in some areas over recent years. For example, in March 2014, the Scottish Government published a framework and action plan to increase the impact of women's enterprise on the Scottish economy. Using a partnership approach, it has been pioneering and was the first of its kind anywhere in the European Union. Scotland established women's enterprise ambassadors, and there have been many workshops, held by Government bodies such as Business Gateway and a range of private sector firms, all of which have focused on encouraging women in their business ambitions. However, that can never be enough when we face unstated cultural assumptions that continue to limit women's engagement.

The barriers are quite profound. Research from Women's Enterprise Scotland has found that women start their businesses with 53 per cent less capital than men, ask for 39 per cent less funding and, consequently, are hugely undercapitalised from the outset. Its research has also found that, every year, women-owned companies contribute to the Scottish economy £8.8 billion in gross value added, which is more than comes from food and drink, the creative industries or sustainable tourism.

Women have created more than 230,000 jobs, but that is not yet enough. I hope to see the day when women-owned businesses in Scotland have created closer to a million jobs, and I do not regard that as an unreasonable ambition.

The most recent Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report on women's entrepreneurship was published in November 2021, and it provides both hopeful and worrying insights into recent trends. On the hopeful side, it points to the ambition of women-led businesses to increase their number of employees. In mid-2020, 30.2 per cent of women entrepreneurs who were surveyed expected to hire six or more employees in the next five years, which was an increase from only 18.7 per cent in the 2019 report. Although that is encouraging, it is still less than the 48 per cent of men who have high expectations for growth.

However, as Global Entrepreneurship Monitor makes clear, the patterns of entrepreneurship vary widely when comparing women and men. In 2020, women far exceeded men on the rate of solo entrepreneurship, or solopreneurship, but that factor could indicate an inability to access finance at the same rate and stages as men rather than necessarily a business or lifestyle choice. Those types of businesses add value and can start to

break the barriers. For example, INDEZ, which recently gave evidence to the Economy and Fair Work Committee, writes of a study that suggests that e-commerce is breaking the mould in gender equality. It suggests that, unlike in the gaming industry or other areas of digital, around 50 per cent of business owners in e-commerce are female.

We can learn from areas of progress beyond our shores. Some time ago, I was fascinated to listen to a TED talk by Halla Tómasdóttir, who managed to take her company, Audur Capital, through the eye of the financial storm in Iceland from 2007 onwards by applying so-called feminine values to financial services. I will mention just two of those values, the first of which is risk. Tómasdóttir argues that we should not be risk averse in preventing innovation, but nor should we be cavalier with risk, which was characteristic of testosterone-filled males who were the authors of the financial crash. I would also argue that risk assessment today must take a different approach, given that its history and development have been fundamentally about men-owned businesses.

Women face particular risks that go beyond finance. Tómasdóttir makes the point that businesses do not succeed on the basis of spreadsheets, but through people. Her argument reminded me of my days in businesses where one particular role sought to deliver transformational change. I always used the phrase that we must deliver “through people, and not to people”, so her focus on due diligence involving emotional capital gives us all much to consider.

Some would argue that Government support for businesses during the pandemic has been gender neutral, but the actuality and the distribution of funding tells a different story: one not of neutrality, but of gender blindness. The United Nations describes gender blindness as including an inability

“to realize that policies, programmes and projects can have different impact on men, women, boys and girls.”

One example—with thanks again to research from Women’s Enterprise Scotland—is the distribution of the pivotal enterprise resilience fund, or PERF for short. It provided bespoke grants and wraparound business support to viable but vulnerable small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland during the pandemic. Proportionately more funding was given to male-led than female-led businesses in every local authority area. In Angus, East Dunbartonshire and East Lothian, no funding whatsoever was allocated to female-led businesses from PERF.

I support a more rigorous and comprehensive approach to capturing and disseminating the gender-based data that we need not only for

monitoring policy impact but for designing policies in the first place. On the two committees on which I sit, I have, on more than one occasion, raised that issue with a number of bodies in Scotland, only to find out that such data is not yet being gathered and disseminated as standard practice.

We need to take issues regarding women in business very seriously. I ask the Scottish Government to reflect on all policies and all strategies to ascertain, where appropriate, how they support women into business and those already in business. For example, the recent retail strategy mentions women but does not go far enough to flesh out specifically how women can be at the heart of retail’s future.

