



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 23 May 2023

Session 6



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# Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 23 May 2023

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Pastor Joe Ochei, Jesus House, City of God pastoral team ecumenical officer.

**Pastor Joe Ochei (Redeemed Christian Church of God, Jesus House, Aberdeen):** Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

Reflecting on the different challenges I have experienced in my relatively short life, I have come to understand the importance of faith, hope and deliberate resolve to keep pushing on in the face of harsh constraints and realities.

The journey of life is different for every person in our diverse communities, as are the challenges that people face daily. These challenges prepare and equip us for the opportunities and uncertainties of the future. Challenges are also an opportunity for critical reflection and improvement. It appears that our world has been experiencing crisis after crisis, from the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war increasing the migration crisis to the cost of living crisis. There is now an overwhelming desire for even a moment of reprieve.

While we may not always get a crisis-free period, we are encouraged by Romans, chapter 5, verses 3 to 5:

“But that’s not all! Even in times of trouble we have a joyful confidence, knowing that our pressures will develop in us patient endurance. And patient endurance will refine our character, and proven character leads us back to hope. And this hope is not a disappointing fantasy, because we can now experience the endless love of God cascading into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who lives in us!”

The attitude required in any crisis is a problem-solving attitude, and not despair or succumbing to the crisis, guided by the virtues of hope and faith.

Today, I will focus on being an overcomer. There are so many stories in the Bible that tell of how people lived through and overcame challenges. One of them is the story of Job, which is one of extreme human suffering. Job, chapter 1, verses 1 to 22, clearly shows a catalogue of difficult situations that any human can experience, with the loss of his family, his businesses and

even his health. However, by staying steadfast, Job recovered all and was blessed by Almighty God.

I encourage everyone to understand that having a positive attitude and a disciplined sense of purpose in our response is crucial to overcoming any difficult situations. Also, with the right mindset, challenges can be building blocks for a prosperous and rewarding tomorrow.

My message for this Parliament is that we all have what is required to overcome any difficult situations and that we must continue to have faith, have hope and prepare adequately to respond positively in any difficult situation.

Thank you and God bless.

## Topical Question Time

14:04

### Deposit Return Scheme

**1. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will compensate businesses if it decides not to proceed with the deposit return scheme. (S6T-01392)

**The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):** We are committed to our deposit return scheme, which is critical to reducing the amount of litter, tackling emissions and increasing recycling. I am grateful to all businesses for the investment that they have made in preparing for the DRS.

The missing piece of the jigsaw is the United Kingdom Government agreeing an exclusion from the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. We have been discussing an exclusion with the UK Government for almost two years, fully following the agreed process. The UK Government needs to do the right thing and agree an exclusion now, to give businesses the certainty that they need to prepare for the launch of the DRS in March and to allow the investment that has been made by businesses to be put to good use.

**Meghan Gallacher:** Yesterday, during the Scottish Affairs Committee meeting, the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that the UK Government was still missing elements of the application for an exemption to UK trade rules.

The fault for this disastrous scheme lies firmly at the door of the minister's office. The shambolic roll-out of the policy has damaged the relationship with and confidence among Scottish businesses. I remind members that thousands of businesses have not even signed up to the Scottish National Party-Green deposit return scheme, because they think that it will be too damaging for their business. The Scottish Retail Consortium has said that one of Lorna Slater's recently proposed changes to the scheme makes it even less likely that the scheme will go ahead in March 2024, and the Scottish Licensed Trade Association has explicitly said:

"Lorna Slater has effectively torpedoed the scheme".

Why does the minister think that Scottish businesses are wrong?

**Lorna Slater:** I will address the point that Meghan Gallacher raised early in her question: it is simply not true that the information that is required under the common framework has not been shared. Provision of the impact assessments of the kind that Mr Jack has demanded is not part of the common framework process. It is not true

that such assessments have not been carried out; we have conducted a full set of impact assessments at the appropriate point in the delivery of the scheme. The business regulatory impact assessment, which is known as a BRIA, equality impact assessment, islands impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment are all publicly available. In the BRIA, we have covered all the impact assessments that Alister Jack has claimed have not been conducted. I direct you and him—

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Through the chair, please.

**Lorna Slater:** I am sorry. I direct Meghan Gallacher and Mr Jack to the following pages. The competition assessment begins on page 35 of the BRIA, and the impact assessment on consumer choice begins on page 58. We have supplied all the required information, and more, to agree an exclusion from the internal market act.

Furthermore, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities—that is, Michael Gove—wrote to the Deputy First Minister today, thanking the Scottish Government for our updated analysis of the impact of the Scottish deposit return scheme and confirming that his Government is currently processing and reviewing that information. In that letter, Mr Gove has not indicated—

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, please.

**Lorna Slater:** —that there is any further or outstanding information that the UK Government requires to enable it to make a decision on the internal market act exclusion.

To answer Meghan Gallacher's question, the reason why I can give Scottish businesses confidence is that there is no reason for an internal market act exclusion not to be granted. We have provided all the information, and Mr Gove and his colleagues are now considering it.

**Meghan Gallacher:** Once again, the minister is abdicating responsibility and trying to pin the blame on the UK Government. The deposit return scheme is a long-standing Scottish Government project that it has been responsible for and talked about for years. It is not anybody else's problem, and everyone but Lorna Slater agrees.

It is time for the minister to put her money where her mouth is. If the minister who is responsible for paying compensation to Scottish businesses is so confident about the scheme and the commitments that she has made today, will she commit to publishing the Scottish Government's legal advice on who is liable to pay?

**Lorna Slater:** As I have answered previously, I am committed to delivering Scotland's deposit return scheme on 1 March, and we are working

closely with industry on all the pieces of that. The one piece left that we need is the internal market act exclusion and, as we have seen in today's letter from Mr Gove, we have provided all the information that is necessary for that to be granted, which is currently being considered by the UK Government.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** Creating the DRS is a democratic decision that was made by this Parliament. The Tory Government at Westminster has torn up the common frameworks that were intended to protect devolution and regulatory divergence. The common frameworks were developed in conjunction with the devolved legislatures of the UK, and they permit regulatory divergence. They include a dispute resolution section that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been initiated for the DRS.

Does the minister agree that anti-democratic posturing is putting the DRS scheme, regulatory divergence and the future of devolution at risk, all for an internal market act that, I remind members, the Scottish Parliament rejected but was ignored by Westminster?

**Lorna Slater:** I absolutely agree with the member. There is a climate crisis that requires urgent action, and the deposit return scheme is a practical way of tackling that. Our deposit return scheme will help us to achieve our net zero ambitions as well as tackling litter and increasing recycling. I know that the UK Government shares all those aims.

There is also strong public support for Scotland's deposit return scheme. Polling that was carried out in February showed that 70 per cent of Scots support deposit return. It is therefore astonishing that the Secretary of State for Scotland is actively working to undermine those aims and the way that devolution works. The United Kingdom Government, in the shape of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, can choose to ignore that conduct and grant the exemption now, which would be in the interests of Scotland and the UK.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** It is unacceptable that our businesses are now facing massive uncertainty because of the Scottish Government. We urgently need a ministerial statement on this matter, because our constituents, businesses and producers need—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**Sarah Boyack:** —more than the answers that they will get now. The issue of compensation—

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Boyack, will you sit down please? I cannot hear you because

members are shouting. You cannot listen when you are shouting, and I am sure that we would all agree that each and every member should be heard.

**Sarah Boyack:** I appreciate that, Presiding Officer. The issue of compensation has arisen because of the predictable blame game that is taking place on an internal market act exemption. Will the minister confirm what steps she and her officials have taken to look at all options? Have she and her officials exhausted every possible solution that would avoid the need for an exemption and mean the launch of a successful and workable deposit return scheme—yes or no?

**Lorna Slater:** Of course, we know that we need an IMA exclusion to launch the scheme. We have known that all along, which is why we have engaged in good faith with the UK Government on that exclusion for almost two years now. We first raised the need for an exclusion in July 2021, and we have followed the process that was agreed between the UK Government and the devolved Governments. We have published a summary of our correspondence and engagement with the UK Government, which it does not dispute. We submitted a final, detailed paper on the exclusions proposal in relation to the resources and waste common framework on 13 February this year. It was the culmination of continuous engagement at official and ministerial levels to exclude the DRS from the IMA.

We cannot go on indefinitely; we need an answer on that. However, as we have seen in today's letter from Mr Gove, the UK Government now has all the information that it needs and it is actively considering the exemption. Once it has made a decision, and it knows that the decision has to be made by the end of this month, we will proceed with delivering the deposit return scheme.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The minister must acknowledge that this scheme has been in trouble for quite a long time and certainly since well before this recent episode. Confidence in those who are expected to deliver the scheme is at rock bottom. Rather than stringing it along for yet more weeks and months, why does the minister not acknowledge that she needs to go back to the drawing board, come up with a new scheme and work with the UK Government to develop something that works?

**Lorna Slater:** I am rather shocked by the member suggesting that. The regulations for a deposit return scheme were passed by the Parliament in 2020. They were extensively consulted on and they went through the committee process and all the other stages of the Scottish Parliament. The deposit return scheme that is being delivered is in line with the work that was done at that time. It is absolutely my intention to

deliver what the Parliament voted for, and that is what we are actively engaged with the industry on.

I do not agree with the member's characterisation. I met industry stakeholders yesterday with the high-level ministerial strategic group for the delivery of the scheme. We are now looking at working through the operational details with the industry, sector by sector, so that we can have that delivery. I am supporting the facilitation of the intersectoral group so that, if issues come up that cannot be separated out sector by sector—by hospitality, retail or producers—they can be escalated and resolved in the shortest possible time. I have every confidence that the industry will be able to deliver this scheme, and that is what we are working on. I do not recognise the member's characterisation of this at all.

Industry has invested hundreds of millions of pounds in the scheme. People have been recruited, information technology systems are under way, reverse vending machines are being installed, sorting centres are being set up, vehicles and logistics are being provided. We are all systems go and just need that last little piece, which is the internal market act exemption.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please be brief, minister.

**Lorna Slater:** We will carry on with the launch.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I remind the minister that there was 100 per cent support from members in this chamber for a DRS—just not for this shambles. Business has said the same.

I ask the minister why she is threatening to drop the scheme 10 months before the start date. Why not 10 months before the last date or 10 months before the date before that, or before the date before that? The reality is, you only put up an official request—

**The Presiding Officer:** Please speak through the chair.

**Brian Whittle:** —for an exclusion from the internal market act on 6 March 2023. The public does not understand that; business does not understand it; the minister does not understand it. Is it not time to go back to the drawing board?

**Lorna Slater:** The member is absolutely incorrect on that point. The process of making a formal request that Alister Jack has described is not how the process for making decisions between Governments works. Those decisions are based on the common framework, which is an agreed and published process. Alister Jack cannot just make up bits of the process for the purpose of saying that I did not comply with them.

On the issue of the exclusion, we have agreed in good faith with the UK Government at every step. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**Lorna Slater:** We have published the correspondence and engagement that we have had with the UK Government. We first raised the need for the exclusion in July 2021, so this has been going on for almost two years. The UK Government must not delay any further; it must give us the confidence that we need to go forward.

As I said, the letter that we received today from Michael Gove shows that he has received all the information that he needs and that the decision is currently being considered by the UK Government. I really welcome that and look forward to a positive decision on the exclusion in the near future.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** The last gateway review was completed two months ago, in March. Why has that not been made public? When will it be made public?

Irrespective of who is responsible for compensation, will the minister simply confirm that businesses, producers and retailers have incurred costs—as required by law—and that therefore, if the scheme fails, they must get compensation? Does the minister accept that that principle is unchallengeable?

**Lorna Slater:** I believe that there were two questions there. On the second, the question of compensation is a thoroughly hypothetical one at the moment. I am working towards getting the scheme launched and ensuring that it is a success. That is what we are putting in place as we work towards the 1 March launch.

The second question was about the gateway review. The member is correct: the most recent gateway review took place in March. The Scottish Government is fully and carefully considering the review's recommendations and will share those, along with the response to that review, with the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee imminently.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** The Secretary of State for Scotland is actively seeking to sabotage not only the DRS, with all its benefits for litter reduction, recycling and climate emissions, but the whole basis of devolution, including the right of this Parliament, and of the Welsh Senedd, to deliver DRS schemes across the UK that include glass—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members!

**Mark Ruskell:** Will the minister say how she has sought to correct Mr Jack's



misrepresentations and misunderstandings of the way that devolution works across these islands?

**Lorna Slater:** I met Mr Jack yesterday at a regular intergovernmental meeting and laid out exactly what we have done to follow the process and how we have gone above and beyond the agreed process by providing all the additional information that he and his colleagues have asked for.

I remind the member that, as he knows, the Scottish Parliament approved the regulations for Scotland's deposit return scheme in 2020, long before the introduction of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. The regulations are wholly within devolved competence and, as the member said, include glass.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** The Scottish Government has so far spent almost £220,000 on setting up the DRS. How much was budgeted for that?

**Lorna Slater:** I do not have that information to hand, but I will be happy to write to the member. The operational cost of running the scheme will be met by industry, and hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of private investment has already been made in that.

In recent days, we have temporarily increased the number of Scottish Government staff who are working on policy development and stakeholder engagement. That is to support the changes to the regulations, which I will bring to the Parliament shortly, and ensure that industry is prepared for the scheme. We have also had to handle an increase in freedom of information requests and increased correspondence with industry. I aim to respond to members, businesses and constituents in a timely fashion. I believe that that would be expected by Parliament, industry and the general public.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** The minister is in denial. She is acting with recklessness. The question that was asked by Fergus Ewing stands unanswered, and it is very simply this: the minister has apparently publicly admitted to businesses that, by the end of this month, the DRS might be scrapped, so how much does she estimate will be due to businesses in compensation should that arise? She says that it is hypothetical, but she is duty bound as a minister to bear in mind all the considerations regarding any decision. What amount does she have in mind that would be due to businesses in compensation? It is a very simple question. We do not need a pre-written, scripted answer. Just tell us what it is.

**Lorna Slater:** It does not matter how many times the member asks the question—the answer is still the same. It is a hypothetical question, because the deposit return scheme is continuing.

All the information that is required for the granting of an exclusion to the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 was submitted to the UK Government weeks ago. Indeed, we have submitted additional information. It has everything that it needs. There is no reason for an exclusion not to be granted. I look forward to hearing about that in the next few days and carrying on with the delivery of the deposit return scheme.

### Retired Carers (Support)

2. **Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to retired carers. (S6T-01394)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Local carers centres provide information and advice services for unpaid carers, which must include information about support services, including when a caring role comes to an end. We have improved support for carers as a priority with our social security powers. Carers allowance supplement means that eligible carers in Scotland will receive up to £540 more than those in the rest of the United Kingdom this year.

The carer support payment will replace carers allowance from the end of this year. Carers who receive the carer support payment will continue to receive national insurance credits to protect their state pension entitlement.

**Paul O'Kane:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. Yesterday, BBC Scotland reported some very troubling accounts of carers who reached retirement age only to find themselves facing the rise in the cost of living without any substantial support.

As a result of dedicating their lives to caring for a family member or a loved one, many unpaid carers miss out on a workplace pension—something that many other people have and rely on in old age.

The Scottish Government has said that we can now expect the new carer support payment to be introduced later in 2023 with a roll-out in 2024, but does the cabinet secretary agree that the process of rolling out that new carer payment has been too slow? Does she agree that the Scottish Government should be acting with all urgency to introduce a fairer payments system to prevent unpaid carers from falling into poverty?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Any changes that have been made recently, over the past couple of years, have been made as a direct result of the impact of Covid on the social security programme. I refer not just to the social security programme here, in Scotland, but to the very real and challenging situation that the Department for Work

and Pensions was in during Covid, particularly in the initial months.

We have laid out to Parliament when we will introduce the new carer support payment. Important aspects to point out are the level of consultation that has gone into that and the real care that we need to take to ensure that, while we are including case transfer, we do not have a two-tier system for our carer payments involving those who are still to have their cases transferred and those who are being paid directly by Social Security Scotland. We will make changes on introduction and we will make further changes once case transfer is complete.

**Paul O’Kane:** The cabinet secretary has had five years since the bill was passed in which to prepare for the new benefits. For the carer support payment truly to be an improvement on carers allowance, it will have to be paid to more unpaid carers and take into account their varied and very difficult situations, which I have already outlined.

Carers Scotland estimates that only one in 10 carers is eligible for the payment, with many not meeting qualifying criteria. I think that members in the chamber would agree that it seems wrong that unpaid carers cannot access a benefit that has supposedly been made for them.

Since the establishment of Social Security Scotland, we have been promised repeatedly by the Government that things will be better, yet many Scots are being made to wait with uncertainty, just as they were under the DWP. Therefore, can the cabinet secretary say with confidence that the proposed carer support payment will be the much-needed, long-term improvement to carers allowance that will allow more unpaid carers to access support, or will it merely be a tweak that fails Scotland’s unpaid carers who desperately need it, now more than ever?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** There will be changes to the carer support payment—for example, a reduced past presence test to allow carers to receive support sooner and the extension of eligibility to more carers in full-time education. Once case transfer is complete, to avoid that two-tier system and when it is safe to do so, we have committed to providing additional support, including extra support for those caring, for example, for more than one person, extending support after the death of a cared-for person from eight weeks to 12 weeks and providing short-term assistance when the carer or the person for whom they care is challenging a decision on their benefits.

Our consultation also set out further improvements that could be made in the future, on which we are continuing to consider feedback.

They include increases to the earnings limit and the provision of extended support for a cared-for person in hospital or care.

