



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 23 March 2017

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 23 March 2017

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

Presiding Officer's Statement

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good morning. Before we move to today's business, I would like to say a few words to the chamber.

Members will wish to know that I have, this morning, written to Speaker Bercow and Lord Fowler and to the Mayor of London on behalf of the Scottish Parliament. I wanted to convey our sympathy, our sorrow and our solidarity with our fellow parliamentarians and to express our sense of loss at the loss of life and cruel suffering inflicted on so many innocent individuals and their families yesterday. Flags are flying at half mast at Holyrood today, and we observed a 1-minute silence this morning as a mark of respect for those who have been affected by the tragic events.

This morning, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body received a briefing from Police Scotland. I want to reassure members that there is no change to the threat level and no intelligence to suggest that there is a specific threat to Scotland, Edinburgh or Holyrood. However, as a precautionary measure, security at the Scottish Parliament was heightened with immediate effect, and the corporate body, in discussion with Police Scotland and the security services, will continue to keep our security arrangements under review, as we always do.

I convened a meeting of the Parliamentary Bureau this morning, and a motion will be put to Parliament later today, proposing that the debate on Scotland's choice be rescheduled for next Tuesday. The change has the support of all business managers. Other business today will proceed as scheduled, as will the business at our sister Parliament in Westminster.

I hope that I speak for all members in saying that this shocking event should serve to remind us of the importance of holding firm to our humanity and of defending our democracy.

Business Motion

11:42

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04845, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for today.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 23 March 2017—

after

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Consultation on the Draft British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan

insert

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Motion: Acting Conveners—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

General Question Time

11:42

Violence Against Women in Prostitution

1. **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):**

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle violence against women in prostitution. (S5O-00817)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing): I associate myself and my colleagues with the Presiding Officer's earlier remarks.

The Scottish Government is committed to tackling all forms of violence against women and girls, including women in prostitution. The Scottish Government supports a range of measures that can help to reduce the harm that is caused by prostitution, and encourages the enforcement of existing laws against those who seek to exploit others through prostitution.

The questions of how to deal with prostitution in the longer term, and whether any specific approach can or does reduce the inherent harm associated with it, are very complex, and policy decisions should be evidence based. That is why we commissioned research in 2015 to consider the reliability of the evidence base internationally on the impacts of the criminalisation of the purchase of sex, and research that explored the available knowledge and evidence of prostitution in Scotland. That research was published by the Scottish Government on 24 February to further inform the debate. We look forward to hearing views on the findings of the research around what is a highly complex and contested area.

John Mason: I have heard a number of survivors of prostitution speak about their experiences—not least last Friday, at the Scottish National Party conference—and it has been very moving. Even survivors who worked in a brothel in Edinburgh that was tacitly approved continued to be abused by pimps and others. Will the minister agree to meet some survivors of prostitution and hear of their experiences?

Annabelle Ewing: It is important that we listen to the views of everybody who is involved, including the views of sex workers, on both sides of the debate—those who are in favour of criminalisation and those who are opposed to it. I would be happy to meet current and former sex workers to listen to their views on the findings of the research and to hear of their experiences, in order that they might help to inform future policy considerations.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the policy decision on commercial sexual exploitation that was taken by the Scottish National Party conference at the weekend, which is similar to the Scottish Labour Party's stance. Both policy positions are in line with "Equally Safe", the Scottish Government's violence against women strategy, which was endorsed by Parliament.

However, we need to take action now to stop such exploitation. I am glad that the minister has agreed to meet survivors to learn about the devastating effects that their experiences have had on them. I asked the First Minister and the minister to meet survivors some time ago. Will such a meeting now take place and will the Government put in place a plan of action to deal with commercial sexual exploitation and promote equality?

Annabelle Ewing: I acknowledge Rhoda Grant's long-standing interest in the subject. Work on the matter has been on-going for some time. The immediate next steps that we plan to take are to allow all interested stakeholders, including current sex workers and people who have exited prostitution, to digest the detailed research that we published about four weeks ago on 24 February, and to engage further with those stakeholders to obtain their views on that research. I have asked officials to hold meetings with key stakeholders after the Easter recess in order to try to understand their current views and to hear whether their views have changed since that research. I am happy to have meetings with current and former sex workers and will ensure that officials put meetings in place in the weeks to come.

The Presiding Officer: Question 2 has not been lodged.

Yorkhill Minor Injuries Unit

3. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to reopen the Yorkhill minor injuries unit and, if so, on what date it will do so. (S5O-00819)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The planning and provision of local services are the responsibility of national health service boards and integration partnerships, in line with national policies and frameworks. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has confirmed that the closure of the minor injuries unit at Yorkhill is a temporary measure to ensure that there is robust unscheduled care cover across the city.

After a meeting of the acute services committee this week, the board will carry out a review to determine the best location for a replacement

service for the west of Glasgow to best meet the needs of local people.

Anas Sarwar: The minor injuries unit closed two days before Christmas, with no notice having been given to local people except a sign at the entrance. At that time, the local public were reassured that the closure was just a temporary measure to cover the peak during winter, which was confirmed by the First Minister at First Minister's question time.

However, as of today, the unit has still not reopened. I have a letter from the chief executive of the health board stating that, due to the continued pressures at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, the minor injuries unit will remain closed, and will stay closed during the period of the review into whether we should have a minor injuries unit service at Yorkhill at all. That has been decided without any consultation of the public. The public have been given no information, there has been no consultation and no due process of service reform has been gone through. That is simply not acceptable, is it?

Shona Robison: I reiterate what I said in my first answer, which I hope Anas Sarwar listened to. The closure is a temporary measure that has been taken to help to provide unscheduled care cover across the city.

However, as I have said, the acute services committee agreed this week to review where the best location in the west of Glasgow would be for a minor injuries service.

As Anas Sarwar would know if he paid attention to the detail, the Yorkhill minor injuries unit was always an interim step as part of the migration of services in Glasgow in recent years. It might be that there is a better permanent location for a minor injuries unit that would better serve the people of the west of Glasgow. I would have thought that Anas Sarwar would agree that that work should go on.

On Anas Sarwar's point about consultation, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde should be discussing with local people where the best location for the unit in the west of Glasgow should be. I will certainly encourage the board to do that.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned a review that is being carried out. Can she confirm whether NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is looking at sites—for example, Gartnavel—other than Yorkhill for a minor injuries unit in the west of the city?

Shona Robison: Yes. In considering where the west of Glasgow service should be provided, the board will need to go through a process to identify the most appropriate location for that service, and both Gartnavel and Yorkhill will be looked at to

assess which would better meet the needs of local people. I have asked the board to keep Sandra White informed of the timing and the process. I certainly encourage her to engage further with the board on the matter and to ensure that the views of the local people whom she represents on the best location are conveyed to the board.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): There have been reports that the closure at Yorkhill was due to staff shortages over Christmas. Between December 2011 and December 2016, nursing and midwifery vacancies in Glasgow rose from 0.3 per cent to 3.4 per cent, which equates to 541 vacant posts. What will the cabinet secretary do to ensure that there are enough nurses in Glasgow to provide urgent care?

Shona Robison: On workforce growth over the past 10 years, the number of qualified nurses and midwives in Glasgow is up by 5.5 per cent, or 597 whole-time equivalents. However, it is clear that demand has also increased. It is very important that services are delivered in the best way to meet not just current demands, but future demands. Demand for unscheduled care has grown not only in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, but across Scotland, so it is very important that services continue to meet demand. The minor injuries service and potential services around that provide a very important part of the unscheduled care service in the west of the city of Glasgow.

I hope that Annie Wells supports what I have said. If she wants to meet the board to discuss the matter in more detail, I am sure that it would be willing to do that.

Railway Policing

4. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the comments by the divisional commander of British Transport Police in Scotland that its proposed merger with Police Scotland risks reducing the effectiveness of railway policing. (S5O-00820)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Police Scotland has confirmed to the Scottish Parliament that its intention would be to maintain a specialist railway policing function within the broader Police Scotland structure. That will retain the skills, knowledge and experience that BTP officers and staff have built and embed railway policing within the wider local, specialist and national resources of Police Scotland.

Graham Simpson: The Justice Committee has heard that up to 40 per cent of British Transport Police officers could leave the service if the merger goes ahead. That is a huge concern to operators such as Virgin Trains and CrossCountry and, indeed, to all of us.

The British Transport Police Federation chairman, Nigel Goodband, told that organisation's conference in Cardiff yesterday that the plans are driven by "nationalistic jingoism", amount to a "childish wish" from the Scottish National Party

"to play with their own train set",

and are not based on any evidence. Expert after expert says that the BTP is not broken. Chief Superintendent John McBride, whom I referred to in my question, told MSPs that when other police are involved in rail incidents, it takes 50 per cent longer to investigate and get trains moving again. Does the minister dismiss the views of Mr McBride and others, or is he going to listen?

Michael Matheson: We have engaged extensively with the British Transport Police Federation and others in railway policing on a whole variety of issues that relate to the intention to integrate railway policing in Scotland into Police Scotland.

As I mentioned, Police Scotland has been very clear about its intention to maintain a specialist railway policing function within it and to do so under a single strategic command structure. That will allow us to ensure that we maintain that specialist resource and that railway services and passengers receive the quality of service that they require and believe is necessary, and also increase their capacity to draw on a national, specialist resource in a way that they are currently not able to do to the same extent.

In addition, to provide reassurance to the staff in the BTP, we have made it clear to the British Transport Police Federation and the staff unions that we have offered a triple lock, which guarantees security of job, pay and pension conditions. We will continue to work with those bodies as we proceed with the proposed legislation in the Scottish Parliament, to provide them with the reassurance that they and the public require about the way in which specialist railway policing will continue to be delivered if Parliament supports our proposed legislation.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Assistant Chief Constable Bernard Higgins of Police Scotland and Chief Constable Crowther of British Transport Police both told the Justice Committee that Police Scotland has the specialisms and resources that it needs to take over policing of railways in Scotland. Does the cabinet secretary agree, and would he like to reiterate his earlier comments on that?

Michael Matheson: Assistant Chief Constable Higgins, in his evidence to the Justice Committee, was clear about Police Scotland's ability to deliver specialist policing in a range of areas. For example, we already have specialist police functions relating to airports and ports, underwater

matters and other areas such as firearms. There is no doubt that the assurances that ACC Higgins provided demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the specialist function of railway policing should the integration of the BTP into Police Scotland be agreed by the Parliament.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I know that, whatever differences we have in the chamber, we will all want to pay tribute to the work of all our brave police officers, wherever they are, and that PC Keith Palmer will be in our thoughts.

Major rail unions have warned that they are prepared to consider industrial action if the Scottish Government pushes ahead with the Railway Policing (Scotland) Bill and the break-up of the British Transport Police. Is the justice secretary prepared to risk yet more disruption on Scotland's railways for a merger that workers do not want, that the public do not need and that those who represent British Transport Police officers have said is supported by

"no logic, no reason and ... no evidence"?—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 14 March 2017; c 45.]

Michael Matheson: I can assure the member that I and my colleague Humza Yousaf will continue to engage with the variety of stakeholders who have an interest in how policing is delivered on our railways, including the unions, to provide them with the assurance that they are looking for on how policing will be delivered should integration be agreed by the Parliament. We will provide them with an assurance that they will continue to receive the level of service that they expect and that is provided at present. Ultimately, it will be for the Parliament to decide whether integration takes place by choosing whether or not to approve our proposed legislation. It will be for the Labour Party to set out its position on that but, ultimately, it will be for Parliament to decide whether integration takes place.

Organ Donation (Consultation)

5. **Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its timetable is for proceeding with the results of the consultation on increasing the number of organ donations. (S5O-00821)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): The independent analysis of the consultation on increasing the number of organ and tissue donations will be submitted to the Scottish Government in May this year. A decision informed by the outcome of the consultation will be made shortly after that.

Mark Griffin: I welcome the minister's previous comments on a presumption in favour of moving to an opt-out system of organ donation. Does the minister agree that there would need to be a major

public awareness and education campaign around an opt-out system; that there would understandably be a long lead-in time before that system was up and running and saving lives; and that, as a result, swift action is essential?

Aileen Campbell: I take on board the member's comments. The crucial thing is to ensure that we get this right and take the time to properly consider the 863 consultation responses. Alongside the work on the soft opt-out—the member is right that we set out our presumption in favour of a soft opt-out system in the consultation—a significant amount of work has been done to increase the rate of donors. We have the highest rate of donors per million of population of any part of the United Kingdom and we have had the highest-ever number of deceased donors in this financial year. Alongside the careful work that needs to be taken forward relating to the soft opt-out, significant work is on-going to increase the rate of donors. We want to ensure that we proceed with the sensitivity that the issue requires. We will take time to go through the consultation responses, and we will keep the member and the Parliament updated on progress on the legislation.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Will the minister please advise members on how many people are currently awaiting a transplant in Scotland and how many people died while waiting for a transplant in the most recent year for which figures are available?

Aileen Campbell: I can get back to the member on some of the detail that he seeks. I can tell him that the active transplant waiting list has decreased by 20 per cent and that, since 2008, the number of donors in Scotland has increased by 131 per cent. Moreover, as I said in response to Mark Griffin, we have the highest rate of donors per million of population of any country in the UK.

Alongside the careful work that we are undertaking on legislating for the presumption of a soft opt-out, on which we have consulted, we are taking forward a significant number of other areas of work to ensure that people get transplants when they need them and that we increase the number of donors across the country.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-01070)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Let me express, on behalf of the Parliament and our country, my shock and sadness at the heinous attack on Westminster yesterday afternoon. We send our heartfelt condolences to those who have lost loved ones and our thoughts to all those who sustained injuries.

Many of us in this chamber have friends and colleagues—indeed, some of us have family members—who work in the Palace of Westminster: parliamentarians, staff and journalists. Yesterday was a harrowing day for all of them, and they have our support and good wishes. Above all, we stand in solidarity with London, a vibrant, diverse, wonderful city, which will never be cowed by mindless acts of violence.

This attack stands, of course, as a stark reminder of the dangerous jobs that our emergency services do every day on our behalf. Yesterday, a Metropolitan Police officer went to work to protect and defend democracy, and did not return home. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of PC Keith Palmer.

Today, we should also express our appreciation to policemen and women across the country, who risk their lives every day in the line of duty. To the police and security staff who keep us safe here in our own Parliament, we say thank you.

In the aftermath of the attack yesterday, I was updated by the national security adviser and updated also on the immediate actions that were taken by Police Scotland. I convened a meeting of the Scottish Government's resilience committee last night. That was an opportunity to review what was known about the events in London, consider any implications for Scotland and hear directly from the chief constable and other senior officers about their response. I am grateful to the chief executive of our Parliament for taking part in that meeting. I have been updated again by Police Scotland this morning.