Professor Sara Carter of the University of Strathclyde said:

“Research shows that if women started businesses at the same rate as men, the number of entrepreneurs in the UK would increase dramatically. While the under-representation of women in entrepreneurship is an international concern, relative to other high-income countries, Scotland’s rates of female business ownership are persistently low.”

That is a rallying call for us all.

Access to finance is critical. We need an in-depth understanding of cultural barriers. Our programmes must ensure equality for women in business and we must continue the good work that has already been started to stamp out misogyny. There is a long way to go yet to create a level playing field for women in business, and I believe that this Parliament and this Government will play a leading role in that endeavour. Scotland means business and that means women in business.

17:12

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I congratulate Michelle Thomson on securing the debate, which I am glad to speak in, and I acknowledge the excellent work being done by Women’s Enterprise Scotland.

Right across the country, women play a vital role in business. When it comes to ownership, however, only 17 per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises are led by women, according to the latest “Small Business Survey Scotland”. As in other aspects of society, women face particular challenges in business and we must do more to break down those barriers.

When I was a councillor—which I was until less than a week ago—I chaired Business Gateway Lanarkshire for a while and I got to meet many talented entrepreneurs. I know the particular challenges that women can face, including disproportionate caring responsibilities, and sometimes there is a lack of confidence in an area that is dominated by men. That lack of confidence

is perhaps reflected in the statistics on women starting business with much less capital than men and asking for less money in funding bids.

It has been recognised, including by Business Gateway, that women in business want more opportunities for networking and mentoring, often with other women who are or have been in similar situations. Many women have experience of being a main caregiver, and having to juggle that with work and other life commitments is often very difficult. There is also the issue of misogyny and women's health needs, about which there was a great discussion at the cross-party group on women in enterprise last week. It is crucial that we do as much as possible to tailor support for women's wellbeing, and that is true in business, too.

On policy, the Scottish Government has committed to establishing a women's business centre, which will be supported with investment of £50 million over this parliamentary session. The centre will ensure that women-led businesses have accessible, relevant advice and the right support. Women's Enterprise Scotland has already launched a digital version of that, and I encourage any women who are in business or are considering setting up a business to look it up.

Another commitment from the Scottish Government, as part of the work to support women in business, is the funding support that will be given to 100 women per year to develop pioneering business ideas. That welcome policy will support many women entrepreneurs.

There will also be a review to investigate and make recommendations on the gender gap and opportunities in business, and consider things such as education, financing and support and mentoring. I hope that the review's short, medium and long-term recommendations will help to remove barriers and support women in and into business.

In Scotland, women-owned businesses contribute an estimated £8.8 billion to the economy and directly employ almost 250,000 people. That represents huge benefits for the women leading those companies, the employees, the Exchequer and our society as a whole. Just imagine how, when we break down the barriers faced by women in business, those benefits will multiply.

17:15

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I thank Michelle Thomson for bringing the motion to Parliament and I am delighted to contribute to the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

Women in business is a subject that is extremely close to my heart. As some members may know, after my father sadly passed away in my teenage years, I had to step up and run the family business. Not only did I run the family business, but later I changed the model to transfer it into a portfolio of properties so that I could pursue my career and my education. It was not without its challenges. I was thrown in at the deep end and had to learn to swim without guidance or support, as an Asian girl in a male-dominated business environment. I am proud to stand here today knowing that times have changed.

As a trustee of many women's groups, I have seen many women start up a business from the kitchen or garage and turn a small dream into reality. On many occasions, the greatest challenge for women in business is infrastructure: they need allies, investment and support. A report showed that doubling the number of women-led businesses and increasing their productivity by about 40 per cent would power around £50 billion into the United Kingdom in gross value added, and would add about 50,000 new female entrepreneurs and 260,000 more women-led businesses to the UK economy by 2030. This year, women-owned businesses in Scotland accounted for only 14 per cent of SMEs, which is down from 20.6 per cent in 2017.

How do we turn that around? As a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, I am no stranger to the topic of women's inequality in the labour market. The statistics that are outlined in the motion emphasise the challenges. Professor Norin Arshed told the committee that we need more collaboration with financial institutions in order to understand access to financial support. She also highlighted concerns about duplication and confusion over what is effective, who is doing what and what is going where. That kind of confusion puts women off—attempting to wade through bureaucracy to apply for funding puts them off.