Therefore, important changes are already planned. We will, of course, consider what further improvements will be made, but let us be very clear that they will require further funding within a fixed Scottish budget, and decisions will need to be taken about how we will take forward that funding in the future.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Unpaid carers provide vital support to the people they look after, as well as benefiting Scotland as a whole. Will the cabinet secretary reiterate how the decisions that the Scottish Government has made—for example, through investment in the carers allowance supplement—are helping to provide carers with the best package of support anywhere in the United Kingdom?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** We have invested £230 million in the carers allowance supplement since 2018, and carers continually in receipt of carers allowance since its launch will have received over £3,300 more than the majority of carers in the UK by the end of this year. Since 2019, we have also invested £2.4 million in the young carers grant—the first support of its kind in the UK—providing £359 to eligible young carers this year. The carer support payment will replace carers allowance from the end of this year, as I mentioned earlier, and that will deliver an improved service and will, for example, allow more carers in full-time education to receive support.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes topical question time.

## Scottish Connections Framework

### **The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-09107, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the Scottish connections framework. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:27

### **The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):**

I am pleased and honoured to move the motion in my name. It is an honour and a privilege to launch this debate on the Scottish connections framework, Scotland's new approach to diaspora engagement.

The opening line in the "Scottish Connections Framework" states:

"Scotland's diaspora is an extension of Scotland itself—our living bridge with people, organisations and communities around the world."

Today, I will explain how the Scottish Government will bring reality to that pledge. I will give the background to that important work, explain why we plan to redouble our efforts to engage Scotland's diaspora and set out some proposals.

I hope that the ambitions set out in our framework are welcomed across the chamber. I was delighted to see colleagues from the Scottish and United Kingdom Parliaments attend tartan week in New York this year, which shows support for engaging Scotland's diaspora.

This Government pledged to expand our connections with the diaspora in the programme for government 2021-22. Given the amount of diaspora activity already undertaken by other Governments, and by members of the diaspora, we commissioned independent research to shape our approach and to learn from others. Both pieces of research are available on [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot). The research underpinned the "Scottish Connections Framework", and I am grateful to all the researchers for their work.

The research suggested that upwards of 40 million people consider themselves to have Scottish heritage. Many represent Scotland in their own ways, from organising St Andrew's societies, Burns suppers and Highland games to teaching traditional dance or the Gaelic language.

Scots have long travelled the world, which is evident in place names such as Neu Schottland or Nowe Szkoty in Poland and its namesakes in Nueva Escocia in Argentina and Nova Scotia in Canada. They travelled for different reasons: as traders, economic migrants or victims of the Highland clearances, or simply to make a better

life for their families. Many were also part of Britain's imperial adventures, including the transatlantic slave trade. We have committed to being open and to learning from less comfortable chapters in our history while embracing those who descend from those times.

Thousands of Scots migrated to countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, seeking better opportunities. Many families in Scotland therefore have links to those countries today.

More than 5 million Americans claim Scottish heritage. The Scottish Government's office in Washington DC and Scottish Development International offices across the country collaborate with our trade envoys and GlobalScots to increase trade and investment between our two countries. They also work closely with a range of US-based organisations, such as the New York Caledonian Club, the American-Scottish Foundation, the Saint Andrew's Society of the State of New York and the Clan Campbell Society, to deliver a spectacular and growing series of events at tartan week. Tartan week draws huge crowds, providing a platform for Scottish business, higher education, culture and tourism to be showcased to many Americans.

Canada's 2021 census confirmed that 4.4 million Canadians claim Scottish descent. Our Ottawa office engages Canadian Scots across the country, from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia via Toronto and Montreal to Whitehorse, Yukon, on the edge of the Arctic. More than a quarter of Nova Scotians claim Scottish heritage, and many of them speak Gaelic and regularly celebrate Scotland's culture. The province also dedicates two weeks of the year to Celtic Colours, a festival that took inspiration from Celtic Connections in Glasgow, which lets Scottish artists bring their talents to new audiences while supporting our own indigenous language.

More than 2 million Australians identify as having Scottish ancestry, as do many New Zealanders. I was delighted to receive the proposal from my colleague Stuart McMillan MSP that we promote Scotland via tartan week in Australia, and I look forward to discussing that further with him.

Large Scottish communities also exist in Argentina, which has been home to the St Andrew's Scots school since 1838 and is home to Balmoral College, which was established in 1959. They also exist in Brazil, where Scottish traders and industrialists imported football, only to see their newfound compatriots improve the game.

I thank everyone who commits to keeping our country's traditions alive around the world. As

somebody who lived abroad for a decade, I understand the pull of home and desire to celebrate and gather with other like-minded diaspora Scots. That is why we have decided to expand our approach to adopt a broad and inclusive definition of diaspora. We want to strengthen and expand Scotland's links not only with those with Scottish heritage, but with those who have lived in Scotland for any reason. That includes alumni of Scotland's world-leading educational institutions and those who have lived and worked in Scotland, including our fellow Europeans who came here under European Union freedom of movement and contributed so much to our country.

Scotland's relationship with Europe remains strong. The Caledonian Society of France celebrated its centenary in 2022. There is a Scotland hub at the university of Mainz, promoting Scottish culture. Diaspora and community is one of the priority areas in the Ireland-Scotland joint bilateral review.

Beyond that, we will reach out to those with professional, business, cultural or other links to Scotland—our affinity diaspora.

Expanding our definition of diaspora means that we must work across many geographies. Tens of thousands of students from China, India, Nigeria, the United States and many other countries—that figure was more than 82,000 in 2021-22 alone—benefit from Scotland's world-class universities. That not only boosts Scotland's economy by nearly £5 billion each year—let that sink in: £5 billion annually—but creates a global network of hundreds of thousands of professionals who know Scotland and, I hope, possess a fondness for Scotland.

The Scottish Government's office in Beijing is strengthening the relationship between Scotland and China. An important part of that is engaging with alumni of Scottish higher education institutions. About 25 per cent of all international students at higher education institutions in Scotland—more than 18,500 in 2020 to 2021—are from China. I hope that that will lead to lifelong relationships with our country.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary be able to discuss the role that the British Council will—or should—play with regard to the alumni platform?

**Angus Robertson:** That is an excellent intervention and very timely, because the British Council hosted an event in Edinburgh last night that was attended by trustees from the British Council at United Kingdom level. They and I stressed the opportunities of their work internationally. I look forward to working with the British Council internationally to further the aims of

the framework, particularly in that educational and alumni space. I am delighted at the positive interventions from various members.

I want to make a really serious point about the framework. I really hope that it is one that we can all adopt and be part of shaping. I hope that we can all help to get the framework's priorities and alignment right to make it the success that I believe it can be.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** The cabinet secretary is making a very positive speech and I congratulate him on that.

In relation to the Scottish connections framework, how will we know whether the framework is delivering what we expect it to deliver? What material things should we be looking for so that we can recognise whether it is a success? What does success look like?

**Angus Robertson:** That is another excellent question, and it is one of the reasons why we accept the Scottish Conservatives' amendment this afternoon. We believe that it is right, when one is rolling out an initiative such as this, to ensure that there are metrics and areas for success, so that we can understand how the framework is being rolled out and whether its integration with the diaspora community is reaching its full potential. I am coming on to some of the technical suggestions, which will make it obvious how one will be able to reflect on the framework in future years.

Professional Scots are prominent in companies based in the world's global business centres—New York, Singapore, Tokyo, the middle east and elsewhere. Some act as Scotland's trade and investment envoys in Asia, the Americas and Europe or as GlobalScots in more than 60 countries. They are embedded in their own communities as well as being leading lights in local Caledonian societies, where they bring visibility and experience. We know that European Union nationals who made Scotland their home, when they were able to exercise their treaty rights here, have returned home. We now host more than 20,000 displaced Ukrainians in Scotland, who are welcome to remain here for as long as they need to. However, many will, one day, we hope, be able to return home to rebuild a peaceful Ukraine, following Russia's barbaric invasion. We hope that, when they do so, those Ukrainians will remain connected to Scotland.

Each and every one of those people has a connection with Scotland. All are part of Scotland's international community. Many already work with Scotland and promote our values around the world, and more may wish to do so. Others may want to find a sense of Scottish community overseas and build links with other members of

our diaspora. That is the scope of Scottish connections: to create a truly global diaspora connected to Scotland and to each other.

We are not undertaking this work from a standing start. The Scottish Government, its agencies and its international network already work closely with our diaspora. Our 1,200-strong GlobalScots and the network of trade and investment envoys, working closely with our Scottish Development International offices around the world, volunteer their time to support Scotland's economic ambition. They will continue to promote Scotland's prosperity, and I extend a huge thank you to them on behalf of the Scottish Government and, I hope, everybody in the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Government's international network of offices has strong local relationships with Scottish diaspora organisations and alumni networks. Our Berlin office works with Showcase Scotland Expo to promote Scottish music in Germany by building relationships in the country and promoting new and traditional Scottish artists in the German market, including artists performing in Scots and Gaelic. They will continue to do all of that because of the value that such activity brings for Scotland. However, the success of the Scottish connections framework will be to build on that existing work and create new relationships and new opportunities for Scotland and the diaspora. Our culture connects diaspora communities and Scotland. Our culture sector has been hit by Brexit and Covid 19, and now by the cost crisis, so developing international opportunities can help the sector's recovery. I have committed to developing an international culture strategy to that end.

Scotland's diaspora may be dispersed, but its members are well integrated. The Scottish Government will take concrete steps to engage as many people as possible by improving our digital offering. Connecting digitally will provide us with an opportunity to reach new members of our diaspora wherever they are in the world and, of course, it will mean that they can connect with us, too.

Ahead of this year's tartan week, we updated our international-facing website [scotland.org](http://scotland.org) to provide a new home for Scottish connections activity. We updated several pages that cover the US and Canada so as to reflect our enduring and evolving relationships in those countries.

This year, we will launch two new online resources for our diaspora. We will create a digital directory, promoting hundreds of Scottish organisations worldwide. Any member of our diaspora will be able to find out about networks, organisations and services near them, so the directory will form a touch point for Scots who are new to a country or those who are already there

and who want to connect with their community. The directory will also be a resource for organisations in Scotland that want to expand their international reach, whether they be businesses or performers looking to take their services abroad.

Later this year, we will create a means by which members of our diaspora can register themselves as members of Scotland's international community. We expect that facility to be live by St Andrew's day 2023. That new direct contact will supplement the excellent work of our international network, the SDI and agencies.

All of that work will be supported by a redoubling of effort to engage members of our diaspora. Recognising their efforts will be vital if we are to succeed. I have therefore decided to take a number of steps to strengthen their connections with Scotland to enable us to build the vibrant, visible and connected network that we strive for. Those will include piloting a Scottish connections fund. The fund, which is under design, will be open to bids from individuals and organisations from the Scottish diaspora to support the aims of the Scottish connections framework. Successful bids will support the creation or strengthening of Scottish community, alumni, cultural or similar groups, or will improve existing links between organisations and Scotland. The spending will have to show clear outcomes and strong levels of value for money.

I have also asked officials to provide recommendations on how a diaspora recognition award could encourage and reward the work of Scots around the world, either in services to their own countries or in what they deliver for Scotland's interests.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab) rose—**

**Angus Robertson:** Forgive me for not taking an intervention—I am running out of time.

In order to benefit from the extensive expertise that exists in Scotland and among our diaspora, I will appoint a Scottish connections advisory panel to advise on priorities, opportunities and specific initiatives to improve our diaspora activity. The panel will be diverse, will be based both in Scotland and internationally and will contain experience and expertise covering business, alumni and affinity diaspora, and those with specific cultural and tourism interests. The design of that group is under way.

I am also delighted to hear that the University of the West of Scotland plans to inaugurate a centre for diaspora, migration, citizenship and identity later this year, and I look forward to exploring how we can work together.

We have a lot to do. Our approach will be incremental and inclusive, and we will learn both

from our experiences and from feedback from our diaspora, advisory panel and others. We will also continue to learn from those who are already active in diaspora work, especially in Ireland and Wales. The framework commits to reviewing progress biennially, so, in two years' time—and, no doubt, beforehand, through parliamentary questions from members from across the chamber—I expect to be reporting on successes and lessons learned.

I hope that our efforts will encourage members of our diaspora to see and promote Scotland as a favourable

“destination in which to work, live, study, do business, or simply visit.”

I hope, too, that it will draw support from across the chamber. I want the Scottish connections framework to evolve on the basis of the involvement of members of all parties. I hope that it will become a platform for Scottish communities, businesses, universities and cultural organisations to build bridges with our global diaspora.

However, recognising and engaging members of our diaspora is an objective in itself, not a means to an end. Our framework shows how we can work together to build a truly global network of Scottish connections that will recognise, support and benefit everyone who wants to be a part of our nation.

I move,

That the Parliament cherishes Scotland's global diaspora, which it considers to be an extension of Scotland itself; welcomes the publication of the Scottish Connections Framework, which seeks to build a more vibrant, visible and connected Scottish community around the world; affirms a broad and inclusive definition of “diaspora”, embracing those of Scottish heritage, lived diaspora, alumni of Scottish educational institutions, and anyone who has an affinity with Scotland; recognises the importance of including historically marginalised communities, including minority ethnic Scots, women, young people and the LGBTQ community, and of facing uncomfortable chapters in Scotland's history; celebrates the efforts of Scottish community organisations around the world for maintaining and promoting Scotland's culture and language, including through marking St Andrew's Day and Burns events; applauds the Scottish Government and Scottish Development International's international network of offices for their efforts to increase Scotland's global connections, the valuable contribution of trade and investment envoys, and the 1,200-strong GlobalScot network; stresses the importance of connecting with alumni of Scotland's world-class educational institutions, and expresses its hope that the Scottish Connections Framework will encourage many more people to consider Scotland as a destination in which to work, live, study, do business, or simply visit.

**The Presiding Officer:** Before we move on to the next speaker, I advise members that we have time in hand.

14:44

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Scotland's greatest-ever export has always been our people. It is hard to overstate the impact and legacy that Scots have had, and continue to have, across the four corners of the globe. For a country of only 4.5 million people, our impact on the world, based on population, is without compare: our contributions to science, commerce, education, medicine, culture and politics across the globe are vast.

I welcome the tone that has been set by the cabinet secretary in his speech today. That tone is not always set in the chamber. I also wholeheartedly support the motion. The aim to

“build a more vibrant, visible and connected Scottish community around the world”

is something that should unite us. I welcome the fact that we have a 1,200-strong GlobalScot network. I would like to see more and I know that the framework will help to deliver that. I share the aim that

“the Scottish Connections Framework will encourage many more people to consider Scotland as a destination in which to work, live, study, do business, or simply visit.”

Our amendment attempts to make two points. First, it recognises the importance of engaging the Scottish diaspora, within the terms of the devolution settlement. That is something that should, perhaps, be taken as a given. Secondly, and more importantly, we are very keen to have more details on the metrics through which delivery of the Scottish connections framework can be measured and how its impact will be monitored and reported on.

We will also support the Labour amendment. I am not quite convinced that we needed a reference to the Welsh Government; nevertheless, we can support the sentiment behind the amendment.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am disappointed that the member finds possible offence in the reference to Wales.

This is not to add a point of discord in what has, so far, been a good debate, but it is a disappointment that students in Scotland cannot travel the world for university and further education as students in Wales can.

**Maurice Golden:** I am certainly a big advocate of studying abroad. Having studied in America for a year as part of my higher education, I think that study abroad is invaluable. That should be a two-way street, because we have a lot to give international students and we should be engaging with that global community.

With 40 million people worldwide claiming some degree of Scottish ancestry, maintaining

Scotland's links with our Scottish diaspora is crucial—both economically and culturally. In the Scottish Conservative's 2021 manifesto, we made it clear that we would like the Scottish Government to make better use of the Scottish diaspora—which we believe is one of our greatest assets, both as a market and as ambassadors for Scotland—and our produce in order to reach larger markets abroad.

The Scottish Conservatives welcomed the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's call, as part of its recent inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work, for more detail on how the Scottish Government intends to maximise its engagement with the Scottish diaspora. On that basis, we welcome the publication of the "Scottish Connections Framework" and we are very supportive of its intentions.

However, the commitments that have been made in the framework require further details. We call on the Scottish Government to provide more information on the metrics through which delivery of the framework will be measured and how its impact will be monitored, measured and reported on. I know that the cabinet secretary regularly attends committee and will look forward to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's considered scrutiny. However, we are looking for more information on resource allocation, timescales, responsibilities and targets emanating from the framework.

Monitoring, measuring and reporting has been missing from the Scottish Government's international work for some time, which is why the Scottish Conservatives have called for greater transparency and accountability in that work. Our call is aligned to a number of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's recommendations in its inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work.

In its inquiry report, the committee called on the Scottish Government to make the objectives of its international work clear and to detail how it will measure the impact of and report on its work. Furthermore, the committee highlighted that the Scottish Parliament should have a role in scrutinising the work in delivery of the Scottish connections framework. Ministers should take account of the committee's views.

Transparency and accountability are required throughout the Scottish Government's international work, so I welcome the commitment to those. The Government's motion also expresses its hope that the Scottish connections framework

"will encourage many more people to consider Scotland as a destination to ... visit",

and we welcome that. We stand ready to support the Scottish Government's objectives in that, although surely the cabinet secretary must recognise that, in order to attract visitors to Scotland, we have to make Scotland an attractive place to visit. The latest regulatory changes in the tourism sector are, in my view, not aligned to the aspirations of the framework.

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** Within those considerations, does Maurice Golden agree that, although it is important to continue to remain attractive in terms of cost, if we do not invest in our offering as a country—which, of course, the transient visitor levy seeks to do—we are in danger of becoming complacent about what we offer here, in Scotland?