It is important to stress that there is no intelligence of any increased threat or risk to Scotland. However, as a precautionary measure, Police Scotland has increased security at key locations, including our Parliament, and will keep those arrangements under review. The public

should also remain vigilant but go about their everyday business as normal.

We know that, at times like these, it can be all too easy to look for someone to blame. It is important, therefore, that we are very clear about this: acts of terrorism are not the responsibility of any one faith or section of our society; the only people to blame for acts of terrorism are the individuals who plan and perpetrate them.

Let me end by echoing and endorsing the words of the Prime Minister. Terrorists seek to undermine our values and destroy our way of life. They will not succeed. Whatever our disagreements, in this chamber or any other, we stand united in our core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Those values are strong and they will endure. *[Applause.]*

Ruth Davidson: On behalf of members on these benches, I express our deep shock at yesterday's events in Westminster. We, too, send our deep condolences to those whose loved ones were lost or injured yesterday. Once again, we express our gratitude to the police officers and security guards who, at Westminster and here at Holyrood, work to keep us safe, and whose bravery we seem only to truly appreciate at a time like this—people such as PC Keith Palmer, who lost his life yesterday doing his job, doing his duty.

Yesterday, a coward killed three innocent people and injured many more in an attempt to attack the symbol of our country's democracy. His attack on our values failed as he died—the paramedics demonstrated what a civilised society is by trying to save him. His attack on our freedom will fail again today, as we show our resolve by returning to work and getting on with our lives.

Does the First Minister agree that, as representatives of democracy, we best demonstrate our defiance by showing—here in Edinburgh and at Westminster—that we will not be silenced and we will not be cowed? Does she agree that we best strike back against terrorism by staying true to our own values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law?

The First Minister: I agree whole-heartedly with the sentiments expressed by Ruth Davidson. Those of us who have had the opportunity to see some of the proceedings in the House of Commons this morning cannot fail to have been moved by the poignancy of what we witnessed. All of us feel very deeply the impact of what happened yesterday on our colleagues and friends in the House of Commons and in wider Westminster. Going back to work today must have been difficult and harrowing, but the dignity that was expressed by the Prime Minister and by other members of Parliament gives us all an example to follow.

We have many disagreements. That is the nature of democracy. We have seen that in our own Parliament over the past couple of days. However, it is our ability to express those disagreements, often very passionately, that is the hallmark of our democracy. It is the values of democracy, human rights, freedom and the rule of law that terrorists seek to strike at. Whatever our disagreements—and, before too long, we will undoubtedly return to them, here and in other places—we have had the opportunity in the past 24 hours to remind ourselves that we are all united by our common humanity, and that it is democracy that defends our ability to have such disagreements and express them in the way we do.

Ruth Davidson: Can I ask the First Minister about the measures to protect people since yesterday's events? This morning, a deputy chief constable at Police Scotland outlined some of the measures that have already been taken since yesterday's attacks. As the First Minister has indicated, those include an increased police presence in our major conurbations and a substantial armed presence on our streets. The deputy chief constable also described how, yesterday, Police Scotland officers dropped everything to be in the right place. Again, we thank them for their actions. Can the First Minister today assure the chamber that the police will be given all the support that they need to tackle this threat, so that the public are given the reassurances that they require?

The First Minister: I am happy to give that assurance. I have indeed been assured by the chief constable that he has the resources that he requires to respond appropriately. There will continue to be—as, I should say, there always is—on-going dialogue between the Scottish Government and our police service to ensure that the police have the resources that are required.

The police have well-developed plans in place that enable them to increase security in response to incidents such as the one that we witnessed yesterday. Those plans were activated by Police Scotland yesterday and put into place immediately. There is an increased police presence around our major conurbations and that includes, as people would expect, an increase in the presence of armed officers.

For reasons that I am sure the whole chamber will understand, I will not go into precise detail about the police tactical response. It would be inappropriate and counterproductive for me to do so. However, that response involves a substantial uplift in armed officers on duty and a configuration of resources to ensure that there has been a high-profile, non-armed police presence across the country. I am sure that many members of the

public will have seen evidence of that this morning as they travelled to work.

As I said in my initial remarks, I have already spoken to Deputy Chief Constable Gwynne this morning, to be updated and also to continue to be briefed on how the police are responding. The arrangements that have been put in place will remain in place for the foreseeable future, but the police will continue to keep those arrangements under review. I am confident, and therefore want to reassure the public, that the police are doing everything that is appropriate to ensure the protection of the public.

Finally, I reiterate a point that I made earlier. The public—as should be the case at all times—should be vigilant. If they have concerns about anything, they should trust their instincts and contact the police, but the public should get on with their daily business, as we in this Parliament are getting on with ours. That, after all, is the best response to terrorists.

Ruth Davidson: I thank the First Minister for the information that she is able to give the chamber. As has been noted again today, we can never guard against attacks like yesterday's by building ever-higher walls or bigger defences, and nor, as a free and liberal society here in the United Kingdom, should we wish to do so even if it did work. As the deputy chief constable also said this morning, the best defence against terror is a cohesive society that self-polices against the threat of extremism, a society that itself stops extremism from taking root and from poisoning vulnerable minds. What practical efforts is the Scottish Government making to ensure that we have the right community engagement in place to strengthen us all?

The First Minister: I agree that there will always be a limit to what can be done to provide guarantees of protection, but whatever can be done should be done. I have already outlined the increased police presence that Police Scotland is making available. Those who heard the deputy chief constable on the radio this morning will also have heard him talking about the specialist advice that is available to the police, including counterterrorist security advisers to advise on physical security—for example, barriers in place at key locations—and it is important that we trust our police to take the right decisions in that regard.

The fundamental point is that our best resilience comes from community resilience and the vigilance of the public. The police have been in contact with faith groups already, over the course of yesterday, last night and this morning. The chief constable has today issued a message of reassurance to communities. The Scottish Government, as we do on an on-going basis, will also be making contact with key groups in our

society and key faith communities, to underline the important message of cohesion. Terrorists, by their very nature, seek to divide. Their intention and their objective is to lead us to turn on each other and to look to blame people in our own society. We must not do that. No faith group and no section of our society is responsible for what happened on the streets of London yesterday. Just as it is the best response to terrorism to go about our daily business confidently and defiantly, so, too, is it the right response to terrorism to unite as a society and to use that cohesion as a strength.

Ruth Davidson: I thank the First Minister once again for her response. This has been a week when we have been reminded that terrorism has many faces. In Northern Ireland, the passing of a former Deputy First Minister there has brought back memories of the sickening violence that has played out in that part of the United Kingdom. The events in Westminster yesterday reminded us of the new terror threat that has dogged the United Kingdom and our allies internationally over the past two decades. Terror has come to our country in many forms and guises. It has come not from one religion or one group but from the twisted world view of individuals. Does the First Minister agree that the lesson here is not to tar one religion or one group in the coming days but to tackle the evil of terrorist ideology itself, and not to vilify or blame whole communities but instead to show that we all stand united against terror and stand united in defeating it?

The First Minister: The best and strongest message that we can send out from our Parliament today, in solidarity with our sister Parliament in Westminster, and with the people of London and other parts of our world that have been blighted by the acts of terrorists, is exactly that one. Whatever legitimate disagreements we have, we are united in those core values that we hold dear, and at times like this it is more important than ever that we come together to express those values and express our determination that terrorists will not divide us.

Perhaps there is another lesson, and perhaps it is one that is particularly resonant for us here in this chamber at this time. We resolve disagreements by debate, by discussion and by dialogue. That is what democracy is all about. Whatever we disagree on, what we all agree on is the vital importance of a vibrant democracy. Let that message ring out loudly from our Parliament today.

Engagements

2. **Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-01069)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Kezia Dugdale: I add the thoughts and prayers of these benches and this party to all those who were affected by yesterday's attack on Westminster, including the families of those who have died. In particular, I pay tribute to PC Keith Palmer, who died doing what he did every single day: keeping people safe.

Westminster means different things to different people. Our houses of Parliament are a beacon of democracy for many around the world. They represent freedom, tolerance and the rule of law. However, Westminster is also a place of work for cleaners, catering staff, janitors, journalists, police officers, administrators and many more. Many people are going to work today concerned about the safety of others, such as the police officers in Scotland who are watching guard at train stations, the nurses who put themselves at risk every day and those in our schools who dedicate their careers to the enrichment of others. What assurances can the First Minister give us that everything that can be done is being done to ensure public safety?

The First Minister: Kezia Dugdale is absolutely right to draw attention to the fact that, yesterday, we were all reminded that Parliament at Westminster, just like our Parliament here, is not just a symbol of our politics and democracy, although Parliaments the world over are exactly that, but a place where human beings go to work. Some of my oldest friends in life work within the Palace of Westminster, and there will be many others in this chamber who can say exactly the same. I will not be the only one whose first thoughts yesterday were about people who I love and people who I count among my dearest friends. That is a reminder that politicians are human, as are the staff who work for them and the journalists who report on us. At moments like this, it is that humanity that we are reminded of. Last night, I read a wonderful piece by the journalist Jonathan Freedland, who made that precise point. I recommend it to anyone who has not read it.

I have already outlined to Ruth Davidson the steps that Police Scotland has taken and will continue to take to ensure that it guarantees public safety, as far as can be done. However, it is also important to work hard to guarantee public assurance. The police presence that many people will be witnessing on our streets today is higher profile than normal. I stress—it is important to continue to stress this—that that is not because there is any intelligence whatsoever of an increased threat to Scotland; it is about assurance. Understandably, the public feel nervous and anxious in the wake of events like this, and part of

the job of the police is not only to keep us safe but to contribute to a sense of assurance. Police Scotland and all of us will continue to do that in the days ahead.

Kezia Dugdale: London is a microcosm of the world. We know from the Prime Minister's statement just an hour ago that those who were injured yesterday were British, French, Romanian, South Korean, Greek, German, Polish and Irish. London is an open and multicultural city that is home to people of all faiths and from many different and diverse nations. It is a city that, last year, elected Europe's first Muslim mayor. Therefore, no matter the religion, nationality or identity of the attacker or of those arrested earlier this morning, this cannot and must not turn into a war on any one community. Bringing people together must be part of the solution to combating terror. Will the First Minister join me in sending a strong message that Britain remains an open, tolerant nation that is home to people of all faiths and all nationalities?

The First Minister: Yes, that is an extremely important message. London is one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan cities in the world. Two weeks ago today, I walked across Westminster bridge on my way to the memorial service for Afghanistan and Iraq. On that morning, the bridge was packed, as it is every morning, with people of all nationalities and all ages, including school parties excited to be witnessing the Palace of Westminster and everything that the wonderful city of London has to offer.

We must remind ourselves that the victims of yesterday's attack would and could have been of any nationality. However, it is also important to remind ourselves—as Kezia Dugdale has just done—that the responsibility for this attack does not lie with any faith or nationality. Terrorists seek to pervert religions and we should not, in any way, contribute to their ability to do so. This is an important moment for us to stand united and to send that message.

One of the issues that I discussed both last night and again this morning with the deputy chief constable was the need to be vigilant against any increase in hate crime in the days ahead. All of us in this Parliament should unite to send the message that the only people responsible for terrorism are the terrorists. Let us make sure that that message is heard loudly and clearly. *[Applause.]*

Kezia Dugdale: This is of course the second time in less than a year that we have faced an attack on our democracy here in Britain. We have watched in angst as terror has struck around the world, from Belgium to Nigeria. In the days following the brutal murder of Jo Cox, we resolved that we have more in common than that which

divides us, so does the First Minister agree that the best message that we can send following this terrorist attack is that we will remain true to the values of tolerance and integration, freedom and solidarity?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree wholeheartedly with that. I am sure that many people yesterday, in the immediate aftermath of the attack in London, thought of Jo Cox and the incredible dignity with which her husband and her family reacted in the days immediately following her murder. I had the privilege of speaking to Brendan Cox last week to pledge the support of the Scottish Government for the activities that he is planning to commemorate the anniversary of her murder.

This is an opportunity for us all to remind ourselves of the values that Jo Cox encapsulated and the values that all of us hold so dear. These are the values that terrorists seek to strike at. Their whole motivation is to divide, to undermine, and to destroy the way of life that we hold dear. Just as we all did in the aftermath of the murder of Jo Cox, let us again today send the message to those who would commit acts of terrorism anywhere in the world that they will not succeed because whatever we disagree on, we are united by a rock-solid commitment to the values that Kezia Dugdale has articulated.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-01072)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Cabinet will next meet on Tuesday.

Patrick Harvie: I add, on behalf of my party, our deep concern for all those who were affected by yesterday's horrific events, our deepest sympathies for the friends and families of PC Palmer and all those who were killed yesterday, the respect and gratitude that we all feel towards those who stepped forward in such circumstances, both bystanders who helped the injured and the emergency services who showed professionalism and dedication, and our hopes for the recovery of those who have been injured.

The lasting injury that some people wish to inflict upon us all is the destruction of the empathy and solidarity that our society depends on, so we must all be united in expressing and building that empathy and solidarity—in particular, in challenging those who would seek to blame, stigmatise and alienate people on the basis of their religion.

There are, sadly, those in our society, in our media and in our politics—in this country and in others—who are today reacting to these events by

continuing to express racist, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments. As well as reflecting on the First Minister's comments about the actions that are necessary to address security concerns, I welcome the assurance that the First Minister has just given that the Government will also respond robustly to any increase in hate crime and prejudice. Does the First Minister agree that we must continue to confront any presence of such far right threats in our society?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree. Just as we have to stand strong against the terrorists, so too do we have to stand strong against anyone who would seek to exploit the acts of terrorists to sow division in our society.

At such times, I think that we are all acutely aware of the feelings of people in our Muslim community in particular, who feel as horrified, shocked and distressed as any of us do about the attack that happened yesterday, and who often have the additional burden of feeling that some in our society seek to blame them for such acts. At such moments in time, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with them. I know from my constituency—which, as members are aware, has a very high Muslim population—just how important it is to do that at this time.

That takes a number of forms. It is a question of reaching out. As I have already said, the police and the Scottish Government will do that across all faith communities in the days that lie ahead. It is also a question of calling out anybody who seeks to respond to what happened in London yesterday with racism, intolerance or anti-immigrant sentiment, and of making sure that we are vigilant against hate crime and that the police respond vigorously to any crimes of that nature. As I said earlier, I have had an assurance this morning from the police that they will do exactly that.

This is a moment for remembering what unites us as human beings, and that—in all the different ways and forms that we have been discussing it this morning—is the most important message that we can send.

Patrick Harvie: I ask the First Minister to reflect on the children and young people who are growing up at this time, who must also be looking on at these events. Their experiences not only of what they see in the news coverage of the Westminster attack and other such attacks but of our response as a society will shape their understanding of the world around them.

I grew up at a time when the cold war created fears and insecurity—there was fear of violent destruction on an unimaginable scale. I can barely imagine the impact of the brutal reality of yesterday's attack, and others, on those who are growing up today.