I welcome the First Minister's £50 million of funding for the national women's business centre, but it is unclear what stage its development is at and how exactly it intends to support and empower women entrepreneurs. Those issues can be ironed out with more accurate data on women's participation in our labour market.

Currently we lack data on what works and what does not work; we do not know what type of support works that takes into account women's intersectional differences, whether she is black, Asian and minority ethnic, has children, has a dependant or is single. This is not me taking an opportunity to bash the SNP. It is important that we get it right for those women and ensure that

investments are effective and not wasted opportunities.

Investing in supporting women-led businesses has great social and economic value. I welcome the commitment to invest in a women's business centre, but it must not be another botched SNP project, cluttered with bureaucracy. First, we need more detailed data on women's participation in the labour market, showing what is happening on the ground, to inform more accurate support mechanisms for funding streams. Secondly, we need more clarity on the women's business centre. For example, what support will it offer and how will it function? Last but not least, we need to see more promotional campaigns on the social and economic impact of investing in women-led businesses.

17:20

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I congratulate Michelle Thomson on securing today's members' business debate and for her great speech. I also thank her for becoming the deputy convener of the cross-party group on women in enterprise. I have chaired it for six years now and after listening to Pam Gosal's speech, I would love it if she would consider joining as a member because there is a lot that she could add to the CPG. Many of the women entrepreneurs who come to the cross-party group on women in enterprise are business leaders and are active in the consultation on shaping the new women's business centre. Pam Gosal might get quite a lot of comfort and answers from hearing those voices, because they are very much involved.

It was interesting to hear what Pam Gosal said about how she ended up being a business leader and the drivers for that. Reflecting on my business career before I came to the Parliament and hearing the stories of many other women in the cross-party group of how they got into business, I notice that relatively few of them ever thought, "I want to run a business"—circumstances led them to set up in business. In my case, I had two small children and I wanted to be in control of what I did of a week. My profession related to the media and I wanted to be able to pick and choose what I did because childcare was an issue. It was never a dream as such; it was almost a necessity. I think that that is the case for quite a lot of women.

I was totally comfortable being a business entrepreneur in a man's world. I was working in a very male environment in television production and I was also offshore a lot, doing a lot of work on safety. That never bothered me, but I never scaled up and I never ever went to any so-called networking or business events. I never did that kind of thing because that aspect seemed a bit like "Dragon's Den", and I did not like that.

When I came to this job and became active in the CPG, I found out that I was not an anomaly. Support does not necessarily mean the traditional networking events, the traditional funding opportunities and those structures. Support also means nurturing and being in a female environment where you have that soft support.

Recently, I did a podcast on women in enterprise, "Scale Her Up", with Brenda Hector. She asked me, "What do you think you'd be doing now if you were still doing your business?" I reflected on what would have become of my business if I had had to go through the pandemic and I wondered whether I would have adapted or whether I would have sunk. Those are the questions that a lot of women entrepreneurs are dealing with now, post-pandemic—or not even post-pandemic—where they have adapted to the circumstances that they are in. There has to be a real focus on helping women whose businesses may have suffered. A lot of them are involved in things like hair and beauty, art, media, music, textiles and so on, and those are probably the hardest-hit areas. There may need to be some targeted support to keep them going.

I will end on one idea, which I have had for quite a considerable time. There are an awful lot of disciplines in our colleges that lend themselves to entrepreneurship and self-employment but the students do not get support on how to set up a business. That is a real failing of the college sector. The courses on music, art, hair, beauty, media, textiles—a lot of things that women enjoy doing and may end up becoming self-employed in, usually as a knee-jerk reaction to circumstances rather than anything else—need to have a component that helps women to hit the ground running when they graduate. If we give early support at college level we will find ourselves with a lot more women-led businesses in the future.

17:24

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I acknowledge Michelle Thomson's efforts in securing this important debate and I appreciated her speech very much. We are both members of the Economy and Fair Work Committee and I welcome the attention that my committee is giving to equality in business and the workplace. It is not just for the women members of the committee to speak about those issue, but I think that the committee is the most gender balanced that the Parliament's economy committee has ever been and I hope that will be reflected in our work.

Women's role in the economy has been marginalised for too long. Last week, Carolyn Currie from Women's Enterprise Scotland, which has campaigned for a women's business centre, described to the committee how a similar model in

Canada and the US has led to them having the highest percentage of women-owned businesses. In the US, 40 per cent of businesses are owned by women, which is at least double the figure in the UK. The number of women-led employer businesses in Scotland has declined from 20.6 per cent in 2017 to just 14 per cent in 2019. That is the latest data. The statistic of 14 per cent of women-led businesses is, however, at odds with data that suggests that 51 per cent of new start-ups are led by women.