**Maurice Golden:** We need investment, but there is also an economic realisation that the sector has had much to deal with over recent years—not least Covid and the global cost of living crisis, which have increased the regulatory burden, which is increasingly problematic.

I visited an agritourism business yesterday, and the people who run it are at their wits' end. The owner said to me that she just feels scunnered by it all. There is a role for investment, but we also need our regulations to support tourism, and, ultimately, to support Scotland as a destination that we would all like to visit. On that, at least, we are aligned.

Scotland has some of the most wonderful historical sites, which are top of the list for anyone visiting Scotland—especially people of Scottish ancestry. In a recent committee submission, Historic Environment Scotland highlighted that half of international visitors reported heritage as their key motivation for visiting Scotland and that, every year, more than £3 billion is contributed to Scotland's economy by tourism that is generated by the historic environment.

However, it was reported last month that 90 historical sites are still closed or have restricted access. That issue has been on-going for years. In my region, we have Arbroath abbey, which is home to the declaration of Arbroath and is one of the sites that have been partially closed for years. There is no opening date in sight. Having such a historically important site closed for so long is incredibly troubling.

With the cabinet secretary being in the unique position of having responsibility for external affairs and culture, he should be best placed to recognise the importance of historical sites in attracting international visitors. Reopening our historical sites must be a priority if we are serious about attracting international visitors.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray):** I have responsibility for elements of what Maurice Golden is talking about. In relation to high-level masonry, realising the programme to ensure the safety of visitors and staff at those sites has to be the top priority, which I am sure Maurice Golden would accept. Does the member also accept that there is a fantastic visitor centre in Arbroath that provides really good interpretation, that people should not be put off by the partial closure and that we should ensure that people can continue to visit the really important sites?

**Maurice Golden:** Yes—of course, safety must be the number 1 priority. There is much more to Arbroath than just the abbey—not least the smokies, I hear from Stephen Kerr, or a visit to Gayfield, where a person can watch a match while perhaps having sea water drizzling on them, if they get lucky.

People should stop in Dundee on the way to visit the V&A Dundee or Verdant Works. There is lots more to see. The Dundee Museum of Transport is very good as well. It is well worth a visit. It has three halls and includes vintage cars.

Many businesses require support to grow and internationalise, so we need to ensure that there is support. For example, manufacturing in Tayside currently has no Scottish manufacturing advisory service support. That needs to change.

We have called on the Scottish Government to provide more information on how it will engage with the diaspora. We support the Scottish connections framework, and we stand ready to be part of the journey to create a successful international Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-09107.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises the importance of engaging with the Scottish diaspora within the terms of the devolved settlement, and calls on the Scottish Government to provide more details regarding the metrics upon which the delivery of the Scottish Connections Framework will be measured and how its impact will be monitored, measured and reported.”

14:56

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Scottish Labour welcomes the debate and the publication of the Scottish Government’s “Scottish Connections Framework”.

I agree with Maurice Golden that Scotland’s greatest export has been its people. However, Scotland is also recognised around the world for our landscapes, our culture, our brilliant universities and educational tradition, our food, perhaps especially our drink, and so much more.

As Mr Robertson said, Burns nights are annual celebrations across the globe—in Blantyre, Malawi; in Hamilton, Bermuda; in Dunedin, New Zealand; in Glasgow, Kentucky; and even in Antarctica. Members might be interested in consulting the University of Glasgow’s outstanding interactive map of Burns suppers, which details more than 2,500 events in all four corners of the earth.

It is no wonder that many people around the world continue to feel affinity and love for Scotland. That is because we have been a diasporic nation throughout our history. For centuries, Scots have migrated across the seas and oceans in search of a better life. As the cabinet secretary said, at least 5 million Americans claim Scottish ancestry, and millions of Canadians do so, too. Some have estimated that up to 15 per cent of Canadians may be of Scottish descent.

Tartan week in April has been mentioned. That is a huge celebration of Scottish ancestry and heritage across North America.

Scotland’s global brand is incredibly proud and incredibly strong. Our diasporic links are enormous, and doubtless many are untapped or underutilised. With connections in all corners of the globe, the potential power of the Scottish diaspora network cannot be overestimated. A serious and strategic approach to the definition, support and deployment of the Scottish diaspora worldwide is therefore very much to be welcomed.

The framework correctly identifies a whole raft of areas in which there are potential benefits of engagement for the diaspora community itself and for those of us closer to home, whether that be in respect of heritage, culture, immigration, education, tourism or business.

There is much to welcome in the framework. I welcome the commitment to direct National Records of Scotland to prioritise the development of online and digital resources. We know that many in the diaspora wish to visit Scotland to trace their ancestry and heritage, and that is not always easy. That measure is therefore welcomed and supported. Many are unable to make such a trip, so the development of online and digital tools to aid people around the world in finding their Scottish connections is vital. So, too, are the framework’s professed aims to promote business and employment opportunities in Scotland for members of our diaspora and to offer a pathway for those seeking to make Scotland their home.

Scotland and the UK as a whole have been and continue to be greatly enhanced and enriched—socially, culturally and economically—by immigration. Demographic trends suggest that Scotland in particular needs immigrants, so I welcome the introduction of the talent attraction



and migration service to bring talent to Scotland and the Scottish economy. There are also plenty of encouraging noises in the document about the use of the GlobalScot network to promote cultural connections and business links. I await the development of those proposals with interest.

Above all, the framework is to be applauded for stressing from the outset the importance of reaching out to historically marginalised groups such as minority ethnic communities and LGBTQ Scots and of promoting young people's and women's participation through Scotland's international offices. Scotland's national identity must always be defined in civic terms as being open to all who live here and regardless of a person's race, gender or sexual identity.

In a similar vein, as the framework acknowledges, it is important not to whitewash Scottish history or to romanticise Scotland's past any more than we should romanticise our present. I hope and believe that we are a welcoming and open society but, in 2023, minority ethnic communities are still experiencing racism, prejudice and discrimination in Scotland. My colleague Foysol Choudhury will speak about that. There is also still homophobia, misogyny and bigotry in our society.

Scotland's role in global history is not one of unalloyed goodness—far from it. Scotland played an important role in the appalling history of slavery and the slave trade, as well as of colonialism. I welcome the framework's acknowledgement of Scotland's role in those atrocities and of the impact of emigration on other countries. The framework is to be applauded for its commitment to working with academic institutions

“to better understand ... these chapters in our history.”

In that vein, our rekindled relationship with Malawi, which was launched in the chamber in 2005 by the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, can perhaps serve as a model of how acknowledgement of past injustices can be channelled effectively in a positive, civically engaged and socially just direction.

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture was right to highlight the importance of the Scottish Government working with universities and colleges to diversify the international student population and promote Scotland's reputation internationally, as well as to promote alumni engagement.

Scotland has a proud history of education—of pioneering scientific discovery and pioneering social and political thought. I welcome the developments at the University of the West of Scotland that the cabinet secretary mentioned. The University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh were key centres of the enlightenment,

in dialogue and engagement with cities and centres of learning across Europe.

It is therefore regrettable that contemporary Scottish students still do not have access to a proper replacement for the Erasmus programme. That is why our amendment calls on the Scottish Government to follow the Welsh Government's example and establish an international education exchange programme by the end of this year.

I believe that all of us across the chamber would like better global engagement and to see the framework succeed. As other members have said and as the cabinet secretary recognised, concerns have been expressed about what we expect from the framework, how we measure success and what targets will be in place. I look forward to hearing details of the value of the Scottish connections fund and what it will be used for. I welcome what the cabinet secretary said about achieving value for money and putting in place checks for that.

Our amendment stresses the importance of physical connections and of good international air links. If we truly want to be an outward-looking nation that is globally connected, Scottish airports should be supported to develop frequent and accessible air services to key international destinations and economic hubs. I urge the Scottish Government to use its conversations abroad to promote Scotland's large aviation industry and its role in enhancing opportunities for people to visit and work in Scotland.

**Maurice Golden:** What are the member's thoughts on how achieving net zero is compatible with expanding the aviation sector?

**Neil Bibby:** The aviation industry is making great efforts to reduce emissions globally; that important work is being undertaken. Aviation will play a key part in improving Scotland's connections around the world. Instead of people having to take two or three flights to get to parts of the world, we would benefit from more direct international flights. I urge the Scottish Government to use its conversations abroad to promote the industry in that regard.

Co-operation between the Scottish Government and the UK Government—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Sorry, Mr Bibby—could I ask you to resume your seat for a second? Conversations are going on across the Scottish National Party and Conservative benches between members in sedentary positions, which is disrespectful to the member who has the floor.

**Neil Bibby:** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

I was about to raise the importance of co-operation between the Scottish and UK Governments. I do not know whether that was an example of Scottish Government and Conservative Party co-operation.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the member give way?

**Neil Bibby:** In the spirit of co-operation, I will give way to Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** First of all, I assure my friend that I was not having a conversation. That might have been misinterpreted.

One of the things that is mentioned in Neil Bibby's amendment—it is mentioned in the Scottish connections framework, too—is the need for us to leverage UK Government assets in countries, such as embassies and consulates. Does the member agree that we ought to do a lot more of that? Those assets can do much more to promote a positive image and vision of Scotland.

**Neil Bibby:** Yes, I very much agree with that. We must ensure that the Scottish Government is undertaking its role to promote Scotland abroad, but we also need the UK Government to be working better for Scotland and promoting the country across the globe.

As I said, co-operation is needed between the Scottish Government and the UK Government and its agencies to progress the framework, to progress the aims that I think that we, in this chamber, all share and to ensure that we are delivering on that.

Forgive me if I am a little sceptical, given the record on co-operation between the two Governments over recent years, but it is the duty of the Scottish and UK Governments, regardless of their political colours, to work in the interests of the people of Scotland and those of the rest of the UK. That should certainly include the promotion of brand Scotland abroad and in the diaspora.

Both of Scotland's Governments should be working together to maximise the opportunities that our diaspora offers. Therefore, I call on both Governments to develop a plan to better use the Scotland Office and the global network of UK embassies to celebrate Scottish culture and support trade envoys.

The Scotland Office should be transformed into a powerhouse for Scotland, leading trade missions, hosting Scottish culture events around the world and using the UK's global network to promote Scotland to the world. Whatever our politics, we can all agree that boosting Scotland's place in the world lifts up every Scot. I encourage both our Governments to use the power of brand Scotland internationally to create jobs and opportunities at home and abroad.

We welcome the document, and we hope that the framework will be a success. We hope that the Scottish Government will respond to the issues that are raised today.

I move amendment S6M-09107.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises the importance of good international air links and believes that Scottish airports should be supported to develop frequent and accessible air routes to key international destinations and economic hubs; believes that there is more that could be achieved if the Scottish and UK governments worked together to promote Scotland internationally and calls for both governments to develop a plan to better use the Scotland Office and global network of UK embassies to celebrate Scottish culture and support trade envoys; regrets that Scottish students still do not have access to a proper replacement for the Erasmus programme, and calls on the Scottish Ministers to follow the example of the Welsh Government and establish an international educational exchange programme by the end of 2023.”

15:07

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I thank everyone who is involved in the GlobalScot network for their immense contribution, time, effort and knowledge. They often provide that expertise on a voluntary basis during their free time to help people here and abroad. That great contribution should be appreciated, as should be the contribution of the staff team behind the connections framework. I think that there will be unanimity across the chamber in support of the framework.

The staff on the network are involved in impressive work connecting, informing and educating about the opportunities abroad. That is why we will be supporting the Scottish connections framework. I am sure that other parties will, too.

The network has a deep heritage. It has been around since almost the beginning of the Scottish Parliament. The Liberal Democrat-Labour Government sought to develop the network across the globe, and that has been taken on by subsequent Administrations, which is a great thing.

Back in 2006, the then First Minister Jack McConnell said that Scots must embrace globalisation. He was right, and we have endeavoured to achieve that ever since.

It is valuable to have the assistance of people with an affinity with Scotland to help people here to connect with the world, because learning new systems, bureaucracy and laws overseas can be daunting, especially at first and when someone has limited time. However, that can be filled with opportunities. Holding someone's hand, making introductions and offering advice on the local sensitivities can be immensely helpful.

There is no doubt that our heritage is rich, that our reach is broad and that we have tangible connections across the world. We have genealogy—which has already been referred to—whisky, Burns, culture and the enlightenment. Those are all strong characteristics of our country.

I know that this is unusual for me, but let me be a little bit challenging in the next bit of my contribution. The work should be practical and helpful, not political or based on some misty-eyed concept of Scotland. For many people, character and culture are important but, for others, especially those in business and academia, it is not all about tartan and Burns. We need to ensure that our work has a broad appeal, because not everyone is motivated by or interested in Scotland the brand; some people are interested in the elements contained within Scotland, whether that be our excellent universities, the whisky industry, fish farms, medical trials or the excellent work that is being done—

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Willie Rennie:** I told you that I would get them going, Presiding Officer. I give way to Mr Swinney.

**John Swinney:** I am grateful to Mr Rennie for giving way. I suspect that Mr McKee would have made the same point that I will make. Let me reassure Mr Rennie that, in my Government experience, I led a very successful delegation of university principals to India, which resulted in significant opportunities based on the strength of those institutions and their willingness to work with the Government to promote Scotland overseas. I assure him that what he is calling for is being actively delivered by the fantastic people in Scottish Development International who serve Scotland overseas.

**Willie Rennie:** I knew that I would immediately get a response from the former Deputy First Minister, who makes a very welcome contribution. It is important that people outside the chamber hear and listen to those assurances.

Let me take the example of the University of St Andrews in my constituency. It has an enormous global reach, and its alumni network is huge. The university attracts talented people from abroad, educates them and sends them back off into the world, often to change it quite dramatically. I hope that those individuals will join the GlobalScot network, but I am sure that they will be in the University of St Andrews alumni network, because they will have developed a strong allegiance to the institution and the town.

Scotland's global outreach must not suffocate the connection with such institutions, because different people have different motivations. It is not just about Scotland the brand, as much as I support that brand. That is why the connections framework needs to be agile and to recognise the pragmatic and practical support that should be involved in helping us and them.

**Angus Robertson:** I will be helpful in amplifying Willie Rennie's point. I suggest that anybody who is interested in the point that he is making should visit [www.scotland.org](http://www.scotland.org), which is the portal that shows how Scotland is promoted internationally. Yes, it is about heritage and where people have come from, but it is also about cutting-edge technology, culture, education and all the other things that he is right to mention. Scotland is many things to many different people, and we will do our best to ensure that we speak to them all.

**Willie Rennie:** That is very welcome. I would argue that, for people who have been to the University of St Andrews and have connections to it, the university brand is far more important than the Scotland brand. The two are not necessarily inconsistent with each other, but we must recognise that talent and the economic potential for Scotland. That is why we need to protect our universities. We need to enhance and support them so that they can continue to be successful.

However, as the cabinet secretary knows, Scotland's share of funding from the UK research council has dropped from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent. That is one of the clearest indications that we are taking our institutions for granted. If they have a tremendous brand that reaches across the globe, we should be worried about that drop in funding, because it will undermine our connections framework in the long term.

The final point that I want to make is about the Erasmus scheme. The previous time we had an exchange with the cabinet secretary on that subject, he claimed that there were all sorts of problems with the Taith scheme in Wales. After that, I spoke to people involved in that scheme, and they were a bit surprised by that claim. The Taith scheme has been sending people right across the globe—to 23 EU countries and to 40 countries in the rest of the world. Five thousand people from Wales have been spread right across the world. The people involved in that scheme have offered to meet the cabinet secretary to discuss how that could happen here. Scottish students and educators have been denied that opportunity for one year, and they could be denied it for another year unless the Government gets its finger out and ensures that we have a replacement for the Erasmus scheme.

I hope that the minister takes up that offer—I can give him the telephone number to make the

call—because, if we are to ensure that Scotland is truly connected, it is important that we use every possible lever to make that happen.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before we move to the open debate, I advise members that we have some time in hand, should members wish to make or take interventions. Of course, that is entirely a matter for them. For the sake of clarity, if we get to a point in the debate at which we have run out of extra time, I will let members know. At that point, any interventions will require to be subsumed within the member's speaking time.

15:15

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** I thank members for an excellent debate so far. I also thank the cabinet secretary for bringing the debate to the chamber and for his work on the framework, which covers all the points that are hugely important to taking forward the agenda. It is critical not just to Scotland's heritage in relation to reaching out to the diaspora and to Scotland's image and place in the world, but to the country's economic impact. The points that Willie Rennie made in that regard are worth reflecting on. I will come on to talk about some of them—the economic impact of Burns and tartan—as I go through my remarks.

I welcome the digital focus within the framework and the ability that it gives to provide a one-stop shop for everyone. There is an important point about knitting together all the different groups that engage with Scotland at different levels of commitment and for different reasons within one framework, be it our trade envoys, who continue regularly to commit a phenomenal amount of time to supporting Scotland's economic development, or GlobalScots. The same applies to our alumni and affinity Scots—people who have less of a time commitment but, nonetheless, are supportive of, and feel a deep affinity with, Scotland. It is important that all those groups and more are part of that framework and that it recognises the co-ordination.

I will focus on the economic impact of the framework and leveraging the broader diaspora. I believe that that is a huge untapped resource—as, I know, the cabinet secretary and the Government do.

I will reflect on a couple of experiences that I had during my time in Government. I remember going to an event in Jakarta organised by our excellent trade envoy there, Ainsley Mann, with alumni from many Scottish universities, including the University of St Andrews, in the room. Three hundred Indonesian alumni came to that event. We could have sold double or three times that number of tickets but that was the capacity of the

hall. Ainsley Mann had organised a full orchestra with singers and songs in Indonesian, English and Gaelic, which was hugely impressive. However, the key point is that, almost to a man and a woman, those alumni were destined for high roles in Indonesian Government and business. Our connection with them is hugely important for developing Scotland's place.