What does the First Minister believe that we can do in our education system and in our wider society to overcome those fears and ensure that young people grow up with those values of respect and empathy that we have all spoken of, and with confidence in the capacity of humanity to stand together?

The First Minister: Patrick Harvie raises a very important point. Like Patrick Harvie and many other members, I grew up during the cold war at a time when the terrorism that people were afraid of was Irish terrorism. As many members will do, I remember how real that felt at times.

However, what we did not have to contend with, which young people today have to contend with, is the 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week conveyance of news on social media—on sites such as Twitter and Facebook—which I think we all recognise makes everything seem so much more acute every second of every day. We must be conscious of the impact of that on young people.

The other side of that is that social media makes the world smaller and gives our young people the ability to reach out to people on the other side of the world to build common cause on those things that unite us as human beings. It is important that our education system ensures that we instil those common values that all of us hold dear, but we should also seek to lead by example in the way in which we respond, and I think that all members in all parties feel a responsibility to do that.

Cabinet (Meetings)

4. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-01064)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Matters of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: For four years, I walked up Kennington Road and over Westminster bridge. I looked up at Big Ben and then down at the Thames. I dodged past the tourists who were taking pictures of that iconic scene, which is recognised right across the globe. I descended the steps and went into the palace of Westminster, nodding at the police officer, who nodded in return—“Morning, Mr Rennie”; it was the personal touch.

I do not think that I will be able to walk that route again without thinking of the people who were run over, the woman in the river, the police and the other people who were injured or the three people who died. Perhaps some of those people were tourists who were taking pictures. I will think of the officer who sought to defend democracy and who lost his life in the process.

However, I do want to be free to walk that route again. Getting the balance right between security and freedom is difficult. Does the First Minister agree that we must act on the basis of security, expertise, evidence and intelligence and not fear?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree very strongly indeed with that. Willie Rennie has very movingly just recounted his experience of making the journey that many of those who work within Westminster would have made yesterday morning. Those of us who have never worked within Westminster, though, can relate to our own experiences of coming to work in this building and nodding and saying good morning to the police officers and the security staff, many of whom have been with us since the beginning of the Parliament in 1999, as those of us who have been here since then will know. They are people who we have come to think of not just as colleagues but as friends. They work every day around the perimeters of the building and within it to keep us safe. Yesterday was a reminder of just how much we owe each and every one of them.

Willie Rennie is right that at times like this there is, of course, a desire on the part of the public to know that the police and the security services are doing as he indicated. We have not mentioned the security services yet, but the rarity of yesterday's shocking events is a tribute to the security and intelligence workers who keep the country safe at all times. However, it is understandable that in response to an attack like yesterday's, people's instinct is to worry about security. That is right and proper, and I feel very strongly the responsibility that I have shared with others as First Minister to ensure that we are doing everything that we possibly can to guarantee the security of the public.

However, the balance has to be right. I do not want—and I do not believe that anybody wants—to live in a country where we allow the fear and threat of terrorism to restrict and undermine how we live our lives, because that would be allowing the terrorists to get what they want. We therefore have to ensure that there is a balance and proportionality in what the police do. Having discussed matters yesterday and today with the police—I discuss periodically with the police the plans that are in place—I am confident that they have that balance very firmly in mind. We have to keep the public safe, but above all else that means keeping the public safe for a purpose: to allow them to get on with their day-to-day lives because that is the most important thing.

Willie Rennie: Yesterday's events were particularly horrific because the scene was so familiar: we have all seen it on our televisions or have witnessed it ourselves. However, acts of terrorism happen abroad as well as at home, and

they happen almost every day. We must do all that we can to protect our open, free and liberal society; never generalising or stigmatising, though, but reaching out to all faiths, religions, countries and creeds. Although yesterday's attacker was born here, his violent ideology is one that pervades the globe. That is why we must act together with our partners wherever they are in the world. It is about defence, security and intelligence, but it is also about soft power through international aid, diplomacy and partnerships. Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister: Yes, I do. There are two points there that are worth underlining, the first of which is the first one that Willie Rennie made. Of course acts of terrorism that happen here at home on our own shores or on the shores of our nearest neighbours will always impact more forcibly on us than acts of terrorism that happen further afield. However, it is really important that we recognise that many countries across the world deal with events like yesterday's on a regular basis. Yesterday, when watching the television, I was struck by an interview with a tourist from Turkey, who made the point that he was shocked by what had happened but that he came from a country where such incidents were, sadly, a regular occurrence. That is a reminder that we probably all have an obligation to give more attention to acts like yesterday's that happen in other parts of our world.

The second point that I think is worth underlining—this is again a point that is resonant in the age that we live in—is that whatever relationships there may be at any time between different countries, it is vital for all countries to work together on security, on defence and on intelligence. Again, perhaps, the theme of our discussions this morning, if we were to draw one out, is this: whatever our disagreements and whatever different relationships we may want from time to time, there are many, many things, regardless of all of that, that unite us—not just the human values that we have spoken about, but the common interest that we all have to work together to combat terrorism and keep our population safe.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I thank the First Minister and all our party leaders for their contributions. We now move to supplementary questions with a question from Miles Briggs.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): This morning, the *Edinburgh Evening News* revealed that national health service staff, patients and visitors will face an increase in parking charges from £7 to £15 per day. Does the First Minister think that it is fair for our hard-working NHS staff to face a more than doubling of parking charges to go to their work? What advice does the Scottish Government

give NHS boards on parking charges for NHS staff? Will the First Minister back my call for NHS Lothian to scrap this staggering 114 per cent increase in parking charges?

The First Minister: I share the member's concern and I actually agree with him—I do not think that the situation is fair to patients at or visitors to Edinburgh royal infirmary. As some members will recall, when I was the health secretary, we abolished parking charges at all NHS-run car parks across the country. There is a small number of sites—Edinburgh royal infirmary is one of them—where it was not possible to do that because of the private finance initiative schemes that were in place. The cost would have been out of proportion to any sense of affordability.

I know that, in years gone by, NHS Lothian has looked closely at the matter, as have Scottish Government officials. I will happily ask the health secretary to discuss the matter again with NHS Lothian. The contracts—I am not seeking to make a political point; today is not the day for that—predate the life of this Government, but we will continue to look and look again at whether anything can be done. I hope that that helps to explain the context for the important issue that the member has raised.

Ageing Population (Planning)

5. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I do not know whether I should declare an interest.

To ask the First Minister what forward planning is in place to meet the demographic challenges of an ageing population. (S5F-01079)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I think that Christine Grahame should almost certainly declare an interest.

Members: Oh!

The First Minister: I will pay a heavy price for that attempt at lightening the mood in the chamber.

Scotland's ageing population is one of our most significant challenges as a society, but it is also—we do not make this point often enough—one of our most significant assets. We want to ensure that older people can continue to contribute and participate to their fullest potential. That is why, across the Government, the needs of our ageing population have been embedded into all our planning. We continue to work with National Records of Scotland on population projections. From health and social care, planning and housing to combating social isolation and supporting people who want to keep on working, we are doing

all that we can to support people to enjoy a thriving third age.

Christine Grahame: I thank the First Minister for her reply, in part.

I congratulate *The Herald* on its grey matters campaign, which we surely all endorse. Given that 17 per cent of the Scottish population is under 16 whereas 18 per cent is over 65 and given that, over the coming 25 years, the number of over-65s is predicted to rise by 53 per cent and the number of over-80s is predicted to rise from 77,000 to 200,000—that is impacting even now and will impact in the future, as the First Minister has understood, on housing, health, transport and so on—will the First Minister commit to appointing a dedicated minister for older people to work across all Government portfolios to provide the best support that we can provide for older people in Scotland?

For the avoidance of doubt, I say to the First Minister that that was not a job application.

The First Minister: But if asked, I am sure—anyway. I will consider that proposal, although, because the issue cuts across every responsibility of the Government, it is the responsibility of all ministers to make sure that it is embedded in our planning.

I, too, commend the grey matters series of articles that has been running in *The Herald* this week, which has been an excellent contribution to raising the profile of the many different issues that are involved. I agree with Christine Grahame's comments and I reiterate that, across all responsibilities of the Government, we are mindful of how we respond to what is a challenge and an opportunity.

There is obviously a crossover with the debate about migration and freedom of movement. I feel strongly that we all have a responsibility not to dismiss people's concerns about immigration, which we should address, but to focus people's minds on the economic necessity for us as a country to grow our population, because of the demographics that Christine Grahame outlined. The contribution of some of the best and brightest talents from across Europe and the world has a significant part to play in that.

The Government has a responsibility to take forward many issues. We will make sure that we do that and that we do so in consultation with others across the Parliament.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): In November, it was my great privilege to chair a meeting of the Scottish older people's assembly in the chamber. At one point, I asked those present what they were most worried or anxious about, and I was surprised to learn that

fear of falling topped the list. A few weeks ago, Parliament agreed to an amendment in my name that called for a national falls strategy to build on the work of the 2014 falls framework, with resources and adequate awareness-raising capability. What steps does the First Minister's Government plan to take on that?

The First Minister: I will ask the health secretary to write to Alex Cole-Hamilton with the detail of how we are working in a co-ordinated way across the Government, and in partnership with local authorities, health boards and the voluntary sector, to combat the fear, risk and consequences of falls among older people.

It does not surprise me to hear that older people expressed that fear most often. Many people have an increased risk of falling as they get older, and that in itself is a source of fear. For many older people, the consequences of having a fall can be severe and can have a significant impact on their ability to live independently, so it is important that we take an approach to falling that not only is first and foremost preventative but deals quickly and appropriately with the implications and consequences of falls, so that older people retain the ability to live independently, notwithstanding that they have suffered a fall.

I will ask the health secretary to write to Alex Cole-Hamilton with more detail about the specific work that we are taking forward.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Referrals)

6. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that, in 2015, around one in five referrals to child and adolescent mental health services were rejected and, over the last three years, approximately 17,000 children and young people have been affected. (S5F-01073)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): All children who are referred to specialist child and adolescent mental health services are assessed on an individual basis. If, as a result of an assessment, a clinician did not believe that CAMHS was the best course, we would expect the child to be referred to an appropriate service.

As the chamber is aware, the Minister for Mental Health will next week bring forward our new 10-year mental health strategy. I am able to tell the chamber today that an early action of that strategy will be to commission an audit of rejected referrals. Its findings will help to ensure that children are being referred to the right services and that those services can provide the help that children need.

Graham Simpson: I thank the First Minister for that answer, which is encouraging. Half of all

adults who are mentally ill experience the onset of their mental health problems by the age of 15 so, if we can identify and support young people early, we can make a difference. According to the Scottish Association for Mental Health, three in 10 young people in classrooms across Scotland have a mental health problem. We will not close the attainment gap unless we address the mental health needs of children and young people.

Children and young people live in five NHS board areas—including mine, NHS Lanarkshire—where the 18-week target is not being met. One NHS board—Lothian—reports a median wait of 20 weeks. SAMH has called for mental health waiting time targets to be reduced to 12 weeks, in line with other waiting time targets. Does the First Minister think that that is achievable?

The First Minister: I agree with the general thrust of Graham Simpson's question. If we can identify mental health problems in younger people, we prevent problems deteriorating later in life. That view will ensure that CAHMS is a central part of the strategy that we will outline next week.

The member is right to raise the issue of waiting times. Progress is being made towards meeting the 18-week waiting time; some boards are further behind than others, and we are working closely with them to support them in accelerating progress.

As I have said before in the chamber, one of the things that we should be positive about—counterintuitive though it often sounds—is that more people, young and old, are being identified with mental health issues and are coming forward for support. As I have said before, that means that the stigma that has often prevented people from seeking support in the past is fading, and that is a good thing that we should all welcome.

However, that places a responsibility on the shoulders of the Government and services across the country. Encouraging people to come forward for help is counterproductive if they cannot then access that help timeously. That is why the aspects that I have talked about—Maureen Watt will outline others next week—are so important. We are increasing support for mental health services; indeed, I announced at the weekend moves that we are making not just in the health service but in our criminal justice system.

Mental health is one of the most important issues that we face not just in our health service but across our society. I am sure that the strategy will receive a lot of robust scrutiny when it is outlined next week, but I hope that we can also build a lot of consensus about what it will seek to do.

Justice for Yazidi People

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-04130, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on justice for Yazidi people. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament is mindful that genocide is a crime under international law and the law of all civilised nations; is further mindful that the UN has identified genocide as an odious scourge, which has inflicted great losses on humanity and from which people must be liberated; reiterates Scotland's commitment to human dignity, human rights and equality, to celebrating cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic diversity, and to promoting tolerance and upholding fundamental freedoms for all people; recognises and condemns the genocide perpetrated against the Yazidi people by Daesh; acknowledges the great human suffering and loss that have been inflicted by bigotry, brutality and religious intolerance; further acknowledges and condemns the crimes perpetrated by Daesh against Muslims, Christians, Arabs, Kurds and all of the religious and ethnic communities of Iraq and Syria; welcomes the actions of the US Congress, the European Parliament, the French Senate, the UN and others in formally recognising the genocide; draws attention to the unopposed motion agreed by the UK Parliament on 20 April 2016; notes the calls from people in Edinburgh Northern and Leith and across the country for the UK Government to take immediate and resolute action in support of international efforts to prevent further atrocities, and to meet its international obligation to provide refuge to those at risk of persecution, and further notes the calls on the UK Government to request that the UN Security Council refer the genocide committed against the Yazidi people to the International Criminal Court.

12:49

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Today we stand united against terrorism and in solidarity with all those who are affected by such extremism and crimes against humanity. I want to thank the Presiding Officer for allowing time for a debate on the genocide of the Yazidi people and for recognising that the issue is a matter of real importance to us all, as internationalists and as human beings.

I recently visited a remarkable organisation called MCFB—Multi-Cultural Family Base—in my constituency. During the visit, I heard about work that it is doing to support Syrian refugees, some of whom are from the Yazidi community, who are making Edinburgh their home. In one conversation, a support worker from the organisation spoke about a Yazidi child who is now living in this city and who, before fleeing Syria, witnessed his family being shot and killed in front of him. He is a child. No one should have to witness such horror and brutality—least of all a child. The story was not only understandably upsetting; it also reminded me why the Yazidi

genocide is so important to us all. It is not only because of our common humanity, but because there are survivors of that genocide living with us here in Scotland.

Genocide is an odious scourge that has inflicted great losses on humanity and is one of the most heinous crimes under international law and the law of civilised nations. Make no mistake—the issue that is before us today is genocide, as defined under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It is genocide that is being committed against the Yazidi community by fascists in the form of Daesh.

The atrocious violence began in August 2014, when Daesh overran the town of Sinjar in northern Iraq. It is estimated that since then approximately 10,000 Yazidis have been murdered, with as many as 40,000 currently seeking refuge. Yazidi community leaders in Iraq have, horrifyingly, reported the discovery of mass graves containing thousands of bodies.