Pam Gosal: Does the member believe that we should be collecting more data, given that there is a big gap in data? She said that the data comes from 2019 and there is nothing after that.

Claire Baker: I recognise the point about data that Pam Gosal made in the debate. I will come to that later and amplify the comments that she made. I think that we have agreement in the chamber on that.

The majority of women who are newly self-employed and the increase in those who are becoming self-employed is unprecedented. Historically, women have made up just over a quarter of self-employed people, but since the 2008 downturn, 58 per cent of the newly self-employed have been female. For a growing proportion of women, self-employment does not appear to be a choice—a point that other members have made—but is a necessity that is driven by factors such as public sector job losses, the uprating of the female retirement age or a need to accommodate caring responsibilities. One fifth of women said that they entered self-employment because of a lack of other employment opportunities.

The commitment of £50 million across this session of Parliament to support women into entrepreneurship is welcome, but we need a smart approach to that investment, which works to reverse the declining trend of growth-orientated women-led employer businesses. We need progress on the national women's business centre. That can build on the work by Women's Enterprise Scotland in launching the digital women's business centre in 2020, which has proved to be a great resource for sharing knowledge and expertise and encouraging more women to start up and then grow their businesses.

There is a growing recognition that women's business support needs to be specific. That is underlined by figures showing that men are twice as likely to start a business as women and that pre-pandemic, only 21 per cent of Scotland's SMEs were majority-led by women. The characteristics of these businesses are also different, with women-led businesses being more likely to be run by younger sole traders, operating from home, working in the service sector and with

a lower average turnover and employment. We need a policy response that supports women to grow and expand their businesses and that values their contribution to the economy and society.

WES has highlighted a number of challenges that are faced by women. They include discrimination and difficulties in accessing procurement, finance, sales training and scaling-up support. In particular, the one-size-fits-all approach to access to finance for start-ups or growth does not work for many women. Women are more reluctant to take on loans and risk debt, particularly if they need to take time away from their employment to start a business. Those are all points that we need to consider in relation to a more tailored advice and support route for gender-based interventions that recognise and value women-led businesses, in sectors that are often devalued and overlooked when we are supporting growth sectors, and when promoting business growth strategies for women.

We have heard lots of quotes that are shocking to everybody in the chamber. British Business Bank found that female founders received just 1p in every £1 of venture capital. That means that men are receiving 99 times more venture capital than women across the UK. We need to see specific action to address difficulties in accessing financial support for women and action on the lack of gender-disaggregated data. The Scottish Government has said that it will look at that but we need to see progress on how to better capture and publish information.

Finally, the Government's strategy for economic transformation recognises some of the issues but talks about addressing them in broad terms. It highlights the gender gap in the total rate of early-stage entrepreneurial activity, but goes on to state that the intention is to increase new businesses of all sizes and in all sectors rather than pointing to focused action. Where the document indicates targets to focus and improve access to support for underrepresented groups, including women, it states:

"An early priority will be to deliver our commitment to review how we support more women into entrepreneurship."

I would like to see more ambition there. The forthcoming delivery plans are critical to progress. I seek assurances from the minister that delivery plans will address the need to grow women-owned businesses across all sectors.

17:30

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I congratulate Michelle Thomson on securing it and on setting out so clearly the issues and the

challenges facing women in business. It has been good to hear everybody else's contributions so far.

I will focus my contribution on welcoming the positive steps that have been made to support women in business and on congratulating fantastic and inspirational women in business across the South Scotland region.

The business landscape is changing in Scotland. Covid-19 pandemic aside, we are seeing that attitudes to traditional ways of doing business are changing and there is evidence to suggest that women are playing a large role in shaping the future of business. Research suggests—this is a powerful statistic—that if the level of female ownership of businesses in Scotland matched the level of male ownership, the size of our economy would increase by 5 per cent, which equates to £7.6 billion. That is another £7.6 billion if more women-owned businesses in our economy. Enabling more women into business is good not just for women; it will make us all more prosperous.