The second experience is an event that I was at in the United Arab Emirates with a group of GlobalScots, who filled the room. As they always do, they insisted that I give them more to do, because they wanted more work to do to help to support Scotland's agenda and drive it forward.

One company that was there—Motive Offshore Group Ltd, which works in renewable energy and which I have met regularly in different parts of the world—has gone as far as designing and patenting its own tartan. I am honoured to wear its tartan tie today. That is a demonstration of how much it took its Scottish heritage forward and how it sees it as a key attractor in helping it to drive additional business.

I welcome the focus on ancestry. That, too, opens doors to economic opportunities for tourism and, more widely, foreign direct investment. An interesting statistic is that around 50 per cent of the opportunities for inward investment in Scotland that come through Scotland house in London are from individuals who have an affinity with, or connection to, the country. It is hugely important to build on that, and the work with the broader diaspora to make those people deepen their connection with Scotland and understand it more thoroughly is welcome.

I turn to a couple of points in the Labour amendment. The first concerns co-operation with the UK Government. I am a great believer in the principle that, if we are paying for it, we should use it. While we are paying our share of the UK Government footprint before we become independent, we should absolutely use it. That is a key point that was in "A Trading Nation—a plan for growing Scotland's exports". It is part of the wider network of resources that we should use and leverage.

Rest assured that, when I was on my travels on behalf of Scotland—I am sure that current ministers do likewise—I always made a point of leaning on the relevant ambassador to encourage them to run as many Scotland-themed events as possible, using their UK Government resources in support of that. I also took every opportunity to ensure that Scotland could be part of Nordic hubs where they exist, so it is not just the UK Government with which we work in the international co-operation field.

The other point is about air connectivity and its importance. Scottish Labour should know that on-going significant work takes place on that with VisitScotland, SDI and the sector. Again, it is a firm part of “A Trading Nation” to understand which routes are important for Scotland’s connectivity and to work to maximise the potential by persuading airlines to connect as much as possible. To pick up on Maurice Golden’s important point about net zero, I note that direct flights help to reduce the amount of carbon that is emitted in relation to people who make connections from Scotland to international destinations. In addition, Scotland is very involved in the on-going work on sustainable aviation fuel.

I have three specific asks of the Scottish Government that it can perhaps take forward and consider for the development framework. The first builds on the point that Willie Rennie made about the importance of universities and accessing alumni networks. We need them to redouble their effort to address general data protection regulation issues about sharing alumni databases with Government. Universities can be slightly protective of that data, but it is really important that we open it up in order to connect with and bring alumni—

**Willie Rennie:** Will Ivan McKee give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is closing his remarks.

**Ivan McKee:** Sorry.

The second ask is around the Government and Scottish Enterprise not being too controlling, for want of a better word, over the network. We should let the network flourish. We should let groups self-organise on a geographical or sectoral basis—as we saw recently with the GlobalScot space network—or as a wider diaspora. Where possible, we should delegate that, because it allows things to be tailored locally and work more effectively, and, frankly, it means that we do not have to have a big expensive team at the centre to manage what will, I hope, become a rapidly growing network at all levels. As part of that, we should also ensure that we use the excellent private sector networks that are out there, including the Scottish Business Network—I see that Russell Dalgleish is in the public gallery this afternoon to take in the debate. Such networks, with many thousands of members globally, have an important part to play.

The third ask is perhaps slightly more controversial, but I will throw it out there, anyway. Ireland has been mentioned as an example of how to do diaspora well. Anyone who has met Irish ministers will know that, for the week of St Patrick’s day, they leave one poor minister to run the country and everybody else gets on a plane and goes somewhere. I would like the Scottish

Government to reflect on the opportunity to do something similar for Burns week. Let us move recess to the end of January, let us shut the Parliament and let us all go out and promote Scotland for the week.

15:23

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I suppose that it is a debate, but we have not disagreed very much so far. Some people will think that that is a good thing, but I think that, in a democratic Parliament, it is good to have contrary opinions, and I wish to offer some contrary opinions in my speech. I would not want to disappoint my colleagues on the nationalist benches in that respect.

There has never been any doubt in my mind about the impact that Scotland has on the world. I have had the opportunity to travel far and wide in my professional life, and the reach that our country has around the world never fails to astonish me. There is something about the very idea of Scotland and Scottishness. Some comments have been made about romanticised imagery, but that has a powerful influence on the way in which many people see our country. Scotland captures the imagination and the hearts of people and, like many members, I am both proud of and grateful for that. There is also no doubt that “Scotland” and “Scottish” are valued brands the world over, which Willie Rennie alluded to, and they can co-exist with institutional loyalties and localised loyalties.

The more people who have different connections to Scotland, the better. We need to maximise that franchise and build on what we have. The diaspora and how we use it is an essential component of that. We have heard about the 40 million people around the world with Scots ancestry, but beyond that, many millions of people feel a strong affinity with Scotland. We all have stories about meeting people in the most unlikely places in distant lands who proclaim their affinity with Scotland. Generations on, they are still Scots at heart.

One group of people who have already been mentioned, but whom I want to touch on again because, if we do our job properly, they will spend the rest of their lives being Scotland’s unpaid ambassadors at large, are international students who choose to make Scotland their home while they study. It is true that international students in Scotland make a huge financial contribution to our country. They are a massive export industry in their own right and we need them more than ever. As Willie Rennie said, the SNP Scottish Government has been willing to cut the funding that goes to Scotland’s universities and at a cost. It is leaving our institutions vulnerable and dependent on international students. The paid

tuition for Scotland-domiciled students does not even cover the teaching costs that go with each student. International students are therefore an important source of vital revenue. Their tuition fees underpin Scotland's universities' finances.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** The member makes an important point. It also leaves our universities vulnerable, because they are so dependent on international students, who are welcome and who make a huge contribution. If those patterns change, it could leave our universities in a precarious position, which they almost were in during lockdown. We all need to think about that collectively. Does the member agree with that?

**Stephen Kerr:** I agree with Daniel Johnson. He correctly cites the example of the shock of Covid, and I would cite the further shock of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. There are other great uncertainties in the world, particularly around China and Taiwan. We should be mindful of all these things. [*Interruption.*] The minister is busy heckling me and making some unhelpful suggestions. I will take an intervention from him, if he wishes.

**Neil Gray:** I sought to add to that list of unfortunate events the impact that Brexit has had on international students coming to study in Scotland.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am sorry, but that is the usual utter nonsense from the Government's front bench. The statistics prove otherwise. Record numbers of international students are coming to the UK and Scotland, and we are seeing the benefit of that. There are so many red herrings being deployed in this debate and they usually begin with B and end with t—Brexit. I am afraid that it is nonsense.

The Scottish Government has been reckless with our universities, which is why Daniel Johnson is right when he talks about the vulnerabilities that exist around them. According to a recent article in *The Times*, international students are worth £7.75 billion to the Scottish economy.

Beyond the financial calculations, international students are a soft power asset that circumnavigates the planet—a flowing tide of goodwill to be celebrated and harnessed. When one speaks to an international alumnus of a Scottish university who has returned home and made a life for themselves, as many will have done, the very mention of Scotland brings a smile to their face. That is an important power that can work to our advantage if we harness it. They love Scotland, they are some of the great proponents of Scotland and the greatest salespeople that we have and could ever hope for.

The idea of Scottish higher education is known around the world and our universities are renowned not only as being among the very best in the British Isles but as being world class. In a similar, but separate, vein, I will forever remember walking into a convenience store in the middle of Tokyo and seeing a whole section of the shop devoted entirely to Scottish produce. Scotland's food and drink sector is a massive cultural ambassador in its own right. For example, Scotch whisky has seen record exports of more than £6 billion in the past year, making up 25 per cent of total UK food and drink exports. I mention that because it is a reminder to my friends in the United Kingdom Government that, when Scotland's unique heritage, industry, beauty and cultural independence are embraced by British institutions, British reputations are embellished.

Like any good relationship, the union also empowers Scotland. Through the UK's membership of NATO, the G7, the G20, the Five Eyes and our permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council, Scotland's voice is heard at the top level of international affairs, as are Scottish voices. With 162 embassies and high commissions, as well as 190 consulates and 35 other diplomatic representations, our position within the United Kingdom allows us to project Scottish influence at all levels around the world. British embassies represent the best of British, which means that they must, should and do represent Scots and Scotland.

**Ivan McKee:** Will the member accept an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member will shortly be closing his remarks. I have said that there is time in hand, but that does not mean that every member gets to speak for an endless period of time.

Mr Kerr, please continue and please start to wind up.

**Stephen Kerr:** So, I cannot take the intervention.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The management of the debate falls on my shoulders. I would like you to continue with your thoughts but to bring them to a close.

**Stephen Kerr:** I will bring my thoughts to a close by saying that the comments that I have just made lead to significant questions. What is the Scottish National Party's true motive for spending scarce resources on new, separate offices in foreign capitals when we are not maximising the valuable asset that we already have through the presence of British embassies? Why did Angus Robertson need to be called out—

**John Swinney:** Will the member accept an intervention?

**Stephen Kerr:** I would love to, but I am afraid I cannot.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have already explained that Mr Kerr is concluding his remarks. Mr Kerr, please conclude your remarks. Thank you, Mr Swinney. Thank you, Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** This is a debate now. Why did Angus Robertson need to be called out for posturing—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Kerr, you really need to conclude your remarks. I hope that we are now on that trajectory. *[Interruption.]* Thank you very much, members;. Thank you, Mr Kerr. Please conclude.

**Stephen Kerr:** Do I have a minute left to conclude?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will give you 30 seconds, Mr Kerr. Please conclude.

**Stephen Kerr:** I have 30 seconds in which to conclude.

Let me close by concluding that question. Angus Robertson should not have to be called out for posturing as a foreign minister—which he is not—and for holding official talks on matters that are reserved. So, I say to the cabinet secretary in conclusion: do not waste the Scottish public's money—do not do that. My colleague Maurice Golden is right to call for greater transparency—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** —throughout the Scottish Government's international work—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Kerr. I think that we have worked out your conclusion.

**Stephen Kerr:** Well, we were having a debate—which is a revelation in this place.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Kerr. I do have other members to accommodate in the debate.

I call Stuart McMillan, to be followed by Christine Grahame.

15:33

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I was actually getting quite worried for the first few minutes of Stephen Kerr's speech, because I was agreeing with him, but then he reverted to type and, thankfully, I disagreed with the vast majority of the latter part of his contribution.

I am pleased to speak in the debate. Some of the opening speeches about Scotland's international role from Maurice Golden and Willie Rennie seemed quite positive, and they certainly seemed to contradict previous comments by Donald Cameron and by Christine Jardine MP about Scotland's outward investment.

To paraphrase the opening lines of the framework, I agree that, although international relations are fundamentally about relationships between Governments, ties between people and communities are also vital in increasing global peace and prosperity. That is why my speech will focus on two key opportunities that would, in my opinion, benefit both Scotland and our global diaspora.

The first relates to conversations that I have had with colleagues who are involved in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Through the CPA, I have had the privilege of meeting politicians from across the Commonwealth. I take my role in the Scottish parliamentary branch and on the international executive committee very seriously, as colleagues who have served with me in the branch will testify.

While away and engaging with folk, I like to make the time to network and engage with other members of the Commonwealth outside official business in order to learn more about their cultures, their politics and, crucially, their connections to Scotland. I am always looking for a hook to raise the profile of Scotland and of my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency, and to highlight the many opportunities that we have. As the official parliamentary piper, it is easy for me to strike up that type of conversation, as the role often leads to CPA members asking me about Scotland's culture. I sometimes take my pipes with me when I go to events.

Those conversations have led me to think about ways that we could celebrate our culture and global diaspora on a bigger scale, and I keep coming back to the issue of tartan week in New York. It is a significant event that attracts a lot of Scots to New York from all over North America, and the various events often receive lots of press coverage both within North America and further afield.

However, America is not the only place with connections to Scotland. Through the CPA, I have learned that Australia has its own tartan day, which is held annually on 1 July. The date was chosen as it marks the anniversary of the repeal proclamation of 1782, which annulled the Act of Proscription 1747. That act had banned the wearing of tartan, which was punishable by transportation.

It appears from my engagement with colleagues from Australia that those celebrations do not have the same reach or impact as those in North America. However, with over 2 million Australians claiming Scottish heritage, I believe that there is a huge opportunity to elevate a tartan day event in Australia and to promote Scotland.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** On the subject of tartan and Australia, this is a predictable point for me to make, but will the member comment on the clan network in Scotland and the wider clan diaspora? Every Scottish clan will have an international association and there is a huge network that the Scottish Government could use. It does not have to be only about tartan; it could be about exchange programmes and so on, which I know happen. Does the member agree?

**Stuart McMillan:** Mr Cameron will be pleased to hear that I am going to come on to that in a moment, because it is the subject of the second point that I am going to raise.

**Angus Robertson:** Through an intervention, may I address Donald Cameron's point? I report for those who are unaware of it that Donald MacLaren of MacLaren, who is one of those who are responsible for Scotland's clan network, was in New York during tartan week and the organisers of that event welcome the involvement of Scotland's historic clan associations. They form part of international outreach efforts, and we are grateful for it.

**Stuart McMillan:** As the cabinet secretary touched on earlier, I wrote to him and the Presiding Officer with a proposal not to replicate what happens in North America, but to have something bespoke for Australia in the form of a tartan week type of event. With over 2 million people there claiming Scots heritage, I can only see such an event having a positive impact for Scotland and its diaspora.

I touched on my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency. It is interesting to note that Port Glasgow has a strong link with Australia in that the composer of its national anthem, Peter Dodds McCormick, was born in Port Glasgow in 1834. He was a teacher and also a composer.

I will not go into too much detail on the proposal as I am conscious of time. However, given the depopulation challenges that my constituency faces and the population challenges that Scotland as a whole faces, as per the recent Scottish Fiscal Commission report, work to engage more with the diaspora represents a huge, unique opportunity to entice others, whether they have a Scottish connection or not, to consider visiting or living here, or even investing here.

The second point that I want to touch on is one that I am sure that we can all relate to, when we meet tourists who are visiting Scotland or when we are abroad and meet people who have a connection to Scotland. I have often found that, particularly if they are visiting Scotland, people have traced their family history and are trying to visit areas where their relatives grew up, worked or lived. That is why making sure that we not only preserve but amplify our history is also crucial for engaging Scotland's global diaspora.

On Sunday, I was invited by the Society of William Wallace to take part in the unveiling of the Wallace oak at Hunterston castle. During the visit, I spoke with Madam Pauline Hunter of Clan Hunter and told her that I would be speaking in this debate. Ivan McKee touched on the issue of heritage earlier. I was pleased to hear that Pauline Hunter welcomed the "Scottish Connections Framework" and its commitment to support heritage organisations and improve access to information targeted at Scotland's diaspora.

Working with Clan Hunter, which has already engaged with Clan McMillan in my constituency and with Clan Buchanan, would be of great benefit not just for tourism but for engaging with Scotland's diaspora and making those connections. Who knows where it could lead in terms of inward investment in jobs? International engagement is not just about talking about the past; it is also an investment in the present and the future.

Economic opportunities can open up if we are prepared to engage. Staying at home will certainly never succeed. In these tough and straitened economic times, it is more vital than ever that Scotland is outward focused, outward minded and out selling and promoting our nation. Anything less is failing the 5.5 million Scots here and the 40 million of the diaspora that we have across the globe.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Christine Grahame, to be followed by Martin Whitfield.

15:41

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Scotland, notwithstanding some dark moments in its history—its role in the slave trade and the British Empire, for example—has that lucky advantage on the world stage of being an instantly recognisable brand. It is identifiable as a nation even though we are not yet a completed nation—independent—and are therefore excluded from the United Nations and other international organisations and treaties.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?



**Christine Grahame:** It is not just about the piper on the shortbread tins, but do not underestimate shortbread or whisky: as Stephen Kerr indicated, global exports grew to more than £6 billion for the first time in 2022, according to figures released by the Scotch Whisky Association, up 37 per cent by value. All of that went into the UK Treasury coffers.

I hope that this is going to be worth while, Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** It is always worth while, I can assure you. The member is quite wrong. Scotland is not excluded from any of those bodies or treaties. We are there, very much, four square and centre as part of this United Kingdom.

**Christine Grahame:** Mr Kerr has a strange idea of what a nation is when you have to stand outside a door and ask permission of another nation to have your voice heard.

The skirl of the pipes is a national identifier, as are the songs of Burns, the clans and their tartans and the internationally recognised “Auld Lang Syne”, none of which we should apologise for. It is also the landscape, urban and rural, and often used for film locations, that shouts that this is Scotland. Despite more than 300 years of the union, we have kept our identity strong. I speak as one being English by birth but a proud Scot.

Any advertising company would give its right arm for just one such internationally recognisable badge, let alone a whole cupboard-full. Add to that the upwards of 40 million people across the world claiming Scottish heritage, and we have an enviable foundation on which to expand and build international relations through all spheres.

Let me correct Maurice Golden. The current population of Scotland is around 5.5 million and we are the beneficiaries of net migration. In 2021, from the rest of the UK it was net 10,000, and from overseas it was net 20,000. However, I recall from the mid-1950s that families of neighbours on either side of our council house emigrated, some under the £10 scheme to Australia and others to Canada and New Zealand, in particular. It is therefore not surprising that, in Australia, stats from 2021 indicate that 130,000 residents were born in Scotland and 2 million residents claim Scottish ancestry.