What makes this issue even more appalling is that Daesh is carrying out a campaign to erase the identity of the Yazidis, who follow a unique and ancient faith that is detested by Daesh. As well as acts of murder, Daesh is, in pursuing its barbaric and horrific determination to ethnically cleanse the region of the Yazidis, forcibly running a conversion campaign, with Yazidi males being forced to change their religion and Yazidi females being treated as sex slaves. It is reported that as many as 7,000 Yazidi women have been captured as sex slaves. Rape has been used as a weapon of war before, but the scale and the nature of the recent and current violence against the Yazidis is gruesomely unprecedented.

Among the 7,000 women who have been captured by Daesh was 21-year-old Nadia Murad. After successfully escaping Daesh's camps, she has courageously spoken out about the suffering and torture that have been and are being endured by her and her fellow Yazidis. As a human rights activist, Nobel peace prize nominee and UN goodwill ambassador, Nadia Murad has campaigned bravely and effectively for the Yazidi cause. Survivors like Nadia Murad have spoken out about how Daesh has imposed the institutional practice of slavery within its so-called caliphate, and how it grotesquely encourages systematic rape and sexual enslavement of non-Muslim women. Young Yazidi women are treated as commodities and are, heinously, distributed among Daesh militants.

As I mentioned earlier, Yazidi children have also suffered at the hands of Daesh. Yazda is a non-governmental organisation in the United States and here in the United Kingdom that is responding to the needs of the Yazidi community. It has reported that Yazidi male children aged between 5

and 15 years old are separated from their families by Daesh and transferred forcibly to locations in Iraq and Syria to receive religious and military indoctrination and become so-called cubs of the caliphate. The boys are not only taught how to use guns and rockets; they are also forcibly and twistedly shown violent graphics to manipulate them to be violent and hateful towards their own community.

In response to all that brutality, as a people who are strongly committed to human dignity, human rights and equality, and as a country that celebrates cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic diversity, we in Scotland must condemn those atrocious acts that have caused extreme human suffering among the Yazidi men, women and children. We must call on those with power to confront the bigotry, brutality and religious intolerance of Daesh.

I welcome the efforts of Iraq, Greece, Turkey, Canada, Germany and Britain to provide refuge to Yazidis. However, it should be noted that there are still thousands of Yazidis in Daesh captivity, who are suffering unthinkable grief and torture as we speak. Although I commend the actions of the US Congress, the European Parliament, the French Senate, the United Nations and the UK Parliament in formally recognising the Yazidi genocide, I call on the UK Government and others to take immediate and resolute action to support international efforts to prevent further atrocities against the Yazidi people, and to meet international obligations to provide greater refuge to those who are at risk of persecution.

I also call on the UK Government to request that the UN Security Council refer the genocide that is being committed against the Yazidi people to the International Criminal Court, which Nadia Murad and her lawyer Amal Clooney have been courageously pressing for in recent weeks and months. I call on the international community to order an investigation into the genocide, to begin to gather evidence to document Daesh's crimes against humanity, to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court and to seek justice for the Yazidi people.

Genocide is something that should be consigned to the history books. Until it is, we must not turn a blind eye when we see it in our world. The crimes that Daesh has committed against the Yazidis must be confronted, and the pain and suffering that innocent Yazidis have endured, and are still enduring today, must be addressed. Let us play our part, by sending a strong and united message from the Parliament to the international community, that Scotland stands firmly in solidarity with, and in support of, the Yazidi community. Let us also send another important message to Daesh: that its crimes will not go unpunished and

that it is the will of this Parliament that that terrorist fascist organisation be brought to justice at the International Criminal Court. Let us do what we can to stand up for the Yazidi people and to protect and support our fellow human beings.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alexander Anderson. I am sorry—I seem to want to change your name, Mr Stewart. You must remind me of someone in my past, or something. I call Alexander Stewart, to be followed by Kenneth Gibson.

12:57

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As I have said before, Presiding Officer, I answer to many things. I will try to give you something to remind you, in the future, that I am a Stewart.

I congratulate Ben Macpherson on highlighting the issue of the crimes that are being committed against the Yazidi people and on securing the debate. It is important that we have the opportunity to have the debate. The plight of the Yazidi people is, without question, difficult for some of us to comprehend. It is as though we are going back to a darker time in our history. We are living in 2017, but the atrocities that we are hearing about are so hideous that they are incomprehensible for individuals living today.

So-called Islamic State has enslaved and killed thousands of Yazidi people, and is forcing people into horrific situations. More than 400,000 Yazidi people have fled and become refugees in camps in Iraq, Greece, Syria and Turkey. The crimes that are being perpetrated by Daesh go beyond the atrocities of rape and murder; it has set out to destroy an ancient culture and to erase that culture from every part of the globe. Ministers in the United Kingdom Government, including the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Tobias Ellwood, have made it clear that they believe that genocide has taken place. That must be taken to the authorities and used.

I commend what Ben Macpherson is trying to achieve.

The United Kingdom is committed to supporting efforts to gather evidence that the law has been broken and that individuals have been subjected to horrific situations, and to ensure that such evidence can be put before a court of law. The UN has to design a system for us to do that.

Forced sexual enslavement by the so-called Islamic State is a horrific situation for Yazidi women to find themselves in—it is modern slavery. We are well aware that there is a significant problem with slavery in other parts of

the globe. We even have indications of it happening here in the United Kingdom. All Governments have to embrace taking on board and addressing that situation. The UK Government is committed to combating modern slavery—the Prime Minister has committed £33.5 million to a programme to tackle the root cause of it.

The vast majority of international communities are opposed to Daesh and to every part of its ethos and what it is trying to achieve. Although it has failed to create a state, it has continued to terrorise people throughout the middle east and to attack innocent civilians across the globe. Last September, in collaboration with his counterparts in Belgium and Iraq, the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, launched a global campaign to hold Daesh to account for its crimes. That has to happen, so Governments around the world have to unite. The UK Government is working with its international partner agencies to bring plans on that to fruition. I look forward to seeing the plans that Governments and Parliaments around the world are proposing.

The crimes that are being perpetrated by IS against the Yazidi people are abhorrent: everybody in the chamber utterly condemns IS. The United Kingdom is working constructively with international partners to fulfil our moral obligation to ensure that the current suffering is combated. We should do all that we can to ensure that that happens.

13:02

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank my colleague Ben Macpherson for lodging the motion and for securing debating time on this matter, the importance and poignancy of which should strike a note with anyone who holds justice dear—especially given the appalling events in London of less than 24 hours ago.

Genocide is universally acknowledged as one of the most abhorrent acts; it is rightly considered to be the crime above all crimes, and history has taught us that it must never be ignored. It is therefore vital that the genocide that is being perpetrated against the defenceless Yazidi people by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant is recognised and condemned as such at international level.

The peaceful Yazidis have previously suffered persecution, but never has a policy of outright extermination and assimilation been launched against them with such violence. The abhorrent and unprovoked display of violence that began in August 2014 with ISIL occupation of the predominantly Yazidi-inhabited town of Sinjar

resulted in the unnecessary deaths of thousands, in what the UN has described as

“the largest mass kidnapping this century.”

By the end of August 2014, 1,600 to 1,800—or more—Yazidis had been murdered, executed or had died from starvation while fleeing. The number has risen steadily with every new report that has been published, and by August last year at least 72 mass graves containing up to 1,000 victims of mass slaughter had been discovered, exposed as ISIL’s caliphate retreated before advancing Iraqi forces.

Along with the forced conversion of Yazidi males, ISIL detained between 5,000 and 7,000 Yazidi women as slaves or forced brides. The sexual slavery that has taken place since ISIL’s unprovoked attack is appalling. Many slave markets still exist in the diminishing territories under ISIL’s control, generating millions of dollars for its illegitimate terrorist state. Sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war in the most barbaric way.

Decisions made by the US Congress, the European Parliament, the French Senate and the UN, among other organisations, to formally recognise the horrors as genocide have shown that we are making some progress towards justice for the Yazidi people. The House of Commons also defied the UK Government to vote 278 to nil in favour of declaring the attacks an act of genocide, calling on ministers to refer the atrocities to the UN. Despite that progress, the United Nations has estimated that, in the third year following the events, 3,200 women and children are still held captive in horrific circumstances. The international community should therefore continue to work collaboratively to offer what protection and aid it can to the Yazidi people.

In a display of solidarity that I hope will be mirrored in many societies, including our own, Germany opened its doors last year to more than 1,000 Yazidi women and children who had managed to escape ISIL. Many witnesses and victims have called for the UK Government’s current resettlement programme, which aims to admit 20,000 vulnerable people who are fleeing conflict in Syria, to be extended to Yazidis

In October 2016, two Yazidi women who survived and escaped sexual enslavement by ISIL were awarded the European Union’s prestigious Sakharov human rights prize. As Ben Macpherson pointed out, Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar have inspirationally spoken out about the horrors that they faced at the hands of the militant group, thereby raising awareness and giving a voice to the voiceless. Yazda is an NGO that supports the Yazidi community in Iraq. It recognised that as a cause for celebration, but respectfully added:

“Yazda sincerely hopes that ... the international community will turn more attention to the thousands of Yazidi women and children still in captivity, the thousands of Yazidi men whose whereabouts remain unknown to their families, and to the hundreds of thousands of Yazidis who remain displaced in Iraq and elsewhere and are unable to return to their homelands and begin rebuilding their lives.”

Scotland is undoubtedly committed to upholding human dignity, human rights and fundamental equality. Our country welcomes and celebrates diversity in all its forms. In the face of despicable brutality, promoting tolerance and acknowledging the unimaginable human suffering and loss that can be inflicted by bigotry, brutality and religious intolerance have never been more significant.

ISIL has made it clear that it intends to destroy the Yazidis completely through killings, forced conversions and rapes. Organisations and Governments across the globe increasingly recognise that genocide is being committed against the Yazidis. Victims such as Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar want the chance to face their abusers in court, and they deserve nothing less.

There is no doubt that the UK Government should request that the UN Security Council refer the genocide to the International Criminal Court in order to ensure adequate punishment for those who have committed such barbarities. Resolute and immediate action to prevent repeats of the events must be taken; there is no valid excuse for ignorance or failing to act.

13:07

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland)
(Lab): I, too, thank Ben Macpherson for bringing this debate to the Parliament.

The day after Daesh-inspired murder came to Westminster bridge and New Palace Yard, our thoughts go to all the victims of those murders and their families around the world.

Daesh is an organisation that is dedicated to killing all who stand in its way. Its objective is to create a state that is built on violence. It falsely claims a connection with Islam and Sharia law; in reality, it represents only the rule of brutal and angry men who are at war with us all. It has made or inspired attacks in more than 30 countries around the world and murdered more than 2,000 people in the past three years alone. Many thousands more have died where Daesh has deployed military force in Syria and Iraq.

The Yazidi population of Sinjar in Iraq has been assailed by a campaign of annihilation that has rightly been designated as genocide and a crime against humanity. The murder of men and boys by the thousands, the enslavement and rape of like numbers of women and girls, the stealing of

children and the destruction of villages have all been intended to eliminate the Yazidis as a people.

That attempted genocide, like the atrocities against Christians, Shia Muslims and ethnic minorities throughout the region, shows that self-styled Islamic State does not represent the true Islamic faith in any way. Far from creating a caliphate of the faithful, it would create a hell on earth. We should commend the courage and determination of the Yazidi people, wherever they have taken refuge, and help them to reclaim their homes.

History tells us that genocide does not just happen out of the blue and that Daesh is only the latest vehicle for murderous hatred in Iraq. The regime of Saddam Hussein turned an ancient cradle of civilisation into a prison state that was run by men who killed with impunity, sent out their agents to murder opponents around the world and brought genocidal violence to a land of many faiths and many cultures.

Saddam Hussein's war on Iran cost a million Muslim lives. As that war ended, his regime visited genocidal violence on the Kurdish population of northern Iraq. At Halabja on 16 March 1988, it used mustard gas, cyanide and sarin to kill 5,000 defenceless civilians and injure 10,000 more. The chief culprit that day was Ali Hassan Abd al-Majid, cousin to Saddam Hussein and better known as Chemical Ali. Like his cousin, he was tried and eventually executed for his crimes, but many of the culprits of Halabja and the wider Anfal campaign against the Kurds remain unpunished. At least 100 former officers in Saddam's army are now to be found in the ranks of Daesh, doing to Sinjar today what they did to Halabja 29 years ago. Because such men were not brought to justice then, they are free to commit their crimes again. This time, they must be pursued with vigour and punished for what they have done. Those whose actions or reckless inaction have allowed those crimes to happen must also be held to account.

Right now, the current elected Government of Iraq has to give a lead in securing justice for all its citizens. Two weeks ago, human rights lawyer Amal Clooney, who was referred to by Ben Macpherson, spoke on behalf of Yazidi women at the United Nations in New York. She called on Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to send the letter that the Security Council needs to trigger an investigation of the crimes of Daesh in Iraq. We should give our support to that call today—I hope that the minister can do so in closing the debate—so that justice can begin to be done for the Yazidis and all those who have suffered murderous violence in that country in the past 50 years.

13:11

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): As colleagues have done, I thank Ben Macpherson for bringing the atrocities that have been inflicted on the Yazidi people to the attention of the Scottish Parliament and for allowing us to raise them today.

As colleagues may be aware, I convene the Parliament's cross-party group on Kurdistan, and the Yazidis are of course an ethnically Kurdish people who, until the genocide, resided largely in Iraqi Kurdistan. They have endured a long history of oppression due to their ethnicity and their unique faith, as Mr Macpherson mentioned. However, the events of 2014 and the on-going atrocities have marked what is perhaps the darkest period in the recent history of the Yazidi people.

In August 2014, when Daesh made sweeping advances across Iraq and Syria, it came quickly to Sinjar, the home of many Yazidi people. Hundreds of thousands fled the city; many of them were already refugees from the fighting elsewhere, including most of the Yazidi population. As Kurds have done many times in their history, they fled to the mountains for safety. Those who stayed and fought could not hold back the barbarians who swept through the city and began massacring the residents.

Forty thousand of those who fled, largely children and the elderly who could not escape quickly enough, were cut off and surrounded on Mount Sinjar. Those stuck on the mountain had little to no water, were surrounded by monsters intent on their slaughter and had no means of escape. Some who had previously been captured and raped by Daesh were so traumatised by the thought of that happening again that they threw themselves from the cliffs rather than be taken.

The now prevailing narrative is that, at that point, the international community woke up and, led by US, UK and Iraqi forces, began dropping emergency aid on to the mountain and evacuating as many people as they could by helicopter, all under fire from the Daesh positions below. That is true, but it ignores the reason why Daesh never made it to the top of the mountain to continue the massacre: it was the Kurds who rescued their Yazidi cousins. The Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, has been locked in a conflict with the Turkish state for decades, but that debate and its history are for another time. Despite being nothing more than infantry equipped with light weapons, the PKK forces raced across northern Iraq and did what others were not doing: they put themselves between Daesh and 40,000 people on that mountain. PKK fighters—men and women—joined by YPG Kurdish forces from northern Syria moved in tractors and other vehicles and evacuated

between 20,000 and 30,000 people from Mount Sinjar into Kurdish-controlled northern Syria before repatriating them back into Iraq once it was safe.