Scotland is making huge progress in achieving that objective. Recently, PWC published its “Women in Work Index 2022” and the good news from that report is that it ranks Scotland as one of the best places in the UK for workplace gender equality. One reason is that Scotland's gender pay gap is at an all-time low. Last year, for full-time employees it was 5.7 per cent. That is significantly lower than across the UK as a whole, where it is 8.6 per cent. However, the pay gap for all employees, regardless of gender and including part-time work, is much bigger at 15 per cent, although it is declining and it is lower in Scotland than in other parts of the UK. This is largely down to the close partnership working between the Scottish Government, private business and the third sector, such as through the Scottish Government's women in enterprise framework and fund. That is welcome, and I ask the minister for a commitment that initiatives like this will continue to be available to help women excel and to tackle the barriers that face women in business.

Across Dumfries and Galloway, inspirational women are excelling in business, particularly small business. Dumfries and Galloway has been identified as a female entrepreneurship hotspot in a new analysis from the Federation of Small Businesses. Official figures show that 10.4 per cent of working-age women in Dumfries and Galloway are self-employed—the second highest rate in the country, behind only Moray. Sandra Patterson, a Stranraer-based business owner, Women's Enterprise Scotland ambassador and FSB member, said:

“It is great to see my part of the country high on the women in business league table.”

Across the region, we have the Dumfries and Galloway Dairy Women Network, which is open to women involved in dairy and the wider agricultural sector. The network promotes discussion, learning, engagement—and nurturing. It is a bit of a spinoff from the extremely successful Women in Agriculture, which is supported by Scottish Government funding. Dumfries and Galloway also boasts Roan's Dairy, which is managed and led by Aylett and Tracey Roan. They have gone from strength to strength, providing milk from the dairy herds, employing local workers, and creating the Udder Bar, which is an alternative to selling booze that serves delicious milkshakes at local agriculture events and, pre-pandemic, at the Royal Highland Show. The Ethical Dairy produces sought-after cheeses and ice cream and is managed by an excellent role model, Wilma Finlay.

So much business diversity is seen across Dumfries and Galloway and even in other parts of my South Scotland region. In Eyemouth, Hazel Smith founded ReTweed, which is an award winning social enterprise. There are so many more. Joanne Heard started the Galloway Soup Company from a farmers market stall and now has a successful cafe and shop in Dalbeattie. We have got so many: Fiona McElrea; Lorraine Galloway of Wigtown Wigwams; Lynne Atkinson at the Whitehouse Gallery; Suzanne Thorpe of the Star restaurant in Twynholm.

There is a fair when of fantastic and inspirational women in business across the region and I want to thank them all for being role models to other women and for their contribution to our economy and our country.

17:35

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank Michelle Thomson for bringing the debate to the chamber. My background includes 20 years in the finance sector and what struck me, when Michelle Thomson was talking, was the lack of women who came forward looking for finance at that time. Things have probably changed, but nowhere near enough.

I will talk about Women's Enterprise Scotland, which the motion refers to. As we know, it is a research-led community interest company that champions women-led and women-owned business. It advocates for better evidence-based policymaking and believes that delivering expert business support will enable women to fulfil their aspirations and unlock £8.8 billion-worth of economic potential to boost the economy, as we have heard.

WES works in collaboration with local, national and international partners towards the vision of

gender equal, diverse and inclusive business systems that will allow innovation and productivity to thrive. WES was created as a voice for women-owned businesses in Scotland and to promote policy and best practice that enables women to successfully start up—which is a big challenge—and grow their own businesses.

If Scotland is to be as successful as possible, the simple fact is that we need more women-owned businesses. WES research showed that women-owned businesses already contribute £8.8 billion to the economy, which we have talked about. They also create over 230,000 jobs in local communities throughout Scotland, yet women-owned businesses are just 20 per cent of the business base in Scotland, which means that 80 per cent of businesses are owned by men. That is not right under any measure at all.

WES says that its ambition is to

“encourage more women and girls to try out their business ideas, through the provision of needs-based support co-designed by women-owned businesses and experts in gender techniques. We have an ambition to double the numbers of women-owned businesses, boost the economy by at least another £8.8 billion, create a further 230,000 jobs and ultimately consign the current gender gap in enterprise to history.”

I want to discuss an initiative that has the ambition for Scotland to become a global leader in women’s entrepreneurship. Carolyn Currie recently became entrepreneur in residence at Queen Margaret University in East Lothian. She believes that the women’s business centre that the QMU intends to launch could help unlock the £8 billion activity that I mentioned and provide a model that could be exported globally. The centre is expected to be the first of its kind in the UK that focuses on women. Carolyn Currie reckons that it could help address barriers that prevent women from maximising the potential they have to become successful business builders. She said that

“That could be an economic game-changer for Scotland.”