In Canada, in 2016, nearly 4 million people—14 per cent of the population—claimed Scottish ancestry. Today, the figure is estimated to be as high as 25 per cent. You can add another four to that figure, Presiding Officer, as one of my sons and his family emigrated there just last year—to Nova Scotia, of all places. For family balance, the other son emigrated to London. In New Zealand, although it is difficult to get accurate data, it is

estimated that between 1 and 2 million people claim part or whole Scottish ancestry.

All of that provides a ready-made base of good will towards Scotland, which can be—and is—translated into economic benefits. That good will extends to our European neighbours—whom, of course, we did not want to leave. Interestingly, even Nigel Farage considers that Brexit has been a failure with no economic benefits. One might add to that the damaging economic consequences.

**John Swinney:** Is it not absolutely absurd that the leader of the Brexit campaign, Nigel Farage, has admitted that Brexit was a total failure, yet the Scottish Conservatives are still insisting that it was an unmitigated success and that they are proud to own it?

**Christine Grahame:** A recent YouGov poll has disclosed that only 9 per cent consider that Brexit has been a success, while 62 per cent consider it a failure. I am happy to take an intervention from Stephen Kerr on that point. No—he is in his seat.

I welcome Scotland’s overseas network of offices in Beijing, Berlin, Brussels, Dublin, London, Ottawa, Paris and Washington, and the more than 30 Scottish Development International trade and investment offices in around 20 countries to promote co-operation in areas of devolved responsibility at the national and sub-national level.

I return to Scottish culture, one of Scotland’s greatest exports, which can support our wider international connections, including trading relationships. Tourism is based inextricably in our history and culture, and it is also a key economic contributor.

I will be a bit parochial here, representing, as I do, the Scottish Borders. We have the eclectic Abbotsford, home of the talented and colourful Sir Walter Scott, who did much to revive tartan, and Melrose abbey, where the heart of Robert the Bruce is buried. How many here know the weel-kent children’s song “Ally Bally Bee”, which, I would suggest, is the first-ever advertising jingle and was the creation of a Galashiels weaver, the mischievous confectionery trader Robert Coltart. Then there are the common ridings, which bring expats back to their communities.

We have the history, we have culture, we have those millions with Scottish ancestry across the globe, and we have the saltire, which is recognised the world over as the flag of Scotland, but we do not have our own voice.

I congratulate the Scottish Government on the international measures that it is taking, constrained as it is by devolution. However, I say gently to Willie Rennie—and certainly not gently to

Stephen Kerr—how much more we could do with our independence.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Daniel Johnson, to be followed by Emma Harper.

15:48

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Thank you for taking me before Martin Whitfield, Presiding Officer. I apologise for not being in the chamber for the closing speeches; I have a constituency matter to which I must attend.

The cabinet secretary invited us to think about a fundamentally important question: what contribution do we want to make as a nation to the world? That question speaks to culture, but also to the economy. Often, Scots do not necessarily realise our true context. In some ways, Scotland is a much smaller country and the world a much bigger place than we realise, but, most importantly, we often underestimate our contribution to the world, both in the past and currently. That contribution is one that we can make a great deal more of, and, fundamentally, that is what the framework seeks to look at and expand on.

Let us take one facet in particular. We all take whisky very much take for granted, but it contributes 75 per cent of Scotland's food and drink exports, 20 per cent of UK food and drink exports and 1.3 per cent of all UK exports. We should be celebrating that contribution, because whisky is serious business. Our key challenge should be to get other food and drink categories to the level of global ubiquity that is represented by Scotch whisky. This sort of framework, as part of a wider economic strategy, is key to doing exactly that.

**Stephen Kerr:** I intervene to underline what Daniel Johnson is saying and highlight the fact that last year was a record year for global exports of Scotch whisky. It is a fantastic success story. Now where is the argument about Brexit?

**Daniel Johnson:** I will ignore the Brexit point, but let me take the fundamental point, which is that we need to recognise and build on our strengths. Often, we do not do that.

Scotland has good standing in the world. Some people might want to refer to that as soft power, but it is about our place in the world. We have a legacy that is renowned the world over. There is our contribution to thought, from the Scottish enlightenment onwards, and to engineering, through James Watt. Perhaps less well known by Scots is our contribution to finance. The overdraft was very much a Scottish invention. Investment trusts may not have been invented in Scotland, but they were promoted and developed by Scottish

banks throughout the 19th century. In medicine, there is the Scottish contribution to medical research and the development of the medical profession. Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular, has been key to that. Indeed, many parts of the world got to know Scotland as a result of physicians going there and helping. We made a contribution in the past and we continue to do so. A number of members have highlighted the pivotal role that our centres of higher education play in our on-going contribution to thought and to exporting that thought.

I was very pleased to note in the Government's motion an acknowledgement of Scotland's history. Historically, many of those contributions have not always been associated with positive things. Scotland played a key part in the Atlantic trade, which involved the slave trade. That is the reason why many of our street names, in Edinburgh and in Glasgow, refer to Jamaica and other places with sugar plantations, many of which were owned by Scots. We need to acknowledge that. Likewise, we need to acknowledge other elements of that global history, such as Messrs Jardine and Matheson—Scots who were pivotal in the opium wars. As we think about our global contribution historically, we need to acknowledge such facts.

**Angus Robertson:** Can I add to the list of things that we should be imaginative about embracing? In addition to the points that are, quite properly, being made by the member, there is a group in North America who have been overlooked as part of Scotland's diaspora, and that is African-Americans. A difficult conversation needs to be had with that community about their connection to Scotland, but I have met African-Americans who are proud to have a connection to Scotland, and I think that we should fully explore that with them.

**Daniel Johnson:** I could not agree more. It is one of those topics that we could avoid uncomfortably or deal with matter of factly. We might get a great deal better reception than we expect. We need to think about and acknowledge the topic—I think that it could be the source of future bonds.

A number of members have discussed these matters as not being purely about branding. As someone coming from business, I would say that I understand what they are talking about. There cannot be brand in a superficial sense, but it absolutely is about brand Scotland in the broader sense, because brand is much more than just window dressing. It speaks to deep-seated values and connections. That is what we should be focusing on. Scotland has good will, good standing and good fundamentals of geography, institutions and people. That is what the basis of our global contribution should be. Willie Rennie and others

were absolutely right. The framework has to be grounded in practicalities and making sure that we add to what already exists.

The contribution that our universities make, especially through their alumni associations, is key to getting that right, as Willie Rennie rightly pointed out. They have always been a source of strength, and we should be seeking not to replace them but to build on them. As someone who views himself as a St Andrews alumnus first, before regarding himself as a Scot—that might be a controversial view—I can understand the point that Mr Rennie makes about the fundamental connection that many people have to certain institutions here.

However, we must also consider physical links such as our airports, and whether our overseas offices are in the right places and doing the right things—where they are located and what we task them to do are critical. That goes to Ivan McKee's point that we should get what we pay for. If we are paying for an addition, let us make sure that it is genuinely adding value.

15:55

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I want to focus a wee bit on America, the Scottish diaspora in the US and our connections there. Having lived in Los Angeles in California for 14 years, and having had experience of work and travel in many other states, I know the depth of feeling for Scotland that exists among people right across America. Whether they be among people with family history that is traceable to Scotland, others who work in business, finance and the arts who have links to Scotland, or those who work in academia, science and innovation, we have great connections with the US.

It is right that the Scottish Government should build on such connections and work with our diaspora to learn skills, gain experiences and share achievements to enrich our culture and society. As the motion states, Scotland's diaspora is

“an extension of Scotland itself”.

The framework that the cabinet secretary has described considers the diaspora to be a

“living bridge with people, organisations and communities around the world.”

Scotland has influenced America in the fields of economics, engineering, architecture, philosophy, business, medicine, geology, politics, law, chemistry and sociology. Many cities and towns there were named by Scots who, after arriving in America, named their new locale after their home town. For example, the USA has eight Aberdeens, seven toons named Glasgow, eight Edinburghs

and eight towns that are simply called “Scotland”. There is even a Dumfries in Virginia. In politics, 35 of the 46 US presidents were either Scots or Ulster Scots.

Just recently, I had a meeting with the Department of Corrections and its staff from Massachusetts. After the business part of the meeting, the staff were very keen to talk about all things Scottish. They wanted to recall their previous trips and upcoming visits to Scotland. They were more interested in talking about Scotland than they were in the business that I had to attend to. It was great to hear about the DOC's willingness to work with the Scottish Government so that we can continue our connections in the justice area.

Last week, here in Parliament, I hosted students from the University of South Carolina. Business minister George Adam, Paisley's MSP, joined me in the session. The students and staff remarked on how the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government are directly in touch with people not only here in Scotland but right across America. If university students can pick that up after a few days travelling in the UK, it puts Scotland in incredibly good international standing. Indeed, in the most recent US census, more than 5 million Americans claimed Scottish ancestry.

The USA is both Scotland's top international export destination and our largest inward investor. As co-convener of the Parliament's USA cross-party group, I can say that we have heard many presentations regarding trade and Scotland over the past few years. Annual exports have been worth £6 billion in recent years, with sectors such as engineering and advanced manufacturing, food and drink—which other members have already mentioned—financial and business services, technology, digital and media, and energy all performing strongly. US companies account for around 25 per cent of total foreign inward investment in Scotland. More than 650 US-owned businesses employ around 115,000 people across Scotland. However, we do not just exchange goods; we also exchange ideas. The US is Scotland's top global collaborator on research: 16 of our higher education institutions share 82 unique links with their US counterparts.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Given that the member has mentioned exchanging ideas, does she welcome the fact that the US is avowedly low tax, pro-business and pro-nuclear; strongly defends its oil and gas sector; and is undoubtedly a free market that believes in economic growth? Are those the kind of ideas that she would like Scotland to share with the US?

**Emma Harper:** Scotland needs to be able to share ideas independently from other areas in the UK. We have a lot to offer and we should be

allowed to be out there, right at the door and speaking to people so that our ideas can be conveyed—especially when we, in Scotland, are taking forward some fundamentally different ideas, such as the wellbeing economy.

We need to take every opportunity we have in Scotland to promote the strong cultural affinity between Scotland and the USA. Every year we welcome performers to the Edinburgh festivals and the world pipe band championships, as well as US military personnel who take part in the Edinburgh tattoo. Scots also make their mark in America, with innovative partnerships between National Theatre of Scotland and New York City's Joyce theatre. Even our baby box has been on tour in the USA—it was featured as part of the designing motherhood exhibition. The muckle cultural ties between our countries are absolutely worth shoutin about.

As a Scot who has lived and worked in America, with many American friends, I support the framework and highlight its importance. I ask the cabinet secretary for a commitment that the Scottish Government will continue to take all action possible to support our Scottish-US connections and to work with the Scottish diaspora to share business, culture, science and innovation.

Finally, I had the privilege of meeting Jerry O'Donovan, the Irish consul general, a couple of times recently, and we discussed how to boost relations between our two countries, including through our minority languages Scots and Gaelic. It was insightful to hear from him. I look forward to continuing engagement, including through the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, of which I am a member.

Working with the diaspora and with countries across the globe has a proven track record of improving our relationships with other countries. I look forward to Scotland taking on that challenge as we build our own independent nation.

16:02

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** I am delighted to speak in this important and largely positive debate about how we enhance Scotland as an internationalist nation and the shared challenge and opportunity of engaging, nurturing and continuing to maximise the ancestral connections to Scotland and the affinity with our country of thousands of people from around the world.

That is manifested in many different ways. Today, I am wearing Macpherson tartan. I think of Clan Macpherson and the connections that that surname has all across the world. I also think of the business deals that will be done today, and toasted with a dram of whisky—the signature way

to ensure that people come together after agreeing terms, from Singapore to Seattle and everywhere in between.

**Martin Whitfield:** Of course, we should also remember all those business deals that are made on the golf course, before being toasted with a dram to seal them.

**Ben Macpherson:** That is noted. I cannot argue with that, although I am not a good golfer myself.

I also think of the quiet moments that people are enjoying with their piece of shortbread, whether they are on an aeroplane or in a sitting room. Some of that shortbread is made at Shortbread House of Edinburgh, in Leith, in my constituency.

I will never forget the power of “Auld Lang Syne” in the many forums in which I have heard it. The song unites humanity as the year turns and has an instantly recognisable tune. Twenty years ago, I taught conversational English in China. I remember asking my students whether they had heard of Scotland. Some of them were a bit bemused until I whistled “Auld Lang Syne”, when there was instant recognition.

Those are a few examples of the very powerful connections that Scotland has around the world, which are part of brand Scotland. As has rightly been argued, although the imagination and connections of the heart from those initiatives, products and bits of history connect us to countries around the world and the wider diaspora, those who have emigrated or have been educated here are more practical and important elements of how we continue to grow those connections. That is why I welcome the framework and its commitments to enhancing the GlobalScot network, which already includes approximately 1,200 people.

I was interested to read about the Scottish connections contact point in the framework. I would be really interested in hearing whether the cabinet secretary can say any more about that when he sums up the debate, because how we practically build those connections in the diaspora is at the heart of what we seek to do here. The Conservative amendment is right to ask about reporting, and perhaps I could suggest that a year from now we meet again as a Parliament and reflect on the progress that has been made.

It is vital that the framework and today's debate have highlighted the need for us all, including the Government, to play a part in enhancing those connections. First, the haste ye back initiative is vital in making sure that Scotland continues to be an attractive place for tourists to come and that, as a senior diplomat in Edinburgh said to me recently, it continues to be on everyone's bucket list. The continued support of the festivals across Scotland,

particularly here in Edinburgh, is a key element of how we continue to build those connections.

The talent attraction and migration service is an excellent new initiative, and I look forward to seeing it develop. It is about how we continue to encourage people to come here and make sure that they leave Scotland championing Scotland and continuing to grow the attraction that we already have. Part of that is about how we as Scots engage elsewhere, and part of it must involve Scottish Government ministers travelling, engaging and promoting Scotland. Some members—absent now—have said that that is a negative.

As a previous minister in the external affairs portfolio, that criticism could not be further from the truth. The comments of some members aside, there now seems to be an implicit recognition that Scottish Government travel is right. Stephen Kerr talked about being in Tokyo. The number of Government ministers who have been to Japan in years past to promote Scottish interests is significant; indeed, Mr Gray was there recently.

We would do better as a Parliament to accept, as the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the committee have done, that Scottish Government ministers travelling is a really good thing for us all.

**Neil Gray:** I can confirm that the investment that has come off the back of regular engagement at ministerial and SDI level over years has resulted in more than £200 million being invested at the Sumitomo Electric Industries site in the Highlands, which is an incredible outcome that could have come about only through ministers leaving Scotland and engaging.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back, Mr Macpherson.

**Ben Macpherson:** I absolutely endorse that point. That gives me an opportunity to commend the work of current and previous ministers, in particular the remarkable and tremendous work that Fiona Hyslop did over a long period of time in promoting Scotland in business, good relations and tourism.

During the period when I supported Fiona Hyslop as junior minister for external affairs and Europe, I attended a number of events and engagements with our hubs. It is important to emphasise to some members in the chamber that those hubs are often within UK embassies, so the idea of new estates is not applicable on many occasions. It is actually about Governments working together to promote and enhance the benefit of Scotland more widely, so we need to be accurate about that.

In that spirit—building on what Mr McKee suggested about ministers having the freedom to

go out en masse, as the Irish do—perhaps we could agree, as a Parliament, that around Burns night we could all engage in that, as happens in tartan week. That would allow Opposition members to see the benefit of the Scottish Government's hubs for themselves.

We have done great work—let us build on it together.

16:09

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate and to follow Ben Macpherson's very thoughtful contribution.

It was never the policy of devolution to prevent the devolved areas from reaching out with an international outlook. That has to be the commonsense approach not just at the country level in Scotland but in our cities and towns. Always looking inwards is very foolish and naive.

I am grateful to the Scottish Parliament information centre, which has stolen the quote that I was going to give in relation to the value of our diaspora. Michael D Higgins described the Irish diaspora as their greatest resource and said:

“through the contribution our people make to the nations they migrate to; through the bonds they forge with the peoples of those countries, our migrants have allowed Ireland to have global connections far beyond our size.”

That must be reflected in Scotland and in the cities. The ability to punch above our weight and to reach out through those who have visited here and those who feel historical connections to here is crucial to where this country, the United Kingdom and, indeed, the world need to go.

To echo Ben Macpherson, the debate has been, in the main, a positive one. I very much welcome the cabinet secretary's call at the start for constructive contributions. The network is truly a global one, and the framework sets out a cohesive and—I agree—a cross-cutting approach to diaspora engagement.

I apologise for mentioning Christine Grahame when she is not in the chamber, but she commented on the location of the origins of the saltire, which is, of course, Athelstaneford in East Lothian. The saltire's birth was a bloody one, but it took place in East Lothian rather than the Borders. The small museum and the hill at Athelstaneford are well worth a visit by members of the Scottish diaspora and travelling tourists.

That echoes the intervention that I made about golf during Ben Macpherson's speech. Golf reaches out across the world, sometimes to individuals who find it easier to play and sometimes to those who find it harder to play.

**Ben Macpherson:** It was remiss of me not to have mentioned earlier that the rules of golf were invented on Leith Links. It is important to remember that.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am glad that my intervention eventually bore fruit with Ben Macpherson. That was the intention the first time around.

I want to discuss the definition of the diaspora. I am very pleased to see that the Scottish Government is taking almost as wide an interpretation as can be taken of it. That is particularly important, especially with regard to those who consider themselves to be alumni from Scotland. Our education institutions are important. We have heard much about the networks that alumni can provide around the world. When we look at our further education and our brilliant universities, we see that it is through networks of research that the greatest strides forward are made. Breaking down those barriers is incredibly important.