I do not say that to detract from the efforts of the Iraqi Peshmerga, US and UK helicopter crews who risked their lives flying emergency aid in and refugees out, but their story has already been well told. The striking footage of helicopter crews dragging refugees on board while firing back at Daesh positions was played out by media outlets across the globe. However, the stories of the volunteers on the ground were not. Kurdish forces—the PKK and the YPG, who were later joined by Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga—not only rescued those stranded on the mountain but took back Sinjar and drove Daesh out at great cost, and they continue to fight to regain their homes.

In northern Syria, where the Kurds have built a democratic, feminist, multi-ethnic and multicultural society, many Yazidis have joined the self-defence forces that have been set up for them and received training. To this day, they take part in the struggle to rid their region of the scourge of Daesh.

I say that not to glorify war—war is horrific and tragic, and this conflict in particular has shocked us all with its brutality—but to highlight the defiance of the Yazidi people. They are victims of genocide who have joined with other Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Turkmen, Muslims, Christians and others, not just to defeat hatred but to build in its place a society that is based on values of equality, tolerance and democracy. I am sure that all members have nothing but admiration for that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Ms Maguire, we have another three speakers, which will take us over our allotted time. I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Ben Macpherson]

Motion agreed to.

13:15

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I am deeply grateful to my colleague Ben Macpherson for bringing this hugely important and urgent topic to our Scottish Parliament.

The horrifying and systematic murder and torture of the Yazidi people at the hands of Isis have been recognised as genocide by institutions and countries across the world, from the United Nations and the European Union to the USA, the UK and France. I am proud that Scotland will today add its voice to the international cry of condemnation of the genocide that is being

perpetrated by Isis against the Yazidi people, and that we join the ranks of nations and institutions that are standing up for justice and human rights.

Just a few weeks ago, we marked international women's day with a debate in the chamber. We reflected on how far we have come and how far we still have to go. When I read about the plight of Yazidi women and girls in particular, I was forcefully reminded of the scale of the battle that still faces us when it comes to protecting the rights and safety of women across the world.

In pursuit of its abhorrent and deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing, Isis has separated hundreds of young women and girls—some as young as 12—from their families. They have been sold, given as gifts or forced to marry Isis fighters and supporters. Many have been subjected to torture, rape and sexual violence, and forced into sexual slavery. A pamphlet that IS produced for its supporters has the following to say about “unbelieving” women, such as Yazidi women and girls, who have been captured:

“If she is a virgin, he [her master] can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first] ... It is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of ... It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse; however if she is not fit for intercourse, then it is enough to enjoy her without intercourse”.

It is difficult to say or hear those words; the horror of the reality of them is even more unthinkable.

Many of us will have seen the video of Iraqi Yazidi MP, Vian Dakhil, breaking down into heart-wrenching tears in her Parliament as she pleaded with her Parliament and the international community, “Save us! Save us!” Every day, members of all parties will hear upsetting and difficult stories from our constituents about the challenges and hardships that they have in their lives, but I cannot even begin to comprehend having to come to the chamber and beg my colleagues to help me to protect the people I represent in Ayrshire from rape, torture and slaughter.

Isis is committing war crimes, it is committing crimes against humanity and it is perpetrating genocide—not only that, but it is boasting about doing so. We cannot stand by and allow this to continue. It must stop. The UK Government can request that the UN Security Council refer the genocide committed against the Yazidi people to the International Criminal Court. I hope that it listens to the calls of the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament, and acts. The genocide must stop and justice must be achieved.

13:20

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Ruth Maguire's speech was very moving and thought provoking, and I thank her for sharing that information, some of which I did not know.

I thank Ben Macpherson for bringing the debate to the chamber.

The Yazidi people have been made the unfortunate subjects of oppression for centuries. In the modern day, although many have now fled to Australia, Canada and Germany, Iraq is the one place where a sizeable community still exists against the odds, and the Yazidi people remain under constant threat from Islamic State's campaign of murder, repression and violence.

I am in absolute agreement that we need to do our utmost to prevent the constant threat that the Yazidi people now face from Daesh fighters, and I agree—as did my UK party colleagues last May—that the actions of Daesh equate to genocide. That is why I support the motion.

The international community is united in seeking to defeat Daesh. As a result, we have seen thousands of people being freed from its rule, but despite those small successes, the threat remains. Although Daesh has failed to create a state, it has not yet been defeated as a terrorist organisation.

As we have heard, more than 3,200 Yazidi women and children are still held by ISIS. Females are being sexually enslaved and Yazidi boys are being indoctrinated, trained and used in hostilities. Thousands of Yazidi men and boys remain missing. We owe it to those people to take action.

It was a Conservative member, Fiona Bruce MP, who lodged a motion on the issue at Westminster last April. She said:

"The supporters of the motion are here to insist that there is overwhelming evidence that the atrocities of Daesh in Syria and Iraq should be recognised for the genocide they are and considered as such by the UN Security Council and the International Criminal Court. It will support similar resolutions of other leading international and legislative bodies."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 20 April 2016; Vol 608, c 957.]

That is why I was pleased to see the Foreign Minister, alongside his counterparts from Belgium and Iraq, launching a global campaign last year to hold Daesh to account for those horrendous crimes.

The British Government is working with its international partners, particularly the Government of Iraq, to bring forward a proposal at the UN to put the campaign into action, and good progress is being made across the United Nations on designing a system whereby evidence can be collected to bring Daesh to justice. As a backdrop to that, the UK Government is also providing our

country's largest-ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. It has now pledged a total of more than £2.3 billion to alleviate immediate humanitarian suffering through the provision of food, medical care and relief items to more than a million people who have been affected.

I again thank Ben Macpherson for bringing this very important issue to the chamber, and I reiterate my support for ensuring that we do our utmost to prevent further atrocities.

13:23

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I thank the members who have spoken for their powerful speeches and for showing a degree of knowledge and passion about a subject that is worthy of this place's consideration. I hope that people outside the chamber will take the opportunity to read the speeches and to learn about what is happening to the Yazidi people.

I particularly congratulate Ben Macpherson on securing the debate and on his powerful speech. I appreciate the fact that he has brought into the public domain the suffering of the Yazidi people, a suffering of which many of us have all too hazy a knowledge. We can recall incidents and we can remember seeing something on the television, but as the cameras move on, so do we. We live in a world of 24-hour news but, sadly, we do not live in a world of 24-hour attention. Too often, atrocities across the world are picked up, so we pay attention, but then we move on. We know that it is important for us to shine a light on such atrocities if justice is to be secured.

At this time, when we have seen the horror of a terror attack in London, we are particularly mindful of the consequences of terror and hatred across our communities, but when we discuss genocide it is important that we look at the pattern of behaviour and the bigger picture that brings genocide upon a people. With such horrendous atrocities, it is hard to fathom the scale of people's suffering or the motives of those who commit genocide. What is it that leads people to create such suffering as they step beyond their own humanity? We see in Daesh people who have left their humanity behind. They destroy the physical evidence of civilisation, just as they seek to destroy peoples and faiths and those who they believe have no place in their society.

Of course, the big lesson of genocide is that it is not a single event. It does not start with massacre or mass graves; it starts with the simple steps of othering people—of talking about differences, labelling people and dehumanising them. It is a process that moves on from preparing for genocide to conducting it and then, critically,

denying that it is happening. I am privileged to be a member of the board of Remembering Srebrenica Scotland, a campaign that has been created to insist that genocide, and the steps to it, be understood, as well as the lengths to which those who commit genocide will go to deny their own crimes.

In Bosnia, the mass graves do not simply represent slaughter. They also represent the desire of those who commit genocide to hide their crimes. Forensic scientists, some of whom are wonderful people from our own communities in Scotland, have established piece by piece that that genocide took place. Later this year, there will be another opportunity to mark the evidence and the experience of the people of Srebrenica and of Bosnia. Their desire is to speak of genocide so that we understand it, wherever it is experienced or expressed. This year, the theme for the memorial is breaking the silence on gender and genocide. We know that in Bosnia, as with the Yazidi people, a terrible slaughter was visited upon the men and boys, but the women of Srebrenica, as in so many genocides, also see themselves as victims of war, because rape and sexual violence have become weapons of war, as has been so powerfully and tellingly described by my colleagues in other parties. That is how genocide operates. The steps towards it lead to the utter dehumanising of men and women, and for women sexual violence becomes a horrific norm in their lives.

I have two final points to make. We live in a fragile world, and when I think of the things that the new President Trump has said, the one that has scared me most is his comment that he wants to reduce the amount of funding that the United States gives to the United Nations. At this time more than any, we need our international institutions to be strong and to take on those who would commit violence, atrocities and genocide against vulnerable people such as the Yazidis, whose plight we have heard about today.

My second point is about the need for our vigilance in understanding where the small steps can take us. I have a message from a Bosnian refugee, who said that we should welcome refugees who bring with them not only their suffering, but an understanding of how violence and hatred can destroy communities and how states can collapse in the face of genocide. They know where hatred can take us, and we need their wisdom now.

I thank Ben Macpherson for bringing this important debate to Parliament. We stand in solidarity with the Yazidi people, and in our determination to do what we can to call out the violence and hatred that lead to the genocide that

has too often damaged and destroyed people in our communities across this world.

13:29

The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan): As others have done, I begin by thanking Ben Macpherson for securing this important debate on justice for the Yazidi people. Of course, we take part in the debate on a day when we remember all victims of terror and seek to build the understanding that we need to overcome that terror.

I want to put on record the Scottish Government's condemnation of the crimes that have been perpetrated against the Yazidi people—a condemnation that has been voiced by members today and which is clearly the view of this Parliament. Ours is a Government and a Parliament that stand in solidarity with the Yazidi people. Indeed, ours is a nation that recognises its duty to stand in defence of human rights, equality, human dignity and minority communities around the world.

Let me go further. As members have so eloquently reminded us in this debate, the Yazidi people have been victims of the most appalling crimes against humanity. Daesh is a monstrous criminal enterprise. It has perpetrated a long list of atrocities, war crimes and human rights abuses. No one has been safe. Kurds and Arabs, Muslims and Christians, civilians, the young and the old—all have suffered. In addition, of course, David Haines and Alan Henning were murdered because they sought to bring humanitarian aid to those in need.

However, in its campaign of hatred against the Yazidi people, Daesh has gone even further and has exceeded even its own record of brutality. It has committed the ultimate and unforgivable crime. In its fanatical desire to impose a corrupt and twisted interpretation of one of the world's great religious traditions, it has sought to destroy an entire minority culture, an entire faith and an entire people.

What the Yazidi people have suffered merits condemnation in the strongest possible terms, and today's debate has demonstrated that the Scottish Parliament is in no doubt about the matter. Daesh has committed, and is continuing to commit, genocide against the Yazidi people and against other religious and ethnic minorities. As we have heard, there is robust and unequivocal evidence that Yazidi men, women and children have been the victims of a campaign of murder, rape, abduction, sexual slavery, brutality and terror at the hands of Daesh in Iraq and Syria. The UN has confirmed that 5,000 Yazidi men have been executed and that thousands of men and boys are

still missing. More than 3,500 Yazidi women have been kidnapped by Daesh, and there have been multiple reports of sexual violence against women in detention and women living in Daesh-controlled areas.

According to a UN report:

“The attacks on the Yazidis, which continue until the present day, are committed pursuant to an explicit ideological policy of the terrorist group, whose radical religious interpretation does not permit the existence of Yazidism within the territory it controls.”

As Daesh continues to swallow up Yazidi territory, the Yazidis have been forced to convert, face execution or flee. According to some estimates, 70,000 people, or about 15 per cent of the Yazidi population in Iraq, have fled the country, with many seeking asylum in Europe. The Yazidis themselves are in no doubt about what is happening, with one saying:

“Our entire religion is being wiped off the face of the earth.”

This is a matter that needs urgently to be taken to the UN Security Council before one of Iraq’s oldest religious and cultural communities is exterminated. I believe that that is the overwhelming view of members in this chamber. It is also, as Annie Wells noted, the view that was expressed by the House of Commons in April last year. I have to say that, like Mr Macpherson, I am disappointed that the UK Government remains reluctant to promote action at UN level to ensure that the genocide that is being committed against the Yazidi people is referred to the International Criminal Court. That reluctance does not sit comfortably with the responsibility that we all have to lead on human rights and human dignity and to act in defence of them.

As we regularly and rightly say, Scotland is an outward-looking and welcoming nation. The Scottish Parliament has spoken out previously and today against actions that amount to, and are, genocide. We speak out lest we forget the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust. We speak out because the world must act to prevent the repetition of the horrors that were visited upon Cambodia, Rwanda, Srebrenica, Halabja and Darfur. We also speak out because we know that such crimes continue to be committed not just in Iraq and Syria but in South Sudan, where personal greed, the thirst for power and a poisonous cocktail of political rivalry and ethnic violence have created a new humanitarian disaster.

Lewis Macdonald: I recognise that the minister wants to address wider issues. However, on the Yazidis in Iraq, does he accept that the critical next step towards enforcement action by the United Nations is for the Iraqi Government to take? Will he join the call that I made that the Iraqi

Government should now take that step and send a letter to the Security Council?

Dr Allan: Yes, the Iraqi Government bears responsibility in that area as well. We should all seek to ensure that the crimes in question come before the UN and international courts.

We speak out about humanitarian disasters that are, in many cases, caused directly by genocide. We cannot afford to pay mere lip service to the idea of human rights, equality and human dignity. We must live by the principles of tolerance, dignity and respect and must never be complacent about prejudice, discrimination and hatred.

The debate has been an opportunity to make a public statement of solidarity with the Yazidi people and other oppressed peoples and communities around the world. As a nation, we have a responsibility to be a good global citizen and to protect the world’s most vulnerable people. The debate has made it clear that the Scottish Parliament recognises and condemns the genocide perpetrated against the Yazidi people. We have united across party-political lines to do so. In doing so, we also join the United Nations and other Parliaments—Westminster, the US Congress, the French Senate and the European Parliament—in expressing our condemnation and solidarity.

13:37

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Early Learning and Childcare

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The next item of business is a statement by Mark McDonald on the expansion of free early learning and childcare. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions during it.

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): This Government is committed to delivering a bright future for Scotland's children, and key to that is ensuring that all our children get the best possible start in life. That is why we have done more than any previous devolved Administration—and indeed any other Government in the United Kingdom—to expand high-quality, free early learning and childcare provision.