Ms Currie is also chief executive of Women’s Enterprise Scotland, an organisation that she helped to found. She went on to say:

“This isn’t just about creating more women entrepreneurs, it’s about that extra £8 billion that could go into the economy. But also, innovation happens in a diverse landscape; if we don’t have a diverse eco-system we are significantly restricting our capacity to innovate.”

Ms Currie held senior roles at the Royal Bank of Scotland before becoming the chief operating officer at WES in 2015. She stated that

“the activity of the centre will be informed by a consultation with local women-owned businesses as well as staff and students at the university. This will ensure that the needs of women are placed at the heart of the service design”

of the business centre. Research undertaken by WES highlighted a range of challenges facing women, including access to funding and to specific growth resources. About a third of respondents had experienced impressions of discrimination. Networking opportunities—and I think Gillian Martin mentioned this—can be hard to come by for women.

The centre will be housed in the innovation hub and is expected to open at QMU in 2025. It could be one of the initiatives that benefits from the £50 million commitment from the SNP to support women’s enterprise. Technology entrepreneur Ana Stewart has been commissioned by finance secretary Kate Forbes to lead a short-term review of how best to target that support and help more women realise their business ambitions.

I want to work closely with Carolyn Currie, QMU and women business owners in East Lothian and Scotland to give us the economic boost that should be achievable. My daughter Kirsty is 24 and she has talked many times about having her own business at some stage. Her ambition should not be limited by inbuilt disadvantages. I am sure that she will own a business one day.

I will close with a quote from Kamala Harris:

“Dream with ambition, lead with conviction and see yourselves in a way that others may not, simply because they’ve never seen it before.”

We need to ensure that more women have that opportunity and can see themselves owning a business.

17:39

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): It is great to be here to respond to a very important debate that Michelle Thomson has secured. Knowing Michelle Thomson, as I have for a number of years, it is no surprise that she has brought this debate to the Parliament. Her real commitment to advancing the agenda of women in business is very well understood.

I will reflect on some of the contributions in an excellent debate in which there has been valuable input from members across the chamber.

Michelle Thomson highlighted the importance of culture, which is a very important aspect of the issue that needs to be taken into account, and the very real barriers that women who are starting businesses face—in particular, undercapitalisation. Many members have raised that point, and I want to address it in my remarks. Michelle Thomson set some very ambitious targets for the number of employees that she would like to see working in women-owned

businesses. It is great to set those ambitions, and we can all work together towards achieving them.

Michelle Thomson also highlighted the importance of data. Many members across the chamber have raised that issue, and that is something else that I will talk about.

Collette Stevenson raised the very important issue of women in business and confidence, and the lack of confidence that prevents women from progressing in their business careers. She also highlighted many of the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to address and make progress on the issue of more women in business. I will talk about that in a bit more detail.

Pam Gosal talked about her personal experience in business, the challenges that that threw up, and the need for investment and targeted support.

Gillian Martin likewise talked about her personal experience in business. Like her, I have often reflected on what my business would have looked like if it had had to survive through the past couple of years of Covid, which have been hugely challenging times. As Gillian Martin and other members have highlighted, they have been particularly challenging for women-owned businesses in specific sectors.

I commend Gillian Martin for her leadership of the cross-party group on women in enterprise over the past six years and the great work that she has done in that regard. On her idea of college support for business start-ups, we identified in the national strategy doing more with further and higher education and, indeed, in the school system to support those who want to start up businesses. Targeting that support specifically at courses through which students and women in particular are more likely to start up businesses is a very good idea, and we will take a look at that.

Claire Baker highlighted the challenges around investment and access to venture capital. She mentioned some unbelievably bad statistics that require to be addressed. I will cover that issue. I had a meeting with a woman who has run a very successful international exporting business in which she highlighted that very issue to me. The trouble that she has had in attracting investment capital has been a significant drag on the business. She highlighted some statistics in that regard that are hugely troubling and concerning.