It is worth commenting on Willie Rennie's point about the value of an academic brand. People can have different identities without it taking away from any one aspect of those identities. Indeed, people will use different identities in different situations just to push the door a little further open in the hope of making a friendship or a business deal.

That brings me, sadly—there always has to be a “sadly”—to the Erasmus programme replacement and the fact that we are a long way behind where we were promised we would be. I ask the cabinet secretary to give some indication, when he sums up the debate, of whether the Scottish Government's position is that that will not happen until independence. That is what a Scottish minister said last week. I deeply hope that that is not the case. An offer has been made to pass on the telephone number from the Welsh Government. I am confident that those who are responding to the issue already have those connections. We must step up and support our young people's ability to travel abroad, to learn abroad and to make networks there that they will carry them through the whole of their lives.

In the short time that is left, I will mention the outreach from Scotland that occurred on Thursday last week at the 2,716th meeting of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its 93rd session. Young people from Scotland spoke to the UN and gave evidence about human rights in Scotland. They stood as tall and were as eloquent as anyone else who gave evidence over the two and a half days for which the committee sat to hear evidence from a number of countries.

It is worth pointing out one aspect—I acknowledge that it is slightly to the edge of today's debate—that talks about Scotland's

strength abroad. The UK Government was the official rapporteur to the UN committee but, through it, the Scottish representative said, in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

“As soon as we are in a position to provide a likely timetable we will do so however it is important to underline that fixing the bill”—

the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill—

“requires extensive engagement with the UK Government to mitigate the risks of a further challenge in the Supreme Court.”

We have talked today about soft power. One of the most significant risks is failing the world if we fail our children by not bringing back that bill to put it on the statute book.

16:16

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I welcome the debate and the framework—especially its aim to use digital tools and social media to increase engagement and drive traffic.

Ireland's success has been outlined, and I will simply highlight the successful framework and vision that were developed by Kingsley Aikins, from whom we can learn a great deal. For Scotland, the obvious touch points such as Burns and St Andrew's day are being targeted, but there must also be one-off events, such as events this year to mark the tercentenary of the birth of Adam Smith, who is as well known as a philosopher as he is as an economist and who undoubtedly took Scotland to the world.

In that respect, much more can always be done. The coupling of sectors with cultural assets, such as music, brings benefit. Even a simple tune such as “Auld Lang Syne” has global reach. Many states—including China—imagine that it is their tune. Many people do not realise that the reason why it is so well known is not the words—there are multiple settings—but the fact that the tune is based on a pentatonic scale. Members can approach me in the corridor for a rendition of a pentatonic scale after the debate.

The work to map organisations that are affiliated with Scotland is welcome, but the scale of the ongoing exercise should not be underestimated. I ask the cabinet secretary whether any need for extra resources has been projected.

I will make a few comments about brand. It can sometimes be quite the challenge to depict what Scotland is—a country that is not yet a state. The literature review that fed into the framework notes that

“Countries face challenges in connecting their nation brands to their national imaginary (how they see

themselves, especially their values and symbols), to the perceptions of others (how others see them)".

I will refer to that later in my short speech.

That brings me to my primary interest, which is international trade. Like everyone else, I celebrate the work that has been done to set up offices in the likes of Berlin, Beijing and Washington, DC and the office that is coming soon in Warsaw. That is welcome, as are the ambassadors from GlobalScot, which is supported by SDI. I trust that the clarity of purpose that Ivan McKee brought in his previous role will continue.

The recent book "Scotland: The Global History" by Professor Murray Pittcock sets out the strong historical international trading activity from Scotland that predated the Act of Union. It is quite literally in our DNA. With that in mind, the network of trade and investment envoys will bring heft and open economic doors for us.

For a time, I had the opportunity to build knowledge in this area when working alongside my former colleague Roger Mullin. Trading as Momentous Change Ltd, we researched and published a report that was commissioned by Scottish Business Network, whose chair and co-founder was in the public gallery earlier. Our focus was from the outside looking in, and the report contained contributions from more than 1,000 members of our Scottish senior business diaspora who were trading across 74 countries. We used LinkedIn fairly extensively to reach into every corner of the earth to find contributors. As a tool, that has become much more sophisticated and can be used to target key sectors, individuals and locations with surprisingly accuracy. Therefore, my second question to the cabinet secretary is: will his staff globally include LinkedIn as one of their digital tools?

As our bard says:

"O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as others see us!"

That always yields great insights.

The report, which is available from all good book stores, was published in 2020, so it is obviously out of date, but a few key themes still remain highly relevant.

Fundamentally, Scotland was viewed positively as a place to do business in and the Scots were viewed positively as people to do business with. The feedback that we received highlighted the soft values as part of our brand. Those include the perception that Scots are friendly, resilient, entrepreneurial, progressive and outward looking.

I return to my comments on the importance of brand. We had some commentary to do with there being a lack of simplicity. One respondent from Malaysia noted:

"Some people in Malaysia are unsure about what Scotland is and its relationship with UK/EU and Ireland. Some Scottish brands are marketed here as British so any distinction can be unclear for consumers".

On this occasion, I am not making a political point, although it will not be a surprise to hear that I would wish to see Scotland the global brand shouting loud. I make that comment because another facet of our report was about trust factors. The trust factors in Scotland as a place to do business in and the Scots as a people to do business with are extremely high. Of critical importance is this statement:

"our respondents clearly believed that Scottish values, particularly around trust and honesty were not only part of our national psyche but influenced how we are seen to conduct our business around the world".

For genuine environmental, social, and governance investments, business and sustainability, the underpinning ethics and integrity are extremely important. Scotland has traditionally stood out in that area from its early beginnings as investors who understood the importance of long-term patient capital. In contrast, the city of London is already viewed as one of the world's major money laundering centres, as is set out so eloquently by Oliver Bullough in his book "Butler to the World".

I have spoken often in this chamber about the use and abuse of Scottish limited partnerships, in which Scotland's strong ethical brand name is being used to launder money via a multitude of dodgy deals. Scotland has no ability to affect change in the regulation and, thus far, Westminster has had limited appetite to affect changes. That has a fundamental impact on the cleanliness of Scotland's brand and, ultimately, having too close a connection can impact on the perception of us and therefore of our brand value. That is another reason for having a properly differentiated brand—or, in political speak, a proper, normal and independent country like everyone else has.

I welcome the document. I welcome the reaching out and pulling into the warm, welcoming arms of a global Scotland. It is a substate for the present time, but that is only temporary.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now come to the final speaker in the open debate, after which we will move to closing speeches. Anyone who has participated in the debate should be in the chamber for the closing speeches.

16:23

**Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** I am very happy to speak today and welcome the publication of the Scottish connections framework, which

seeks to build a more vibrant, visible and connected Scottish community around the world.

At this time, it is vital that we continue to find ways to cement our place on the world stage and to connect with our diaspora across the globe. As the cabinet secretary and Martin Whitfield mentioned, we have taken quite a wide definition of diaspora. I think that that is a very good thing.

There are different types of diaspora. There are those who share a common national civic or ethnic identity, who have left their territory and become residents elsewhere; there are descendants of those immigrants who are interested in their heritage; and there are also affinity diasporas—those who do not have ancestral ties or a shared national identity but who feel some affection for a nation state, often acting on its behalf while resident in the state, after they return home or from a third country.

International students make up a significant part of Scotland's affinity diaspora, and they will be the focus of my speech. International students support the range and quality of education provision in Scotland. They bring different perspectives and help to create a multicultural learning environment that is beneficial to all students. Each year, Scotland welcomes many international students. Talented people from more than 180 different countries make Scotland their home for all or part of their degrees. That represents a significant global network.

Some of those people stay longer and raise a family here. Scotland faces significant demographic challenges, with an ageing population, so international students who stay here could play a key role in mitigating those challenges.

Others go home or move elsewhere, but they can do a great deal to support Scotland's reputation and visibility on the global stage. As we have heard, there is a strong network of alumni with an affection for Scotland that helps to advance Scotland's international, economic, social and cultural connections. That important diaspora needs to be nurtured. The relationship between the homeland and the diaspora is a partnership and is reciprocal, so we must explore what the diaspora wants and needs from Scotland.

How can international students and alumni continue to feel like a welcome and valued part of the diaspora if we make it difficult for them to come to stay or to return? As Neil Gray pointed out earlier, Brexit has led to the end of the Erasmus programme. It is undeniable that Scotland's prestigious universities—such as St Andrews, Glasgow and Stirling, to name but a few—are attractive to international students, but

we face increasing competition from others for the best global talent.

The Scottish Government has pointed out that the UK's immigration system must be improved to allow Scotland to retain students after they have graduated and draw them into the workforce through an inclusive migration system that includes a post-study work offer that meets Scotland's needs.

**Martin Whitfield:** Does Evelyn Tweed acknowledge the challenge that Scottish students face in that they are unable to travel abroad to study?

**Evelyn Tweed:** I absolutely take that point on board, but we probably need independence so that we can get back into the EU and overcome some of those challenges.

Westminster has claimed that the level of migration is too high. Just today, Suella Braverman announced plans to bar the partners and children of graduate students on research programmes from applying to live here during those courses. Prospective students will face difficult choices, as coming to study here will mean leaving loved ones behind. Ultimately, many will decide not to come to the UK and, therefore, not to come to Scotland, which will be to our detriment. Scotland's attractiveness as a place to work, live, study and do business in is at risk of being overshadowed by such exclusionary immigration policies from Westminster.

The motion states that the Parliament

"stresses the importance of connecting with alumni of Scotland's world-class educational institutions, and expresses its hope that the Scottish Connections Framework will encourage many more people to consider Scotland as a destination in which to work, live, study, do business, or ... visit."

I very much agree. It was good to hear the cabinet secretary's positive comments about his work with the British Council.

I welcome the Scottish connections framework and look forward to seeing how that broad and cross-cutting plan will support international students as an important part of our affinity diaspora.

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

16:29

**Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** We welcome the Scottish connections framework and the picture that it paints of Scotland as a global nation. However, the UK and Scottish Governments should work together to maximise the opportunities that the diaspora network can bring. Much more could be achieved if the Scottish



and UK Governments worked together to promote Scotland internationally. The failure of the Tories and the SNP to find common ground on anything to do with Scotland could hinder the impact and reach of our international efforts.

**Ivan McKee:** Is Foyso Choudhury able to give an example of how the Scottish Government and the UK Government are not working together?

**Foyso Choudhury:** Much can be done rather than just talking about independence and moving away from the United Kingdom.

**Martin Whitfield:** I would like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to come back on to the statute book. Both Governments seem to be at odds on that.

**Foyso Choudhury:** I thank Martin Whitfield for the intervention.

The framework commits the Scottish Government to working with the UK and other devolved Governments to utilise the UK's full diplomatic footprint to achieve its aims.

**Ben Macpherson:** Will Foyso Choudhury take an intervention?

**Foyso Choudhury:** I will continue. I have a lot to get through.

A UK Labour Government would ensure that it used all means to help boost Scotland's international standing to create jobs and opportunities at home and abroad. I hope that the Scottish Government sticks to its commitment to work with all Governments in the UK to make that happen.

As my colleague Neil Bibby mentioned, the Scottish Government's commitment to direct the National Records of Scotland to prioritise the development of online and digital resources is welcome. It will allow many of the Scottish diaspora to trace their ancestry and connections to Scotland.

Scotland is rich in history and culture. Christine Grahame rightly pointed out that culture is one of Scotland's greatest exports. We have a lot to offer the world in shortbread, whisky, the Gaelic and Scots languages, medicine and much more. My colleague Daniel Johnson spoke about how important all those contributions are to the world.

He also spoke about the still-present evidence of Scotland's key role in the transatlantic slave trade in our street names and monuments. As the framework outlines, we cannot and must not whitewash Scottish history. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to deliberately reach out to historically marginalised communities and groups and work with economic institutions to better understand our role in their history. It is long overdue.

My colleague Neil Bibby already stressed that Scotland's role in global history is not one of absolute goodness. It is important that we focus on addressing Scotland's role in slavery and colonialism at home as well as abroad. Educating people about the legacy of Scotland's colonial past will help us to overcome the racism and xenophobia that, unfortunately, still exist in our society.

As Martin Whitfield and Willie Rennie said, one crucial way in which Scotland could be better promoted in the international arena is through an international student exchange programme. The UK's withdrawal from the Erasmus programme meant the loss of opportunity for thousands of Scottish students to travel and study abroad. The opportunity was also lost for the thousands of international students who would have wanted to visit and study in Scotland. If the Scottish Government is serious in its ambition to

"build a more vibrant, visible and connected Scottish community around the world",

it must replace the Erasmus scheme. The Welsh Labour Government has already implemented the Taith scheme to replace Erasmus, with funding of £65 million over five years.

**Stuart McMillan:** On Foyso Choudhury's comments regarding an international exchange programme, I note that I was an Erasmus student, and I think that it is desperate that Scotland no longer has access to Erasmus because we are no longer in the EU.

On international students coming here, and further to the point that Evelyn Tweed just touched on regarding the comments of the Home Secretary, there are 30 students from Nigeria living in my constituency. They are here with their families. I have not heard the Home Secretary's comments but, judging by what Evelyn Tweed has said, if those families are now no longer allowed to come, that would mean that those 30 students would no longer live in my constituency, and it could potentially mean no more students anywhere else in the country. That would have a very damaging effect on my community and this country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you most of that time back, Foyso Choudhury.

**Foyso Choudhury:** I agree and, as I said, withdrawing from such programmes can damage relationships.

An estimated 15,000 participants from Wales will take part in the Taith scheme by the end of August 2026. The Scottish Government must implement an international educational exchange programme now to ensure that Scotland stays visible and connected in terms of education.

My colleague Maurice Golden spoke about how the framework will encourage people around the world to consider Scotland as an area to visit, and it highlights the importance of our historical sites in teaching visitors and tourists. He rightly pointed out that the closure of so many such sites in Scotland should not hinder our tourism sector.

As my colleague Neil Bibby pointed out, Scotland must seek to improve our international air links to continue to promote Scotland and its heritage sites. Our airports are our link to the world. Proper investment into and the promotion of our international airports will encourage people to choose Scotland as a travel and holiday destination. This month, Glasgow airport is still running at only 86 per cent of its pre-Covid capacity, which leaves Scotland's largest city with poor connections to international destinations and economic hubs. The Scottish Government should maximise the potential of our airports through direct flights to ensure a sustainable aviation industry in Scotland.

We welcome the publication of the document, and we wish for every success for the framework. We welcome the Scottish and UK Governments' co-operation in achieving its success.

16:38

**Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** We are all proud Scots here, and we should all do our part to promote Scotland internationally and seek new ways to enhance the Scottish brand. We are lucky to be from a country that is so universally recognised and held in such high regard. I take great pride to live in Alloway, where our national bard, Robert Burns, was born. He wrote the poem "Auld Lang Syne", which is known worldwide and recited at big celebrations and especially at new year. The cabinet secretary mentioned tartan week, which is celebrated in New York, and the Burns suppers that are held around the world every year in January.

We should also recognise where we can do better. I note that the Government document that was published ahead of today's debate, the "Scottish Connections Framework", points out that we should work with devolved and UK Government counterparts, and I welcome that collaboration.

Ivan McKee also talked about learning from others and spoke of Ireland.

The document highlights that UK diplomatic missions engage with Scottish communities across the globe and that they have links to various cultural and educational networks, and Scotland is free to tap into those.

**Ivan McKee:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sharon Dowey:** I will just finish my point. I certainly believe that we could do more to turn people's passion for Scotland into positive action and create more jobs, investment and trade right here on our own shores.

**Ivan McKee:** Something has been puzzling me since Stephen Kerr's speech and I did not get to intervene on him, so I will ask Ms Dowey. You mentioned Ireland—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please speak through the chair, Mr McKee.

**Ivan McKee:** How has Ireland managed to be so successful in its diaspora efforts without the broad shoulders of the UK to support it?

**Sharon Dowey:** That is where we take our lessons from. We can work with Ireland and learn from each other, but we can also work along with the rest of the nations of the United Kingdom.

I welcome the approach set out in the document that includes everyone who sees themselves as Scottish in some way. Sometimes, we find it amusing when people claim to be Scottish because of their great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, but we should welcome their pride and encourage others to be proud of their Scottish connections, even if they have spent only a short time here in study or work.

We can also promote Scotland through our creative industries such as encouraging diehard fans of the show "Outlander" to come here, as is mentioned in the report. That show has helped to attract tourists to Dunure, which is just down the road from me, which was a key filming location for seasons 3 and 4 of the show. I do not see why we should not seek to exploit and encourage more projects like that.

Scotland has a lot to offer as far as the creative sector is concerned. For example, Edinburgh is famous for being the birthplace of the Harry Potter books by J K Rowling and it is sometimes easy to forget that we are not in the movie set when we are strolling through the streets of Edinburgh. We only have to look at the roaring trade that New Zealand has done on the back of the "Lord of the Rings" movies to see what is possible for Scotland.

The "Scottish Connections Framework" also speaks of the Government aiming to

"Collaborate across our full network"

although I hope that that includes the UK Government and its officials, particularly given that so many of the SNP's trade hubs are housed in UK Government embassies, as Ben Macpherson said earlier.

I had hoped to hear more details about the Scottish connections fund today, although I know that the cabinet secretary did touch on it in his speech. We could probably all get behind a fund that promotes Scotland's reputation and interests. However, without any information about how that funding will be used, it is difficult to evaluate it. I note that the document promises to publish details of the fund this year, and I look forward to that, but we need to see more than funding details. There must be a mechanism to measure the success of the fund and see whether the framework meets its aims.