If we are to achieve our aim of making substantial progress to close the attainment gap between children from the least and most deprived communities and interrupt the cycle of poverty that attacks the life chances of too many of our children, we must intervene early and provide a high-quality learning experience before they go to school, as well as appropriate support to enable parents to take up and stay in work, training and education.

Achieving excellence and equity for our children is a systemic challenge and one that the whole system that is involved in delivering education and children's services needs to respond to. That includes those sectors and services that are involved in delivering early learning and childcare.

Every child and family is different, so our work with them needs to respond to those individual circumstances. Put simply, our public services need to focus on the individual and not on their own organisational arrangements. "A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland" sets out how we will seek to achieve that by nearly doubling the current 600 hours per year of free early learning and childcare entitlement to 1,140 hours. That expansion will be built around quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability to meet the needs of children and families across Scotland.

Between October and January, our consultation sought views on our blueprint, and I thank all the individuals and the 128 organisations that contributed responses or attended our seven consultation events for their thoughtful input. We are publishing an independent analysis of those responses today. Having carefully considered the

responses, I can advise Parliament that we are publishing today a blueprint action plan that sets out 31 steps that this Government will take in the coming year to work towards the expansion of early learning and childcare provision to 1,140 hours by 2020.

Quality is already and will continue to be at the heart of our entire approach. We will develop a quality action plan by October 2017, working with stakeholders who know what drives quality and what more we need to do to strengthen that. As part of that, we will introduce a quality standard that all providers will be required to meet before they can access funding to deliver the free hours. That will draw on existing quality standards to create a coherent, consistent national standard.

We want to ensure that the service model maximises flexibility for families so that all parents can take up their entitlement for their children. Parents have told us that they want choice—genuine choice—of provision across sectors. That involves removing barriers to private and third sector providers delivering funded ELC. The service model for the future must ensure that there is more financially sustainable provision across all sectors, including community-led provision such as the approach to extending hours that is being supported through the Argyll and Bute trial involving the Mull and Iona Community Trust.

I make it clear that local authorities will continue to play a vital role in delivering ELC and building capacity for the expansion to 1,140 hours. They will be the main guarantor of quality and enabler of flexibility and choice. However, the service model that we will develop will fundamentally be provider neutral, prioritising the settings that are best placed to deliver quality outcomes for children and supporting our ambition to close the attainment gap regardless of which sector they are provided by. That model will ensure that funding follows the child and it will be underpinned by a rigorous approach to ensure the quality of learning and care, so we will also establish a new national standard for funded provider status. Sustainability and fairness will also feature in the new model to help to drive quality.

My officials will work in partnership with local authorities to develop the detail of the funding model and the national standard, and I can announce that we will commission a feasibility study to explore potential costs and benefits of introducing an early learning and childcare account in the future.

As I have already stated, local authorities will continue to play a key role in the delivery of our action plan and will retain their statutory responsibility to ensure that funded entitlement is available for all eligible children in their areas. We need to support them to build the capacity needed

in their communities to provide 1,140 hours, so we will provide them with access to professional and technical expertise on common and complex issues and additional service innovation and redesign capacity. That support will be shaped with the involvement of local authorities.

I can further advise that we are issuing ELC expansion planning guidance to local authorities today, to help them to think through their key infrastructure, workforce and delivery model approaches systematically as they move towards providing 1,140 hours.

Increasing the role for childminders in delivering the funded hours received significant support in consultation responses. Our new provider-neutral approach and accompanying funding model will help make that a reality, but we must ensure that childminders are enabled to play their part. We will work with the Scottish Childminding Association and local authorities to ensure that childminders are properly promoted as a high-quality option for the funded hours, and in September 2017 we will publish a new learning and development pathway to encourage more people to choose to become childminders.

Now that the policy framework has been announced, local authorities can develop more refined cost estimates for the expansion. That is key to ensuring that we collectively maximise public value from this significant investment. I am clear that the new funding model will ensure that resources that are provided for early learning and childcare directly reach front-line delivery, in order to best meet the needs of children and their families. Although the details of actual funding allocations will be made clear in the formal budget process later this year, we will provide greater certainty to local authorities over multiyear revenue and capital funding assumptions over the coming weeks and months. We remain absolutely committed to meeting the costs of expanding the entitlement, and I reaffirm that commitment today.

The role of the early learning and childcare workforce is critical to our principal aim of achieving better outcomes for children. The expansion will see an opportunity for the workforce to grow substantially, resulting in the creation of new employment opportunities in all parts of Scotland. We need to demonstrate how much we value this work, by offering fulfilling career opportunities, entrance pathways and progression routes at all levels, from apprentices through to centre heads, and by ensuring that the workforce is fairly remunerated. That will be a key focus of a new recruitment marketing campaign, which will be developed and ready for autumn 2017. We will work with delivery partners to develop recruitment and career pathways to assist in attracting to the workforce and retaining high-calibre candidates, to

raise the profile of a career in ELC among underrepresented groups and to seek to improve gender balance across the sector.

We will also increase the focus on access to graduate-level early years educators, seeking to strengthen the practice-based element of graduate level training, with clear measures to be set out in our quality action plan.

Our expansion plans will be built on a foundation of fairness for the workforce, with the living wage extended to all childcare staff delivering funded entitlement from the full roll-out of 1,140 hours in 2020. As the First Minister stated at the weekend, we will provide local authorities with up to £50 million additional annual revenue funding to enable funded providers to pay the living wage to childcare staff delivering the entitlement. Up to 8,000 staff in the private and third sectors will benefit from that uplift.

Expanded provision must be accessible and delivered in a way that ensures equality of access for all children. The consultation highlighted that it can still be difficult for some families to access their entitlement if their child is disabled or has additional support needs. We are therefore introducing a new fund that will enable the provision of better support to meet children's needs. Providers will be able to access funding for specialist training and equipment, with a total of £2 million available over the next four years.

Research shows that high-quality learning and care in early years has a positive effect on a range of outcomes for children, and has the potential to make a key contribution to closing the attainment gap. That is why we are determined to ensure that the expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland helps to deliver the strong foundations that our children need to succeed at school and in life. The blueprint action plan that is being published today sets out 31 key steps that we will take in 2017-18 to progress delivery on our key commitment to nearly double free early learning and childcare to eligible two-year-olds and all three and four-year-olds in Scotland by 2020. Crucially, by founding those steps on the core principles of quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability, we will ensure that the expansion helps to give every child in Scotland an equal chance of fulfilling his or her potential.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the minister for sight of his statement. I very warmly welcome the move to this model, which will ensure that funding follows the child, and especially the prospect of a childcare account. That sort of model will, I think, remove a lot of the inflexibility in the system that has prevented many parents from accessing the childcare of their choice. These moves are exactly what the Conservatives have been calling for for some time

now; more important, families and providers have been asking for them, too, and we are very appreciative of the move.

I have three questions for the minister. First, with regard to his desire to improve the quality of care as well as the quantity of places, he states that providers will have to meet new standards. Although we welcome that, what thought has been given to measuring those standards on the basis of regular inspections in order to maintain and enhance them over time? What data will be used in that respect?

Secondly, in recommendation 12 in the action plan, the minister mentions a new fund for additional support needs. How much money is being devoted to that?

Thirdly, in the context of ASN, which is so important, has the minister given further thought to the letter that he sent to me on 21 February with regard to concerns that I had raised about the need for all providers to have a level 9 qualification? It is very good to have a highly professionalised group of people involved in this, but many providers flagged up concerns about additional costs, particularly for those in very small units.

Mark McDonald: I thank Liz Smith for her positive approach to this issue and her welcome for the Government's approach.

We will give careful consideration to how quality will be measured, because we want to ensure that where those standards are in place we keep track of different providers' performance in relation to them. Part of the judgment in developing the standards will be how they are measured as part of the wider inspection process, so we will consider that matter carefully as we take this work forward.

On ASN support, the fund that has been announced amounts to £2 million over four years, or £500,000 per annum, and that money is being allocated to support staff training and purchase equipment to support children with additional support needs in early learning and childcare settings.

As for Ms Smith's third point, if I remember correctly—I do not have the letter in front of me, so the member should not quote me based on my power of recall—I mentioned that we were continuing to give careful consideration to the points that she had raised. That remains the case, and we will continue to look very carefully at the points that she has raised and the concerns that she has fed back to me.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I, too, thank the minister for advance sight of today's statement.

Although Labour has many criticisms of the Government's approach to education, we welcome the ambition in and direction of the expansion of early years and childcare provision. We know that, whether it is equality, attainment or getting parents back to work that is the measure, childcare plays a huge part in improving our society. As a result, we back the commitment to expanding provision.

However, we remain concerned about the investment that is required to meet the commitment. To deliver 1,140 hours, we need substantial investment in buildings. Just this week, First Step community nursery in Hamilton was officially opened at a cost of £3.2 million, and it has just over 100 places. If that is what 100 places cost, surely the £30 million of capital investment in the budget is insufficient to meet the commitment to almost doubling provision. What capital funding will be made available, and when will it be available?

I note the minister's emphasis on a continued role for local authorities in providing childcare, but the new funding model implies a significantly changed role for them with regard to funding and regulation. What will be the role for local councils in respect of quality and standards in childcare?

Mark McDonald: The capital allocation this year is to allow local authorities to start the process of developing their expansion plans towards 2020. Today's announcement provides the clarity that local authorities will want about what the model will be and about our approach to provider status, which will help them to refine the plans that they have been discussing with the Scottish Futures Trust. As I outlined in my statement, future capital allocations will form part of the budget process and part of our discussions between local authorities and the Scottish Futures Trust. I reiterate that we remain committed to fully funding the expansion that is taking place.

Local authorities will continue to have a key role in mapping and shaping provision in their areas and in providing support through the quality assurance that we as a Government will set in place. That will be taken forward as a continuing partnership.

We recognise—as Mr Johnson will have recognised—from feedback that we have received that too often the feeling is that the funding that is put in place does not necessarily relate to the delivery of flexibility in hours or providers. We are seeking to address that through the provider-neutral model, in which the funding follows the child.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I welcome the focus on quality in the plans to nearly double free early learning and childcare provision and I welcome the acknowledgement of the role that a

highly skilled workforce plays in that. How will the action plan that the minister announced help to provide security for the existing workforce and increase diversity and skills?

Mark McDonald: The action plan sets out a range of approaches that we will take to develop the early learning and childcare workforce, improve career pathways and attract more workers to the sector. For example, we will increase the number of modern apprenticeships in the sector by 10 per cent year on year up to 2020; launch a recruitment marketing campaign in the autumn of this year, as I highlighted in my statement; work with Skills Development Scotland to produce updated guidance on opportunities in early learning and childcare for careers advice organisations; and work with the Care Inspectorate and other partners to publish the new learning and development pathway for childminders in September 2017.

Alongside that, our commitment to delivering £50 million of funding to ensure payment of the living wage across the sector provides both security for the existing workforce and the encouragement that is required to attract new people into the workforce to ensure that we can deliver our aims for expansion.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I, too, welcome the minister's statement. I suspect that some of the devil will be in the detail. We look forward to seeing how the process will work over the next few months.

Does the minister agree that there is still an issue for parents who live in one local authority area but work in another when they try to get the childcare that they want? How does he intend to work with local authorities to make sure that parents get a nursery where they want it, which is not necessarily where they live?

Mark McDonald: I agree that the funded entitlement should be delivered where parents choose to access it. We have issued guidance to local authorities on cross-boundary funding of placements. Where we can demonstrate that that is not occurring, I am more than happy to have discussions with the local authorities involved.

As well as preparing for the expansion for 2020, we have to address the here and now in the entitlement that is currently available. I will continue to have discussions with local government to ensure appropriate flexibility and ensure that the cross-boundary issues are addressed. The model that we are putting in place—the provider-neutral model in which funding follows the child—will help to address the cross-boundary issues that Jeremy Balfour is right to identify.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The minister talked about the need to build capacity, which seems correct, and about the importance of provision from all sectors so that childcare can be expanded. In the private sector, one of the problems that nurseries face is the significant increase in their costs through business rates. One example from my constituency was of an increase of more than 40 per cent. What can the minister do to ensure that providers survive that increase in their costs so that they can contribute to the strategy?

Mark McDonald: I will say two things on that—well, maybe more than two; we will see how it goes.

First, the opportunity is there for businesses to appeal any revaluation decision. That should be the first step that any business takes if it feels that a revaluation is unfair because of the costs that will land on it.

Secondly, the chamber decided to pass the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which provides local authorities with the power to implement localised rates relief schemes—something that is happening in a number of local authority areas across Scotland. The power exists for local authorities to identify local sectors that require rates relief and put that relief in place.

On the basis of the feedback that came to the Government from the business community and Opposition parties, we have taken steps at a national level to put in place specific rates relief schemes. Nevertheless, the power is extended to local authorities and additional money was allocated in the budget, through the deal that was struck between the Government and the Green Party, to enable local authorities to put in place their own localised rates relief schemes, and some local authorities have chosen to do that. I encourage Mr Gray to have conversations with his colleagues at East Lothian Council about the approaches that they could take to rates relief locally.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): As is demonstrated by the fair funding for our kids campaign, parents often voice concern about their difficulty in taking up current free provision for their children despite what has been on offer from local authorities. How might today's announcement that the funding will follow the child change that?

Mark McDonald: The new system that we are putting in place, in which the funding will follow the child, will remove some of the key barriers that providers in the private and third sectors have highlighted as currently preventing them from offering funded entitlement. The introduction of a standardised approach to offering the funded

entitlement will remove some of the inconsistencies that exist in respect of their gaining partner-provider status with local authorities. The approach will also underpin a national quality standard that providers will have to meet. That should encourage more providers in the private and third sectors to offer funded entitlement or, if they are providing it already, to increase the number of funded places that are available, which will unlock more choice for parents and, at the same time, guarantee high-quality provision.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The Scottish Greens have previously called for a living wage for all those who work in childcare, so we warmly welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to that. I am also pleased to read about the additional support needs fund of £2 million, the aim to increase diversity in the workforce and promotion of childminders. Why has the minister taken a provider-neutral approach over a local-authority-first one? Does he agree that all children should have access to a General Teaching Council for Scotland qualified teacher?

Mark McDonald: The discussions that I have had with local government have focused on the fact that there needs to be a provider-neutral approach in order to ensure that a range of providers are available. It is fair to say that some local authorities have involved childminders in their delivery of the 600 hours, but we recognise that that approach is currently not being taken universally. The provider-neutral approach allows us to bring providers including childminders in to deliver the extended hours.

On teacher access, the Government has allocated funding to enable an additional teacher or graduate to work in some of our most deprived communities. We are looking carefully at how we can increase the number of graduates who are working in the sector, as I said in my statement. We recognise that there are, as well as the teachers whom Alison Johnstone identified, graduates with BAs in childhood practice who also have a lot to offer the sector. We want to ensure that as many routes into the profession as possible are available.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement and acknowledge the role that he has played in bringing all this together. Indeed, he is probably now known as the great facilitator on the front bench, having brought all the parties together in broadly welcoming what has been announced today.