Emma Harper highlighted examples of women in business in the south of Scotland. It is always a pleasure to visit South Scotland with Emma Harper and to tour around businesses in the region. The next time I go there, perhaps we can try to organise a tour of some of the excellent women-owned businesses that she highlighted. There is also the point that the statistics show that,

for some reason, the south of Scotland has highlighted significantly higher numbers of women in business there than there are elsewhere. It would be really good to dig a bit deeper into that.

Emma Harper: Does the minister prefer cheese, beer or ice cream?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not know why there has to be a choice, minister.

Ivan McKee: As Emma Harper knows, I cram in a lot of visits on my business tours, so I think that we will find room for all three in a tour of the south of Scotland.

Last but not least, Paul McLennan commented on the great work of Women's Enterprise Scotland and much else that is happening to advance the agenda, and his commitment to work to take forward the agenda. That is hugely welcome because, at the end of the day, men need a deep understanding of the challenges that women face in business if we are to address the issues and seek a resolution that works for not just women in business but the whole of Scotland's economy. Many members have highlighted that.

In 2014, the Scottish Government, working with partners across the public, private and third sectors, launched the women in enterprise framework and action plan. That was refreshed in 2017. The Scottish Government has funded partner organisations to deliver programmes that support the framework's key themes, including Women's Enterprise Scotland's ambassador programme, the Investing Women Angels accelerateHER programme, and the programme for growth delivered by Business Women Scotland. Earlier this year, additional funding was delivered by the Scottish technology ecosystem review fund to projects that support women in Scotland's tech sector. That addresses a point that Claire Baker raised about supporting women across all sectors of the economy.

Some progress has been made, but it is clear that an awful lot more needs to be done. That is why the Government has committed funding of £50 million over this parliamentary session to support more women to start, grow and sustain thriving businesses.

To help to shape the approach, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, Kate Forbes, has asked the founder of i-design Group plc, Ana Stewart, to undertake a whole-system review of the women's enterprise ecosystem in Scotland. We look forward very much to that review and its recommendations, which will form part of our wider work to transform Scotland's economy, as set out in the national strategy, with its very clear focus on making sure that we tackle inequality across all aspects of our economy. It is very clear that the issue of the poor rate of

women's start-up businesses is a key part of that. That work will require a radical transformation in the way that we deliver results, and it will ensure that new approaches and the infrastructure that we build, such as the network of tech-scaler hubs, will be designed to be inclusive and to work for everyone from the outset.

The issue of investment has been raised many times in the debate. Pioneering organisations such as Investing Women Angels have invested more than £2 million in 22 companies. More than 90 per cent of funds have gone to female-founded businesses since Investing Women Angels's first investment in 2015. It has recently announced a ground-breaking collaboration with the Scottish National Investment Bank to develop a new fund that is focused exclusively on women and minority founders based in Scotland. That fund would make Scotland among the very few European nations with a bespoke seed investment fund focused on stimulating the growth of female-led companies.

Shifting the needle on investment requires a shift in mindset from the investment sector itself. I am encouraged to see Scottish angel groups, including Equity Gap and Scottish Equity Partners, demonstrating their commitment to advancing female entrepreneurship and access to finance by signing the investing in women code.

Increasing the diversity of the finance sector and encouraging more women to become active investors—especially those who have achieved success in business—will play a part in removing the barriers that women face. That is why the Scottish technology ecosystem review fund has supported Mint Ventures in raising awareness and understanding of investment among women.

The issue of data has been raised as absolutely something that requires attention. Members who have read with interest the national strategy for economic transformation and the accompanying evidence paper will recognise that there are data points there. However, we all recognise that more needs to be done in that regard. Ana Stewart identified that issue in her review. The Scottish Government is currently trialling commercial data packages that offer real-time access to business information. The business support partnership, which I met recently, is also looking at improving access to data. Work is therefore on-going.

I congratulate Women's Enterprise Scotland on its 10th anniversary. For the past decade, it has been at the forefront of the drive to close the gender gap in enterprise participation in Scotland and, indeed, on the international stage. We value its voice as a partner and a critical friend. It has never wavered in championing the needs of women in the business world.

In conclusion, as a Government, we are determined to lead on closing the gender gap in business start-up and growth not just because we know that that makes clear economic sense but because we know that that is absolutely the right thing to do. Let me be absolutely clear: it is simply unacceptable that, in 2022, women should continue to face barriers to their participation in business. An economy in which everyone is supported and empowered to seize opportunities and fully achieve their potential is absolutely vital to Scotland's future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I close this meeting of Parliament.

Meeting closed at 17:49.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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