Although there are points that we all agree on, we must confront some of the challenges that Scotland faces. First, how can we take full advantage of our wonderful heritage to attract tourists when so many Historic Environment Scotland sites are still closed long after the pandemic ended? The Federation of Small Businesses has said that the closures have a detrimental effect on local towns.

Secondly, as was mentioned earlier, we need to look at immigration. We should be asking ourselves why so many Scots move abroad and do not come back, especially when our workforce numbers are declining. We should also be asking why we do not attract as many international immigrants as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, especially when we have major skills gaps in many industries. The Government should reflect on how it could make Scotland a more positive place for foreign investment or for Scots to set up a business, as that is one area in which we could be doing better.

**Stuart McMillan:** I now have Suella Braverman's statement from today. Point 1 states that the Government measures include:

"Removing the right for international students to bring dependants unless they are on postgraduate courses currently designated as research programmes."

There are vacancies in the NHS. The 30 students I talked about earlier are here to train in the NHS. They are here with their families. According to that statement, they will no longer be allowed to come here to train or to stay to help fill some of the job vacancies that Sharon Dowey just spoke about.

**Sharon Dowey:** I do not know the details of what the member is talking about, but net migration is up and we welcome anyone who wants to come to the country to work and to contribute to society. I do not know the details that the member has, but we are happy to have anyone come to the country by legal routes and to help.

The Government should reflect on how it can make Scotland a more positive place for foreign

investment or for Scots to set up businesses, because that is one area where the Government could be doing better. We must do more to remove barriers to investment. For example, it would be worth looking at the regulation of short-term lets, business rates and the red tape that may be putting off investors.

The SNP Government must do all it can to show that Scotland is open for business. Attracting investors to Scotland and encouraging them to set up shop here is made all the more challenging when they face difficulties such as the bottle deposit and return scheme. We must learn from that by listening to businesses and working with our colleagues in Westminster and in the other devolved Administrations to see how we can take a unified, best practice approach.

Daniel Johnson mentioned the success of Scotch whisky and how we must help other parts of the food and drink industry to reach that level. A positive business environment in Scotland would make a real difference. Although the framework is a good start, it would be great to hear more detail from the cabinet secretary during his closing remarks about a timeline for the Scottish connections fund and about the international strategies for culture and education.

There have been many worthwhile contributions today from across the chamber and I have time to highlight a few. My colleague Maurice Golden spoke about Historic Environment Scotland, which has itself highlighted that half of all international visitors report heritage as their key motivation for visiting Scotland and that tourism contributes £3 billion to the economy.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the Ukrainians we have welcomed to our country and into our homes. They are welcome to stay as long as they need to, and we hope that some will choose to stay here, but I am sure that we all wish for an end to the war, to enable them to return to their own homes.

Neil Bibby said that we need a strategic approach to include all marginalised communities and also spoke about the importance of Scotland's aviation sector.

William Rennie spoke about the great team behind the report and about the amount of work that is done by the GlobalScot network. He also spoke of the ending of Erasmus, mentioned the 5,000 Welsh students who are spread around the world and talked about the need for us to get our finger out and set up a replacement scheme.

Stephen Kerr spoke of our reach around the world and the importance of international students, which was also mentioned by Evelyn Tweed, because of the amount of money that those students bring to the Scottish economy and the

soft power that they have. He also mentioned his concerns about university funding.

Emma Harper spoke of her experiences in California.

I may be running out of time. In summary, we applaud any attempt by the Scottish Government to promote Scotland internationally, but we must see more detail about the fund behind the framework and the tools that will measure whether it is delivering the desired outcomes.

16:48

**The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray):** I thank colleagues for their contributions to what has been a largely positive debate; I will turn to Stephen Kerr later in my remarks.

In his opening speech, Angus Robertson outlined the importance of the Scottish connections framework and how it will support our huge diaspora around the world. Better engaging our diaspora and Scotland's global family and friends is the right thing to do for its own sake and is also important in supporting Scotland's wellbeing economy, our culture and our reputation.

Work under the Scottish connections framework can promote Scotland as a place to visit or to study, live, work or do business in, and I am confident that those ambitions are shared across the chamber. We already have a strong international network that reaches out to the world, talking to our diaspora and promoting Scotland's interests. Our international offices, including those of Scottish Development International, our GlobalScots trade and investment envoys, and our public bodies such as VisitScotland, Screen Scotland and others all engage with our diaspora and play a critical role in promoting Scotland overseas.

Scotland's international network has served and been supported by ministers from a range of Administrations over the past two decades, as Willie Rennie rightly pointed out. Our offices have delivered significant benefits, connecting to the global Scottish diaspora and boosting trade and investment.

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Will the minister also recognise the tremendous contribution that our national companies make in promoting Scotland? In this, its 60th anniversary season, Scottish Opera's production of "Ainadamar" has been picked up by the Metropolitan Opera in New York and its production of Puccini's "Il Trittico" is to be picked up by a number of opera houses across the rest of Europe and the world. Those performances enhance

Scotland's reputation as a centre of international culture.

**Neil Gray:** I absolutely concur with Jackson Carlaw. Members across the chamber have spoken about our cultural identity, our heritage and our traditions in Scotland and how there can sometimes be barriers to us internationally. I disagree; I think that, for the reasons that Jackson Carlaw has cited, our cultural institutions demonstrate the power of Scotland internationally and the doors that they can open. I will turn to why that is the case shortly.

**John Swinney:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that this debate has helped to cement the view within Parliament, among all shades of parliamentary opinion, that the network of international offices that we have on Scotland's behalf, many of them set up by the Labour and Liberal Executive before this Government came to office, are a formidable asset for Scotland? Some of the critique that we have heard in recent months from the party over there—the Conservatives—will perhaps be silenced by the eloquence of this debate on the subject.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, I can give you some of the time back for that intervention.

**Neil Gray:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I absolutely agree with John Swinney. I was going to turn in response to Maurice Golden's comments to the fact that no other party sought to amend the Government's motion today, and one of its key elements is to recognise the role that our international network plays. I hope that the parochial, petty political attack on our international engagement will stop today. It absolutely must.

Our network plays a vital role in helping us to build relationships, gather insights, identify new opportunities and ensure that Scotland's distinctive voice and offer is heard on the world stage. The Scottish Government's international network of offices works alongside SDI's 34 offices across 23 countries to promote Scotland on the world stage. SDI's trade and investment specialists help to support Scottish companies to trade and grow globally and people to set up business in Scotland and attract investment opportunities into Scotland.

That approach is working. Ernst & Young's latest annual attractiveness survey shows that Scotland is outperforming the rest of the UK and Europe with the growth in the number of inward investment projects that are attracted. On trade in goods, the latest HM Revenue and Customs data shows that Scotland continues to outperform the UK when oil and gas are excluded.

My recent visit to Japan and those of my predecessors such as Michael Matheson, Fiona

Hyslop and John Swinney are great examples of our successful engagement overseas. Sumitomo's proposed investment in Scotland can promote rapid expansion in the renewables industry by connecting hundreds of offshore wind turbines. That £200 million investment into the Highlands will create 150 highly skilled, green jobs from a business with a strong record in producing high-voltage underground cables. I cannot stress enough how important the direct, in-person engagement by ministers and SDI was in getting the Sumitomo investment to this stage.

Scotland's international footprint is also critical in showcasing Scotland at major events. Scotland's presence at the Dubai Expo, which focused on our energy transition, space and digital health sectors, is forecast to deliver around £90 million in investment and revenue for Scottish companies that participated.

Turning to the importance of our international networks, I note that we have over 1,200 GlobalScots operating in over 60 countries. Those 1,200 influential business leaders, who are located throughout the world, are motivated purely to give something back to Scotland and they act voluntarily to support Scotland's economic ambitions. I thank them all once again.

GlobalScots support companies by advising and mentoring, giving them the benefit of years of international experience. They also advocate Scotland as a place to live, work, invest and study in. They tell Scotland what we need to do to remain competitive but also talk Scotland up, promoting our culture and winning more friends and connections for our country. Our GlobalScots are increasing engagement with international alumni of Scotland's world-renowned universities, especially in high-growth markets.

**Martin Whitfield:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Neil Gray:** I am conscious of the time. I will try to come back to Martin Whitfield if I can.

The Scottish Government's network of 11 trade and investment envoys based in our priority markets provides us with critical business insights, intelligence, introductions and advocacy focused on building trade as well as inward and capital investor relations. They open doors and identify strategic opportunities to support our export, capital investment and foreign direct investment efforts, and they provide critical business insights. They will build on those successes and galvanise a more engaged, vibrant and diverse GlobalScot network that will support our trade and investment ambitions, alongside our envoys and working ever closer with our alumni, affinity and ancestral diaspora.

Much of my focus has been on our international representation—those working around the world to promote Scotland—but I would also like to mention those coming into Scotland. Tourism is one of Scotland's most important industries, creating wealth and jobs and strengthening our international reputation when those visitors return home.

In 2019, almost 3.5 million people visited Scotland from around the world. We know that many visitors identified their Scottish heritage as a key motivation for choosing to travel to Scotland. People may have been inspired by the regular appearances of our landscapes in film or television. Our festival performers, who travel to Scotland in the summer, are in themselves a community—a strand of our diaspora who return every year. Each and every interaction with our international network, a member of our alumni or our GlobalScots raises Scotland's profile a little bit more, so we continue to work with VisitScotland and other key partners to maximise tourism opportunities and achieve our aim of being a leader in 21st century tourism.

For those looking to come to Scotland more permanently, we look forward to promoting our talent attraction and migration service, which Ben Macpherson referenced, when it launches later this year. That service will improve Scotland's ability to attract and recruit people with the skills that our economy and public services need, now and in the future, and, in the process, it will create even more connections between Scotland and the world.

The debate was, as I say, largely consensual. I really appreciated Maurice Golden's contribution saying that our greatest export asset has always been our people. That is why the framework is so important.

Neil Bibby spoke of the University of Glasgow's Burns night spreadsheet. We need to tap into that knowledge and expertise and make sure that we understand and take advantage of it. He also rightly challenged us—as did others including Foysoil Choudhury—on our colonial past, challenging homophobia, misogyny and racism.

In that vein, I really appreciated the work done by the empire, slavery and Scotland's museums group, chaired by Sir Geoff Palmer, who I was pleased to meet alongside Foysoil Choudhury a couple of months ago. He referenced co-operation between the Scottish and UK Governments and he is absolutely right. The evidence is clear that our network advances the work of UK embassies; it does not undermine it and actually leads the way in many areas, not least on net zero. Therefore, it is unfortunate and counterproductive for the Foreign Secretary to seek to undermine it. Mercifully, it would appear that many

ambassadors and consuls general around the world are seeking to ignore that nonsense direction.

Willie Rennie was right that our culture and heritage often help to open doors, as Stuart McMillan also said, but it also leads to the areas of working together that he wishes to see. I hope that Mr Rennie will have been reassured by Mr Swinney's intervention around collaboration in India, which I was able to see in evidence in the collaboration between Gujarat Biotech University and the University of Edinburgh. That is at a very advanced stage and included within the sapphire grants scheme.

I also thank Ivan McKee for his contribution not just to the debate but to the work, previously. We will be looking to take forward all three of his asks.

I want to reference many more very strong contributions including those from Christine Grahame—her usual tour de force—Daniel Johnson, Emma Harper and Martin Whitfield, but I have to return to Stephen Kerr. I am well used to Mr Kerr seeking to be the contrarian in the room, more so in this place than when we were together down the road, but nonetheless he seeks to play that part here. He spoke nonsense about our network and ministerial involvement, and it belittles the Conservative Party to talk about global Britain when it looks to undermine Scotland's role internationally. It is crazy.

Stephen Kerr suggested directly in response to my intervention—

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** If you could conclude, cabinet secretary.

**Neil Gray:** —that I was talking nonsense about the impact of Brexit on the number of international students coming to Scotland. Mr Kerr may well wish to know that we have seen a 75 per cent drop in the number of students accepted into Scottish universities from European countries since Brexit. It has had a direct impact on our international student numbers—

**The Presiding Officer:** I must ask you to conclude.

**Neil Gray:** —so I will take no lectures from Mr Kerr in that regard.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, cabinet secretary.

**Neil Gray:** Otherwise, it has been a very positive debate. I am grateful for it and I look forward to our international network continuing to play the strong role that it does, supporting Scotland's economy and our cultural institutions.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on the Scottish connections framework.

## Business Motion

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-09138, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a change to the business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 24 May 2023—  
after

*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Debate: Ending Violence in Scottish Schools

insert

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Powers of Attorney Bill - UK Legislation—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-09107.2, in the name of Maurice Golden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09107, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the Scottish connections framework, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-09107.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09107, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the Scottish connections framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:02

*Meeting suspended.*

17:06

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment S6M-09107.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09107, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the Scottish connections framework, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am not sure whether my vote went through, but I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Somerville. I can confirm that your vote was recorded.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seemed to lose my connection. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was having difficulty connecting with the app. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Regan. We will ensure that that is recorded.

### For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 49, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-09107, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the Scottish connections framework, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament cherishes Scotland's global diaspora, which it considers to be an extension of Scotland itself; welcomes the publication of the Scottish Connections Framework, which seeks to build a more vibrant, visible and connected Scottish community around the world; affirms a broad and inclusive definition of "diaspora", embracing those of Scottish heritage, lived diaspora,

alumni of Scottish educational institutions, and anyone who has an affinity with Scotland; recognises the importance of including historically marginalised communities, including minority ethnic Scots, women, young people and the LGBTQ community, and of facing uncomfortable chapters in Scotland's history; celebrates the efforts of Scottish community organisations around the world for maintaining and promoting Scotland's culture and language, including through marking St Andrew's Day and Burns events; applauds the Scottish Government and Scottish Development International's international network of offices for their efforts to increase Scotland's global connections, the valuable contribution of trade and investment envoys, and the 1,200-strong GlobalScot network; stresses the importance of connecting with alumni of Scotland's world-class educational institutions; expresses its hope that the Scottish Connections Framework will encourage many more people to consider Scotland as a destination in which to work, live, study, do business, or simply visit; recognises the importance of engaging with the Scottish diaspora within the terms of the devolved settlement, and calls on the Scottish Government to provide more details regarding the metrics upon which the delivery of the Scottish Connections Framework will be measured and how its impact will be monitored, measured and reported.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.



## East Renfrewshire Good Causes

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07928, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on East Renfrewshire Good Causes. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament acknowledges what it sees as the incredible and transformative work of charities in the Eastwood constituency and across Scotland; welcomes the ongoing contribution of East Renfrewshire Good Causes in providing what it considers outstanding support to vulnerable members of local communities; understands that, in the period since the charity was established and first started to offer much-needed support in August 2007 and up to September 2022, East Renfrewshire Good Causes has provided £1.6 million in goods and services and helped 5,400 individuals; acknowledges that examples of support that the charity has funded, either in full or in part, include wet floor shower adaptations for disabled pensioners, help with travel costs for cancer patients on low incomes to attend hospital for treatment, and play spaces and equipment for young people with additional support needs; considers that the set-up of the charity means that it can respond very quickly to emerging circumstances and is able to undertake essential tasks in a short timescale, such as assisting with practical home support improvements needed to allow older people to be discharged from hospital to free up beds for incoming patients; recognises that all referrals to the charity are made by frontline professionals, including teachers, housing officials and health and social care staff, from both the public and third sector; understands that the operations of East Renfrewshire Good Causes have expanded over the years and that the charity is also now active in Glasgow, South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and East Ayrshire; congratulates the founder and project coordinator of East Renfrewshire Good Causes, Russell MacMillan, for what it sees as the remarkable and selfless efforts that he has made for more than 15 years in driving the Eastwood-based charity forward and ensuring that vital support has been provided to people in need, and considers that East Renfrewshire Good Causes has demonstrated a strong track record of delivery and established an operating model that has the potential to be replicated in all local authority areas across Scotland.

17:11

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** This is really quite an old-fashioned members' business debate in that it is entirely unique to my constituency and the immediate surrounding area. I know that there is a fashion these days to bring national issues into members' business debates, but this one is very local and is just about my constituency. I thought that I had better get in there quick, because if Boundaries Scotland has its way, I will no longer have a constituency. *[Laughter.]*

I was reminded a few weeks ago, on the Monday holiday after the coronation, which was a day about giving service, that the King's mother's

coronation all those years before had underpinning it the concept of duty. Duty is less fashionable these days, but these two things—duty and service—are incredibly well represented in East Renfrewshire Good Causes and in the person of Russell Macmillan, who is in the public gallery this afternoon, along with his wife Yvonne.

Russell set up the charity in 2007, the same year in which I was elected, and he has run the charity successfully in the 16 years since. Why did he do that? As he lay in bed in hospital after surgery that had cured his type 1 insulin-dependent diabetes and kidney failure, he decided that he would do something in return for the life that had been given to him. He does so as a man who is registered blind.

Russell has characterised East Renfrewshire Good Causes by saying that the charity

“will start where the state stops.”

In the 16 years since he set it up, he has single-handedly raised £1.7 million for charitable causes. *[Applause.]* That has assisted the lives of 6,000 people by delivering “acts of kindness”—as Russell puts it—in memory of the organ donor who saved his life.

East Renfrewshire Good Causes provides real practical improvements for people in an almost limitless way, and supports individuals in hard times with essential tasks. Although the charity began in East Renfrewshire, it is now helping in Glasgow, South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and East Ayrshire. The charity started out in August 2007 with the provision of a new wheelchair for use in assisting carers with a disability to go out for some respite.