But—there is always a “but”, as Jeremy Balfour rightly said—the figures on workforce planning needs that were presented to the Education and Skills Committee earlier in the year by the minister

and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills suggested that between 14,000 and 20,000 extra members of staff would be needed to fulfil the needs of the plan. Does the minister believe that those needs will be met within the exacting timetable that has been established for the policy?

Mark McDonald: I cannot help but feel that Tavish Scott is trying to set me up for a fall by heaping such praise on me, but I will do my best to live up to such high expectations.

On staffing numbers, part of the discussion that we will have with local authorities following today's statement will be about considering carefully the staffing requirements to deliver the policy. The recruitment campaign that we will launch in the autumn will be focused very much on ensuring that we get the required number of individuals taking the various pathways into the early learning and childcare workforce so that we meet our requirements for the expansion of provision by 2020.

I assure Tavish Scott that this Government is fully focused on ensuring that we have not just the right number but the right quality of staff in place to deliver the expansion and high-quality provision to the children of Scotland.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): It is important that all children are able to benefit from free early learning and childcare. Will the minister provide more detail about what the access fund that was announced yesterday will provide and how it might help more disabled children to take up their entitlement?

Mark McDonald: I thank Fulton MacGregor for his question. He will have heard me say in response to Liz Smith's question that we are providing £2 million over four years to enable training to be provided to staff and equipment to be purchased, which will help to ensure that children with additional support needs can overcome some of the barriers that they face in accessing their early learning and childcare entitlement.

One of the key principles behind the expansion, which I outlined at the outset and have repeated throughout, is accessibility. That does not just mean geographical accessibility, whereby children can access their entitlement locally; it means ensuring that no child finds himself or herself excluded from provision as a consequence of their needs. The funding is designed to ensure such accessibility.

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con): The Conservatives have consistently raised the unfairness of birthday discrimination, whereby a child who was born in August receives a full two years of Government-funded provision before starting school, but a child who was born in

September receives only 18 months and a child who was born in January receives only 15 months. Will the minister clarify whether the measures that he has outlined will tackle that inherently unfair situation for children and families in Scotland?

Mark McDonald: Currently, local authorities have the flexibility to offer entitlement at an earlier stage than that which was outlined by Ross Thomson, and some authorities choose to do so. That will not change as a consequence of the position that I have outlined.

I am determined to continue to focus on driving improved uptake among eligible two-year-olds who are looked after or come from low-income backgrounds. We recognise that they have much to gain from accessing the entitlement, which I believe addresses some of the points that the Conservatives have raised about ensuring that those who require the provision and would benefit most from it receive it.

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It is good to see that so many people and organisations took part in the consultation “A Blueprint for 2020: Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland Consultation”. Given the impact that the policy will have on local authorities, will the minister advise us which local authorities provided their views? Similarly, did any of the Opposition parties or spokespeople provide views?

Mark McDonald: We received responses from 27 of the 32 local authorities. The authorities from which we did not receive response were Clackmannanshire Council, East Dunbartonshire Council, South Ayrshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Stirling Council. We received a response from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, but we did not receive one from the Scottish Local Government Partnership.

Although we did not receive formal responses from the Opposition parties, I met Liz Smith, Daniel Johnson, Tavish Scott and Alison Johnstone. Without telling tales out of school, I am sure that they would agree that those were constructive discussions; I am also sure that they will have seen some of our discussions reflected in my statement to Parliament.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The minister will have seen the National Day Nurseries Association survey that was published this morning. It said that just half of private nurseries are likely to provide places for the expansion of free early learning and childcare hours. Dundee has a disproportionate number of private nurseries—they account for almost 50 per cent of service provision, compared with a third for Scotland as a whole. How will the minister ensure

that local authorities such as Dundee City Council are not left behind in the expansion? How will he put in place the right conditions to encourage private providers to offer funded places?

Mark McDonald: I hope that the steps that I have outlined on the approach that we will take to the funding model—to ensure that funding is provided so that the living wage can be provided, and so that we create a suitable quality standard—will help to encourage more providers to offer funded entitlement, whether through expanding what they currently offer or by bringing themselves to the table as new providers.

The NDNA has highlighted issues in its survey. I thank it for its continued constructive input. It has been involved in the Government’s on-going discussion in developing the action plan and the wider policy framework. We will continue to have discussions with the NDNA, but I am confident that the measures that we have outlined will help to address some of the points that it has highlighted to us in its survey.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): My question is also about the NDNA survey. Particular issues that it raises include staff wages and recruitment. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that private nurseries, which play a key role as partner providers, can address those issues?

Mark McDonald: As I have highlighted on more than one occasion, the £50 million of additional revenue to ensure that all staff who deliver the funded entitlement are paid the living wage will help with that.

On the recruitment campaign that we will undertake, an issue that has been raised with me on numerous occasions is the feeling that the role of staff in early learning and childcare settings has not been valued highly enough. I want to change the mindset that can sometimes exist out there. Essentially, we are asking people to join us in transforming children’s lives in Scotland, and what we are looking to deliver can have no higher status. That is the driving principle behind our approach. I hope that that will encourage more people to go into the sector. We will work on ensuring that the living wage is being paid and that there are better salaries and career progression in the sector in order to ensure that we continue to attract high-quality staff to deliver the entitlement.

The Presiding Officer: That ends questions on the statement on the expansion of free early learning and childcare.

Before we move on to the debate on the consultation on the draft British Sign Language national plan, I am delighted to say that we are providing signing facilities for the benefit of our

audience in the gallery and those who are watching at home.

British Sign Language (Draft National Plan)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04789, in the name of Mark McDonald, on the consultation on the draft British Sign Language national plan. I call Mark McDonald to speak to and move the motion. Minister, you have 13 minutes—and a little bit more, if you wish.

15:03

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): Oh my. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I am pleased to open this debate on Scotland's first draft British Sign Language national plan, which we published for consultation on 1 March.

I am sure that many members will remember the historic day back in September 2015 when the Parliament unanimously passed the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill. On that day, the public gallery was full of BSL users, as it is today. I welcome, in particular, students from Heriot-Watt University and other members of the BSL community.

When the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill was passed, there was a spontaneous eruption of joy in the gallery. It was a day that many deaf people had campaigned for and will never forget; indeed, I will never forget it. I pay tribute to Mark Griffin for introducing that bill back in 2014 and to Cathie Craigie, who was instrumental in developing the initial proposals for the bill. I also recognise the significant contribution of my colleague Alasdair Allan, who worked with Mr Griffin during the parliamentary process to make the legislation as strong, focused and action oriented as possible.

In fact, it is worth recognising that that legislation demonstrated the Parliament at its best. Not only was it developed through constructive and—mostly—consensual debate, but it encouraged the full involvement of deaf and deafblind BSL users and it gained cross-party support. I am proud to have been asked to take over responsibility for British Sign Language as part of my portfolio and to present Scotland's first draft BSL national plan to the chamber.

Our long-term aim for the plan is ambitious. We want to make Scotland the best place in the world to live in, work in and visit for people whose first or preferred language is BSL. That means that deaf and deafblind BSL users will be fully involved in daily and public life in Scotland as active, healthy

citizens and will be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.

The plan covers the whole of the Scottish Government, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, as well as a number of other national public bodies that are directly answerable to the Scottish ministers. That means that we have been able to take a strategic and co-ordinated approach, which we feel will have a positive impact across a wide range of national public bodies. Other public bodies, including local authorities and regional national health service boards, will have to publish their plans next year. The draft national plan that we are debating today has been described by Dr Terry Riley OBE, chair of the British Deaf Association, as

“testimony to the Scottish Government’s commitment to ensure the BSL (Scotland) Act is deliverable for Deaf Sign Language users in Scotland”.

The draft plan responds to the priorities of the BSL users the length and breadth of Scotland whose views were used to inform the work of the BSL national advisory group, which we call the NAG—I can assure members that it is an affectionate acronym. Before I give a flavour of the content of the plan, I will take a moment to recognise the contribution of the NAG. It is a collaboration of deaf and deafblind BSL users, working alongside Scottish public bodies. It is a remarkable group, not least because two of the deaf members are also visually impaired and three are young people under the age of 18. The group is co-chaired by a senior civil servant and a deaf BSL user. I mention that because it demonstrates our genuine commitment to inclusive and open government.

I offer my sincere thanks to the NAG, whose hard work over the past year has made it possible for us to publish a plan that I believe will make a real practical difference to the lives of our citizens who use BSL. I also thank the deaf sector partnership, which has supported the NAG and the many discussions around the country that have contributed to the draft plan.

The plan is framed around 10 long-term goals, which represent our collective dream for BSL in Scotland. They include goals relating to early years; education; employment; health, mental health and social care; transport; culture, leisure, sport and the arts; justice; and democracy. We know that it will take longer than six years to reach those goals, so the first draft plan will set out the steps that we think we can realistically achieve in the next six years. Future plans will take us even closer to our goals.

I want to highlight some of the most significant actions that we have included in the draft plan. We recognise the absolutely critical importance of language in the early years. We will ensure that

families and carers with a deaf or deafblind child are given information about BSL and deaf culture and are offered support to learn to sign with their child. We will also increase the provision of information, advice and support services in BSL for deaf parents and carers. In education, our goal is that children and young people who use BSL reach their full potential at school. We are already looking at the qualification level of BSL that teachers have and at how to remove barriers to teacher registration for deaf people whose first language is BSL.

We will also take specific steps to increase the availability of BSL as part of the language offer in schools under our one plus two language policy. One of the first steps will be to gather information on where BSL is being offered in schools, to gather and share examples of best practice and to develop guidance to support BSL being offered as an option alongside other languages.

We will work with schools, colleges and universities to ensure that BSL users have a much more positive experience when they make the transition to post-school education, and that they receive the support that they need to do well in their chosen subjects when they move to college or university.

When young people who use BSL move into the world of work, we want to ensure that they are supported to develop the necessary skills to become valued members of the Scottish workforce. During the lifetime of this first national plan, we will take steps to ensure that BSL users have fair and equal access to employment opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships and employability programmes, and receive appropriate support to find and sustain work, as part of the new Scottish employability programme.

We recognise that access to health and social care services is particularly problematic for people who use BSL. We are determined to address that in a number of ways. For example, over the next six years we will ensure that information on national health screening and immunisation programmes is routinely translated into BSL and is readily available and easy to access. Similarly, we will ensure that information about people’s rights to direct their own social care and support is provided in BSL. We will also improve availability of and access to professionally approved health information in BSL.

According to the charity Signhealth, deaf people are twice as likely as hearing people to experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. What makes that worse is that deaf people find it harder to access support. Over the lifetime of the plan, we will develop a national source of mental health information, advice and

support for BSL users, to address that significant health inequality.

The draft plan includes a number of important actions, which apply across all public services. We recognise that there is a shortage of BSL English interpreters, particularly with the advanced skills that are necessary to work in specific settings, including the justice and healthcare systems. We will take steps to remedy that.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Is it also important that we recognise the variants of BSL? Of course, I highlight the variant that expresses Doric.

Mark McDonald: At the risk of giving the interpreter at the back of the chamber some difficulty, I say aye. We recognise that there are variations in BSL, and we are more than happy to consider that in the context of our approaches.

We know that there are significant variations in access to information and services in BSL across the Scottish public sector. To address that, we will develop, test and promote a set of guidelines for all Scottish public services. We will also explore how we can develop and deliver BSL awareness and training that can be accessed quickly across all front-line public services.

There are more than 50 actions in the draft plan. Although you have been gracious, Presiding Officer, in affording me so much time to speak, I am not sure that time is sufficiently on my side to enable me to go through all the actions in detail. In addition to the key areas that I have mentioned, a range of actions will improve access to information and services in the areas of transport, culture, leisure, sport and the arts, and justice.

The publication of the draft plan for consultation marks a number of important firsts for the Scottish Government. This is the first time that the Scottish Government has produced a bilingual consultation in BSL and English; we are the first Parliament to pass legislation to promote and support BSL; and this is our first national plan, as required by the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.

I remind members and everyone who is observing the debate that the BSL national plan is a draft. The consultation is now live and will remain open until 31 May. Responses can be made in BSL and in English via a number of avenues, including a dedicated Facebook group.

Yesterday evening, I had the privilege of attending the first of our consultation events here in Edinburgh. There are to be around 30 such events in total. At the event yesterday, a number of interesting and constructive suggestions were raised and I am sure that more will emerge over the next couple of months. It would be fair to say that, although there was significant welcome for

the plan and the actions that it contains, there were also a number of suggestions and challenges to which we as a Government will need to give careful consideration when we come to deliver the final plan in October this year.

Today is an opportunity for members in the chamber to take part in the consultation and I look forward to what I am sure will be a constructive debate as we continue to take forward our shared goal of delivering the best services and support for the BSL community.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the consultation on the first draft BSL National Plan; expresses its thanks to the BSL National Advisory Group whose knowledge and experience have informed and influenced the content of the plan; acknowledges the support and input from across the Parliament to develop and pass the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill in 2015; recognises that this is the first time that the Scottish Government has published a bilingual consultation in BSL and English; encourages people whose first or preferred language is BSL to respond to the consultation, and looks forward to the publication of the final version of the plan in October 2017.

15:15

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I am pleased that we are debating the BSL national plan for Scotland. The Conservatives will support the motion. I congratulate the minister on lodging a motion for a Thursday afternoon debate that does not mention Brexit. I also pay tribute to Mark Griffin for all the work that he did in the previous session of Parliament. I was not a member in that session, but I have looked at some of the work that he and others did and it is a remarkable achievement, of which he and all members can be very proud.

It is right and proper that the BSL national advisory group, which is made up of deaf and deafblind BSL users and parents of deaf children, has been working to help develop the draft plan. I hope that others will engage with the consultation over the next couple of months and submit responses. The plan will benefit deaf children and young people, their families and the wider community, and will close the existing gaps in provision, particularly in the early years and education. Ultimately, it will help deaf people to take maximum possible control over living as independently as possible.

The most reliable data on BSL use in Scotland is based on the 2011 Scottish census, which found that around 12,500 people use BSL at home. That includes people who have no hearing problems but who use BSL to communicate with family members who do. It does not include professional BSL users such as interpreters. People who have BSL as their first language consider themselves part of the deaf community—a minority group that,

like any other minority group in Scotland, has a shared language, culture and identity. For members of the deaf community, English is a second language. Too often, we forget that.

The demand for sign language services is set to become much higher as a result of the raised awareness brought about by the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. With the implementation of the act under way, and consultation on the first BSL national plan for Scotland open, it is expected that there will be a much higher demand for sign language interpreters. The Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters maintains a register of the number of interpreters. Currently there are only 66 operational interpreters in Scotland, which means that, for each interpreter, there are around 200 BSL users, around 100 of whom have BSL as their first or preferred language. One of the challenges that we face is how to meet that demand. I serve on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, which is taking evidence on disability and access to higher education. It is striking that there is good provision in lecture halls for those who go to university, but what provision do those students have in the union or coffee bar, or in discussions outwith the lecture hall?