It has gone on to provide a very wide range of supports, including wet-floor shower adaptations for elderly individuals; tablet devices for people with learning disabilities at Cosgrove Care; assistance with travel costs for people who have been diagnosed with cancer so that they can travel to hospital for treatment, and with transport costs to enable vulnerable young people to get to and from school or nursery; baby monitoring equipment for infants with complex medical needs; play spaces and equipment for young people with additional support needs; food and toiletries for people who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation; grants to support families who are experiencing financial difficulty in providing clothing for their children; and mobility equipment, such as scooters, to allow people who are living with a disability or elderly individuals to maintain their independence.

What is remarkable is that Russell, in the way that he operates the charity, is able to respond very quickly to emerging circumstances, and he can complete essential tasks in a short space of

time. The key thing that Russell has done is not to second-guess where a need exists but to seek referrals from all those who are professionally qualified to establish where that need exists and then to direct the funding speedily and directly to them.

That has a positive effect in many other ways. Russell's assistance with practical home improvements enables those people who are—to use the current term—bed blocked in hospital to get out relatively sooner, through instructing local contractors to undertake vital remedial works to properties, which allows the person to get home.

Russell has also worked in concert with others, such as my colleague Jim McLean, the councillor for Newton Mearns South and Eaglesham, who has himself raised more than £1 million for his local community in his lifetime and who was one of those who worked with Russell to secure a £100,000 contribution from the National Lottery, which is helping with the raising of funds just now as well.

Russell is prepared to do anything, anywhere. He appeared on "Songs of Praise" last year, explaining how his strong Christian faith has guided him in the work that he does. In 2011, he appeared in a short-lived ITV game show hosted by Gethin Jones, where he won £121,000 for his charity.

He has also secured partnerships with local developers. Cala Homes and Wimpey, which are developing a major new facility in Eastwood, in Maidenhill, are working with him, making a roof donation of £50 to Russell's charity for every property that is built, which has contributed a further £17,100. He has also worked with technology companies to ensure that they are able to deliver and assist people.

What is interesting is that Russell says that the problem is not in the raising of funds but in being able to get the funds to people. I say to the minister that, in that respect, Russell has an ambition and a request, which is for us, as politicians, to make the pathway between those people who are able to undertake assessments and the referrals to him much easier.

Bizarrely, some of those organisations and professional services feel that, in making a referral to Russell's charity, there is implicit criticism of them for not being able to provide the funding for the service that he is able to provide, as if that is somehow a failing on their part. That is not his concern. He is concerned simply that, with the funds that he has, he is able to offer assistance quickly and directly to the people who matter.

There will be examples of what Russell does elsewhere. I see in the chamber Paul O'Kane and Tom Arthur, who both represent East

Renfrewshire, and there is Bob Doris, whose constituency is across in Glasgow. Others will be benefiting from Russell's fantastic efforts in Eastwood, but I hope that there are people elsewhere who are similarly minded and motivated. It is absolutely extraordinary what such an individual can do, coming from circumstances in which many of us would have thought only of ourselves and our immediate situation: how we were going to cope, whether life would be the same and whether it was worth it. Instead, Russell sat there at that moment and thought, "I'm going to turn the life I've been given back to the advantage of others."

I commend and applaud that, and I believe that it is exactly the sort of public-spirited initiative that we, as politicians, should applaud and support.

17:19

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I offer my congratulations to Jackson Carlaw for bringing the debate to the chamber. I will take time to record my thanks to all those in East Renfrewshire Good Causes for the help and support that they offer those in need in East Renfrewshire. As a Glasgow representative, I am always happy to commend and praise good work and support that is offered by charities outwith the city that I represent. However, there is clearly a selfish motivation in my speaking about the excellent work of East Renfrewshire Good Causes, as I note that Mr Carlaw's motion indicates that the charity is now active in Glasgow, as he mentioned in his speech. Although I suspect that that is the case, it might not yet have reached the north of the city and Maryhill and Springburn, which I represent. However, it is still right and proper that I record my thanks.

I can see that Russell Macmillan is in the gallery with his wife. I know him from his website, which I looked at in preparation for the debate. He is the project co-ordinator and founder. By all accounts, as Jackson Carlaw said, he is a remarkable individual. I note from the website that he has been driven by his faith and the national health service support that he received during his health adversities. However, whatever the motivation, many individuals and families have been assisted for many years not only by Mr Macmillan but by the many volunteers and donors—it is important to mention the donors—who support the charity.

I was struck by the range and flexibility of the grants issued by East Renfrewshire Good Causes, which the charity reports on every six months. That is an open and transparent reporting mechanism and I was impressed with it. I will offer three examples from the most recent report.

The charity part-funded a breakfast club to enable vulnerable children to be fed and have a social group before school. That project is run by volunteer teachers. East Renfrewshire Good Causes provided 50 per cent funding for it, so it is partnership funding and involved getting funding from elsewhere.

It fully funded flooring for a pensioner with a cancer diagnosis to enable comfort in their home. That 100 per cent funding might be a small thing for many, but it was a major thing for the individual who received the grant.

It part funded an essential wardrobe for an adult with mild learning difficulties who contributes to the organisation and helps others. That individual is a self-employed worker on a low income who needs a little hand financially. The charity provided a 50 per cent grant for that.

The range and variety of grants and the flexibility shown by the organisation are remarkable. The report says that, in the six months to March 2023 alone, the combined value of goods purchased by and donated to East Renfrewshire Good Causes was more than £113,000, and 624 people benefited from that.

I am lucky to have wonderful charitable organisations across Maryhill and Springburn. I am sure that you expect me to mention one or two, Presiding Officer. It is hugely important to acknowledge them and demonstrate that they are appreciated. That is what the debate seeks to do for East Renfrewshire volunteers, and rightly so.

As I read about the various grants made by East Renfrewshire Good Causes, I was reminded of Springburn-based Glasgow Baby Foodbank, which is in my constituency. It offers a range of vital supports to families from nappies and wipes, through baby formula to baby clothes, toys and much more. However, the reason that I mention that group is that it also ensures that people get access to a variety of supports offered by the Scottish Government, whether the best start foods card, the Scottish child payment or school clothing grants. The group also knows that not everyone qualifies and, often, people who need a little bit of extra help will not receive the support that the state provides.

That is what volunteers from the food bank do, just as East Renfrewshire Good Causes does. As Mr Carlaw says, they start where the state stops. That is why I wanted to give that example of a charity in my constituency.

A week on Friday, I will be at a local awards night in Maryhill called people make Maryhill, where I will see a public acknowledgement at local level to thank many people who go the extra mile to help the Maryhill community. Such volunteers do not seek acknowledgement, but it is right and

proper that they be recognised. Likewise, it is right and proper that we acknowledge and thank all those who have contributed to East Renfrewshire Good Causes over the years.

I am delighted to take part in the debate.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Sandesh Gulhane, who joins us remotely.

17:23

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** I am delighted to contribute to today's members' business debate, proposed by my colleague Jackson Carlaw. He has already told us Russell Macmillan's story, which is an inspiration.

East Renfrewshire Good Causes is success personified. Learning, growing and mastering over 16 years, the charity has delivered essential targeted support that has helped vulnerable local people, the local community and our NHS. Through effective fundraising and garnering the support of third sector organisations and businesses, East Renfrewshire Good Causes has distributed more than £1.7 million in goods and services since it started in May 2007. It has helped 6,000 people. This is a story about delivery—I ask the Scottish Government to please take note.

As a doctor, and as an Opposition spokesperson on health, I am particularly struck by the East Renfrewshire Good Causes initiatives that assist with practical home support improvements to ensure that vulnerable elderly people who are in hospital can return home safely. That is so valuable. In Scotland, we have wards full of medically fit patients who are desperate to be discharged home, but they find that care is unavailable in their home environment. That has led to health boards stopping non-urgent elective care or cancelling long-awaited operations.

Back in 2015, when she was the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, the current Deputy First Minister promised to end delayed discharge. Unfortunately, however, there are now 1,900 delayed discharges in Scottish hospitals each day. We have yet to see solutions, but East Renfrewshire Good Causes has instead taken the initiative to help free up hospital beds for others by ensuring that people can get back to their own, improved homes.

As we have heard, the charity's set-up allows it to respond quickly to emerging circumstances and to deliver real, practical help where it is needed. We on the Conservative side of the chamber believe that our NHS should be modern, efficient, local and accessible for all. That will certainly entail internal structural reform and a willingness to embrace new technologies as well as change.

However, in order to deliver better healthcare locally, we need to do more to support local organisations, as they really understand the needs and challenges of people in their communities. I am pleased that East Renfrewshire Good Causes has expanded its reach and is now active in Glasgow, South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and even East Ayrshire.

The charity's model is solution driven and delivery focused—it is one that we can all learn from and replicate, albeit while ensuring that it is tailored to local situations.

To Russell Macmillan and your team: we salute you.

I refer members to my entry in the members' register of interests as a practising NHS general practitioner.

17:26

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** I am grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I thank Jackson Carlaw for bringing the issue to the chamber. As he mentioned in his opening speech, it is a hyper-local issue but could perhaps have far-reaching effects across West Scotland more generally.

It is great to be talking about East Renfrewshire Good Causes in the chamber. It is an organisation that I, being an East Renfrewshire boy, know well. Having spent much time, like Jackson Carlaw, working in our community, I know that the charity is well thought of across East Renfrewshire. Most importantly, it has attracted consensus across the political divide. That can often be hard to achieve in East Renfrewshire, but it is remarkable to see the amount of support that there is for the work that Russell and Yvonne Macmillan have done over many years.

As I was sitting here, I was reflecting on the times when we come together across political lines to mark the sad passing of Jo Cox. In the great get together, we reflect on her words:

"we ... have ... more in common than that which divides us."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 3 June 2015; Vol 596, c 675.]

I think that that gets to the heart of what we are talking about with regard to East Renfrewshire Good Causes.

The work that Russell has done, which is rooted in his faith, is about finding our commonality and our shared humanity, and recognising the fact that all of us, at different times in our lives, experience adversity and often need the helping hands of neighbours and friends to get us through. We have heard some practical examples of the way in which Russell and East Renfrewshire Good Causes have, as good neighbours and good

friends, reached out and supported so many people in all the communities of East Renfrewshire.

It was good to hear Jackson Carlaw refer to the support for the organisation across the local council. When I was a councillor in East Renfrewshire, my colleague Councillor Alan Lafferty—now a former councillor—was very supportive of the charity's work. I know that, as well as Jackson Carlaw, Paul Masterton, the former Conservative member of Parliament; Kirsten Oswald, the current Scottish National Party MP; and Jim Murphy and Ken Macintosh—names from Labour's past—were all supportive of that work, which, again, shows the breadth and depth of the support in the community.

However, it goes far beyond that, because it is about the people in our community as well. In preparing for the debate, I reflected on some of the cases in which the organisation has made the most difference. Back in 2009, a young girl from Netherlee with cerebral palsy, who was a wheelchair user, was able, using a power-assisted walking frame, to stand upright and gain her independence and travel to different places. Without the technology and the equipment, she would have been unable to do that. It was East Renfrewshire Good Causes that came to the aid of that family by providing money towards that facility, enabling her to get her own standing frame, which increased her independence and cut down her reliance on others.

I also reflected on the amount of work that East Renfrewshire Good Causes does for young people, in concert with our local schools, and I thought that I would share a testimonial that I read from the depute headteacher of Mearns primary school. She said:

"East Renfrewshire Good Causes charity never fails to bring about positive change in our community. Without their support and contributions, it would not be possible for some of our pupils to participate in activities with their peers."

Likewise, the manager of the East Renfrewshire Carers Centre offered a testimonial. He said:

"East Renfrewshire Good Causes is a true friend of the Carers' Centre and has over a number of years supported many carers to purchase vital equipment without which their caring role and life generally would be much harder."

Those are two excellent examples of community testimonials about the difference that East Renfrewshire Good Causes makes to many people across the area.

I know that Russell Macmillan's reason for starting East Renfrewshire Good Causes was to say thank you in terms of his life experience and the gift that he was given. It is important that we, in this chamber—and the community in East Renfrewshire—all take the opportunity to say

thank you very publicly in the Parliament to Russell, Yvonne and all those who are involved in and who support the work of the charity for everything that they have done and will continue to do not only in East Renfrewshire but beyond its borders, and we must also, once again, offer them our support in all of that work.

17:31

**The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan):** I am delighted to have been asked to close this debate on behalf of the Scottish Government, and I thank Jackson Carlaw for bringing the issue to the chamber. As he said, it is great to see a members' business motion about a local issue, because, too often, these debates focus on national issues. It is great to be able to recognise the impact that Russell Macmillan and the other volunteers have been making in their local area. Their work is truly inspirational. On the point that Jackson Carlaw made about local service and duty, it is sometimes too easy simply to accept and acknowledge that and not think about it more deeply. We salute Russell Macmillan for the work that he has done over a long period of time.

I thank my fellow MSPs for attending and taking part in the debate. They have all given examples of the work that has been done. In preparing for the debate, I was humbled by the range of activity that East Renfrewshire Good Causes carries out. We heard from Jackson Carlaw that the charity is reaching out beyond its boundaries, which shows its ambition. It is having a positive impact on the lives of many. It has provided more than £1.6 million in goods and services and has helped more than 5,500 people. That shows us the range of work that is being done.

Often, what might be seen as a small gesture or helping hand can turn someone's life around. The drive, determination and creativity that has been displayed by Russell Macmillan in his fundraising efforts is exceptional. We thank him for his passionate commitment to improving the lives of his neighbours and to supporting vulnerable people in East Renfrewshire and the surrounding areas.

Scotland is fortunate to have a richly vibrant voluntary sector. There are more than 46,500 active voluntary organisations in the country. The sector's turnover is around £8.5 billion, which illustrates just how important the sector is to the economy and to the wellbeing of people and communities.

Bob Doris mentioned that people make Maryhill, and I would say that people such as Russell help to make Scotland the country that it is. Some 89 per cent of voluntary organisations are local. They include small grassroots community groups, art

and sports clubs, preschool and day-care facilities, village halls, culture and arts venues and major housing, health and social care providers. Part of the challenge for us all—in our constituencies, in our local authority areas or in Government—is to ensure that the sector can work as closely as possible with Government. I would like to come back to Jackson Carlaw on that point.

Every day, hundreds of volunteers give their time for free and of their own free will, just as Mr Macmillan and his team do. Their unpaid efforts help us to address some of the biggest challenges that we face, from mental and physical ill health to social isolation and loneliness. Through thoughtful acts such as checking in on a neighbour, participating in a local litter pick or doing a few hours behind the counter in their local charity shop, volunteers make an amazing contribution to their communities. We all know that and can probably name lots of volunteers in our constituencies.

Volunteering is the invisible thread that binds our communities together, but it can often be taken for granted. Every day, people make vital contributions—to their families, to their communities and to society as a whole—doing what they believe in without fanfare or reward because they believe in a fair society. Paul O'Kane talked about a shared humanity, and I think that volunteers embed that principle across Scotland.

It is right and important that we take this opportunity to acknowledge the true value of volunteers, and that value has never been more evident than over the past few years, as we recover from Covid. We have seen the vital role of volunteering during times of crisis: the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, severe weather events and the rise in the cost of living. In those situations, volunteers have undertaken many different roles and provided practical help, including food distribution, shopping, medicine delivery and making welfare calls to vulnerable people. When Covid first struck, we saw resilience groups appear literally overnight. There are lessons to learn from that about the way in which Government and local authorities work. We have probably all heard people say, "It was easy to do it then, so why can't we do it now?" We all need to learn from what was done.

Volunteers have shown incredible community spirit. Their kindness and generosity have helped thousands of people across Scotland and really have made a difference. That is another reason why I am pleased to be able to praise the efforts of East Renfrewshire Good Causes in this chamber. Scotland should be proud of its volunteers. We are proud of Russell, and I am glad to respond to

Jackson Carlaw in those terms. Volunteers help to make us a better country.

However, volunteering is not just about giving; it is good for the volunteer, too, as it builds skills, enhances their employability and supports their mental wellbeing. It can offer unique opportunities to gain new skills and experience and to be part of something special.

“Scotland’s volunteering action plan”, published last year, was co-produced with partners across the third sector. The action plan aims to support people to volunteer throughout their lives, from school to retirement. People who can gain the most from the experience of volunteering often perceive barriers to their doing so, and we want to tackle stereotypes around what volunteering is and who does it. We want to increase the opportunities for volunteering, widening the breadth of opportunities and increasing access for under-represented groups.

Jackson Carlaw mentioned the importance of referrals and the creation of pathways that make it easier for charities to provide support as soon as possible. Again, I will come back to him on that, as I think that that is vitally important.

The Saltire awards are the Scottish Government’s way of celebrating, recognising and rewarding the commitment, contribution and achievements of volunteers in Scotland aged between 12 and 25. Participants gain nationally recognised certificates, signed by Scottish Government ministers, for the hours of volunteering that they carry out. In 2022-23 alone, more than 470,000 Saltire volunteer hours were logged, and more than 11,000 Saltire certificates were issued.

We all know how important local recognition events are in our areas, so, during volunteers week, which runs from 1 to 7 June, we encourage everyone to recognise the efforts of Scotland’s past, present and future volunteers and say thank you. I call on colleagues across the Parliament to recognise the skills, kindness and commitment of Scotland’s volunteers. I encourage them to share volunteers’ stories and highlight the enormous breadth of volunteering opportunities that are on offer, to help to inspire others to get involved.

Once again, I thank Jackson Carlaw for highlighting the important work of Russell Macmillan—I salute Russell again for his work in East Renfrewshire and beyond—the volunteers at East Renfrewshire Good Causes and, more broadly, the volunteers across the country who help to glue our society together and make Scotland stronger.

*Meeting closed at 17:38.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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