I am not suggesting that there are easy answers to those questions, but they are questions that we in Scotland have to look at. There is currently no qualifications framework or regulatory framework in relation to use of communication support workers or interpreters in education settings. That means that there is inconsistent provision and disparity in the quality of support that is provided to deaf learners. The role of communication support workers is critical in ensuring that children and young people who rely on signing to access teaching and learning receive accurate interpretation of what the teacher is saying and what is going on in the class.

The same point that I made about university provision often applies to school as well. A constituent approached me recently to tell me that, although their child gets good BSL use in class, their interpreter needs to have a break at break time, so the child often feels isolated in the playground or the lunch hall. We need to ensure that there is provision not just for academic activity at school or university but for social activity as well. Ensuring that CSWs in schools and colleges have a minimum level of BSL qualification, so that they can effectively fulfil that role, is fundamental. The national plan is an opportunity to strengthen consistency in relation to qualifications for those working with deaf learners, and I would be interested to know how the minister plans to bring that forward.

When I was growing up, too often deafness was seen as a learning disability, but it is not a learning disability. With the right support, there is no reason why deaf young people should achieve any less than their hearing peers. However, the latest Scottish Government data shows that, last year, 11.8 per cent of deaf learners left school with no qualifications, compared with the average of 2.6 per cent. That gap in achievement at school goes on to affect deaf young people's life chances not only with regard to unemployment and poverty, but in relation to leisure activities and many other things that we take for granted.

I welcome what the minister has said about promoting positive experiences around the early years. Most deaf children are born to hearing families. The Scottish Government does not currently cover the costs for families to learn BSL. Often, because of the family budget, only one family member gets the lessons, with other family members getting by. Relationships with siblings and parents are often distorted, or are not as full as they could be, because of language and communication barriers, and developing age-appropriate language is challenging for deaf children because of communication barriers that can impact on attainment and life outcomes.

I welcome the funding that the National Deaf Children's Society has secured from the Big Lottery Fund Scotland to deliver the everyone together project, which will see around 350 families receive unique early years support over three years. Its family sign language element will offer families and early years professionals the chance to take part in family sign language courses in group and one-to-one settings.

I welcome the steps that are outlined in the national plan, which include the development of information about BSL and deaf culture for parents whose baby is diagnosed as deaf. I remember someone coming to me a few years ago whose child had been born deaf. Their doctor had almost immediately painted a completely negative picture, with no positivity at all. I hope that the culture has changed, and that we can see that a child who is born deaf can still live a completely fulfilling life.

Overall, my party welcomes all the aims that are set out in the national plan. However, we are concerned about how some of them will be put into practice, especially those that relate to the training of front-line staff such as teachers and health professionals. Teachers of the deaf are a lifeline for many deaf children, but services are being squeezed and a lot of teachers are due to retire within the next 10 to 15 years. For a while, I had the privilege of being a governor of Donaldson's School, when it was based in Edinburgh, and I saw the expertise of many of those staff.

We believe that the issue extends to all people with communication difficulties, such as those who have had a stroke, those who come to deafness later in life and those who simply need help to communicate with family members.

We call on the Scottish Government to carefully consider all the responses to its consultation in order to develop a robust and well-thought-out national plan to support deaf people across Scotland.

I look forward to hearing the views of other members in the debate.

15:25

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am truly delighted to speak in the debate today, and thank the Scottish Government for bringing forward the debate and for the comprehensive consultation document, the proposals in which will meet and exceed many people's expectations when they are fully implemented.

British Sign Language is the first language of many deaf people in Scotland. BSL is a visual-gestural language that uses space and movement—the hands, face and head are used to communicate. It has a different grammatical structure from English. Across Scotland, BSL is the indigenous manual language in the same way as English is the indigenous spoken language. Deaf people who use BSL are part of a recognised cultural and linguistic minority and, unlike people who speak other minority languages, many deaf sign language users cannot learn to speak English, as they cannot hear the language.

The origins of forms of signed language can be traced back to the seventh century. In 1886, "Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions", a short story penned by Charles Dickens, was published. The story is about a deaf girl called Sophy who is rescued from her violent father by a man who adopts her and then devises a form of sign language to enable him and Sophy to communicate with each other.

Even though the history of sign language goes back a long way, there remains a lack of awareness and understanding of BSL among the hearing population, although I think that that is being addressed. That lack of awareness means that deaf people have less access to the same information and services as hearing people, which can often lead to their feeling marginalised, shut out, misunderstood and isolated. By the same token, society is missing out on the contribution that deaf and deafblind people can make, because they do not have the same access to education and the workplace as hearing people do.

Scottish Government figures show that only 36.4 per cent of deaf pupils attain highers or advanced highers, compared with 60.2 per cent of hearing pupils, and that only 26 per cent of deaf school leavers go on to higher education, compared with 39 per cent of hearing school leavers. That comes down to the language skills of the teachers. We will need to address that in order to reduce the attainment gap, and I am delighted that the Government consultation gives a commitment to investigate the BSL qualification level that teachers have and to review how the General Teaching Council for Scotland's professional update and standards could inform guidance for teachers of pupils who use BSL.

In the previous session of Parliament, the Education and Culture Committee undertook an inquiry into this issue, and collected evidence on the matter. It is not difficult to see why there is an attainment gap when a BSL user can be taught complex subjects such as maths, physics or chemistry by a teacher whose language skills are lower than theirs. A teacher with a level 1 BSL qualification trying to teach advanced higher physics to deaf pupils is just not going to cut it. Teachers of the deaf really should have a level 3 qualification in BSL, which is the equivalent of a higher.

Another key point on the subject of education is the commitment to discuss with the Scottish Qualifications Authority the potential for developing SQA awards in BSL. That is key, because a lot of students in Scotland study and learn BSL in primary school or in the early years of secondary school but then drop it as a subject because of the pressure in high school to get the qualifications that they need to go on to college or university or for their CVs. If we can develop a recognised SQA qualification, which gives a young person Universities and Colleges Admissions Service—UCAS—points, we will boost the number of non-deaf BSL users, reduce the feelings of isolation within the deaf BSL community at that key time at school, and potentially increase the number of much-needed interpreters.

Dialect was mentioned earlier. I spoke at an event in Edinburgh for which no sign language interpreter was available in Scotland so an interpreter was drafted in from England. There was a variation in dialect and some of the audience did not understand everything because of the word differences between English BSL and what they were used to from a Scottish interpreter. The low number of interpreters is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Another area that could be improved on is access to leisure and sport. There is a commitment in the consultation to

“Support professional pathways and advocate for BSL users to consider culture, leisure, sport or the arts as a potential career choice”.

I have been contacted by a deaf BSL user who hopes to participate in the Deaflympics this year in South Korea. However, he is having to fundraise to cover his own costs to attend the Deaflympics, along with a number of Scottish deaf athletes, and he is having real difficulty in doing that. We have funding available for our Olympians and Paralympians, so perhaps we should look at that area. I have written to Scottish ministers about the situation and I have included it in my consultation submission, so I hope that the minister will keep in mind the funding of deaf athletes.

During the progress of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill, I said that I was under no illusion that the bill was anything more than a starting point—that it was the first positive step towards putting BSL on a firmer footing and that it would make a positive difference to the lives of BSL users. I am delighted that the Government has taken the next step and if the commitments in the consultation document are realised, that will be warmly welcomed by the BSL community.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I can be a little bit generous with time—isn't it nice to hear that? I call Fulton MacGregor.

15:32

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): First, I echo what others have said over the past 24 hours and offer my sympathy to those who were affected by yesterday's events in London.

It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. I will start by telling the story of my local hero, Holly Kinsella, who I am delighted to say has joined us in the public gallery today. I met Holly during my recent election campaign and, as anyone who has met her will know, she is a confident and outgoing young adult. Holly sits on the youth advisory board of the National Deaf Children's Society and is an avid campaigner for the advancement of sign language.

However, when we learn about Holly's story—one that will not be unique to her—we learn that she was not always as confident and outgoing as she is today and that that was down to a system that failed to support young deaf people. Holly was born deaf but was not diagnosed until she was five. Because of the delay in diagnosis, her language skills were behind those of her peers. At the time of diagnosis, those involved in her healthcare pushed her to speak as opposed to encouraging a shift to signing.

Holly went to a school where there were no other deaf children, and certainly very little support for her—she had absolutely no access to signing. She was in her first year at high school before she had contact with other deaf children and it was then that she learned about, in her own words, the rich and amazing deaf culture. She started to become involved in campaigning and is now an outspoken advocate for deaf children.

Many colleagues have met Holly; she is not at all shy about approaching MSPs and others to let them know exactly what they should be doing to make life better for young deaf people and their families. I include the Deputy First Minister in that, at a recent event here in the Parliament. I am sure that the minister, Mark McDonald, will be firmly on Holly's radar now. Stories such as hers reinforce just how important the consultation is, and I am pleased that all parties in the chamber have come together to support it.

There are many other inspirational people who are helping to make progress on BSL. Katie Slavin, who is also from my constituency and who I also first met during my campaign, runs the shining stars group in Coatbridge, which helps children with additional needs, including those with hearing loss. She, too, uses BSL and believes that it should be rolled out in the curriculum.

Both of those young people are doing an amazing job locally. They have told me that they were inspired by their recent political engagements. It is significant that—as I mentioned—they both felt confident enough to approach me during my election campaign, as they approached all the MSP candidates and developed relationships thereafter. Over the past couple of days, I have been genuinely surprised by talk of political debate and discourse being divisive. The two individuals whom I have spoken about are examples of how community engagement and empowerment can come out of political discussion.

Sign language absolutely must be considered a mainstream language in Scotland, and support must be in place for deaf people, and for parents and the extended families of deaf children. That was covered in the minister's speech and by other members. According to the 2011 census, as other members have said, there are 12,533 people who use sign language in Scotland, including 828 in my local authority area of North Lanarkshire. I thank Action on Hearing Loss for the briefing that it provided for the debate.

I am delighted that this important consultation has been made fully accessible to those who sign. However, I was concerned to hear that there are currently just 66 BSL interpreters in Scotland. In Finland, which is comparable in size to Scotland, there are 750 interpreters, which allows for a ratio

of one interpreter for every six people who use sign language. In Scotland, the ratio is one in approximately 167; that point was made by Jeremy Balfour.

I therefore welcome the commitment to bring in more public bodies to be covered by the BSL legislation, which will increase the number by almost half, and to increase the number of people who use BSL. I encourage the Government to increase the number of registered interpreters. BSL is a language in its own right that enables many of our deaf citizens to learn, work, parent, be creative, live life to the full and make their contribution to our communities, our culture and our economy.

Much has already been said about the Scottish Government data from 2014-15. I think we would all agree that the statistics are not good, and I commend the Government for starting the process to address that.

The National Deaf Children's Society believes that, with the right support and early identification, deaf children can do anything that other children can do, and I agree. The Government's aim is to close the attainment gap, which includes overcoming all sorts of barriers. However, in order to achieve that, it is critical that children are supported in their early years, which are a crucial time for cognitive and language development. As has been said, 90 per cent of deaf children are born to hearing parents, which can create a barrier in communication in the early years, so it is crucial that parents are supported in communicating with their children.

I welcome the consultation and proposals to expand access and support for BSL, and I encourage all my constituents to take part. I offer my apologies to the interpreter if my Glaswegian accent has meant that I have spoken too fast today; I have tried to slow down.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is a timely reminder that members should pace their delivery. I call Graham Simpson. You always pace your delivery, Mr Simpson.

15:39

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I will do my best, Presiding Officer.

I welcome the debate today, although it is not so much a debate given that I suspect we will all agree that helping those who have hearing difficulties or no hearing at all should be a priority.

I echo the comments that have been made about Mark Griffin and the work that he has put in. I do not know Mark very well, but he should be congratulated by all of us on his sterling efforts. I

also thank the BSL national advisory group for its work so far.

The consultation is certainly necessary, and the Government has until October to produce a plan. That is needed, because deaf people encounter in their day-to-day lives myriad problems that those of us who are lucky enough to be able to hear do not think about that often. I will focus on some of the challenges that deaf people face.

Earlier this month, I was delighted to meet Action on Hearing Loss. Its moving on service offers support to help businesses to become more accessible and deaf aware for job seekers or employees who are deaf or have hearing loss. The moving on service is funded by the Big Lottery Fund Scotland and provides communication tips as well as information about the access to work programme and how to book communication support such as BSL/English interpreters. The charity's employment advisers, who sign to a high level of BSL, support young deaf or hard-of-hearing people aged 16 to 25 into employment, training, education and volunteering opportunities. The employment advisers also provide key practical advice on preparing CVs, interview training and getting ready for college or work.

The moving on service is excellent, but it highlights the real issue for deaf people of finding employment. That was also highlighted to me when I recently visited the Lanarkshire Deaf Club in Motherwell. It set up its own job club in January this year and has already seen members start work in Lanarkshire as a result. People who are deaf or hard of hearing can find it difficult to attend the JobCentre or job interviews without interpreters who can use sign language to communicate for them. There is a general issue across Scotland of there not being enough interpreters. The national strategy and any local strategies that follow on from it need to address that.

The ratio of interpreters to BSL users in Scotland is about 1:167, but in Finland it is 1:6, as Fulton MacGregor and Jeremy Balfour mentioned. Strangely, the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 does not compel the Scottish Government to conduct an audit of the current provision of BSL interpretation, but it should do—perhaps the minister could take that up. The public sector can do more and I am pleased to hear that it will be getting guidelines, but private employers could be encouraged to help, too. For example, what about having a deaf-accredited employer scheme? Perhaps the minister could consider that—he can take that as a consultation response. Another idea is that shops and reception desks in businesses could be encouraged to install hearing loops.

I visited Lanarkshire Deaf Club to congratulate the club on receiving £5,000 from the Big Lottery Fund to host a day of celebration this coming Saturday under the banner of “Loving Lanarkshire Deaf”. The club will have a child-friendly event during the day to provide information about local organisations and deaf organisations to the wider community. At night, there will be a party for over-18s, with a buffet bar and disco, for both the deaf and hearing communities—it is all about breaking down barriers in the community.

Ian Galloway, who is the project manager at the club, told me:

“I feel it is important that local business, services and the wider community are more aware of the needs of the deaf community. I would like to see Lanarkshire as a place of excellence where hearing and deaf people are able to access services and communicate freely with each other. British Sign Language is our first language and not English as many people mistakenly think.”

That is the point, is it not? BSL is a language all of its own. Just as we would find an interpreter for someone who walked into a police station who could speak only French, we should do the same for deaf people. Most of us take for granted being able to go outside, shop, get on a bus, go to work and communicate with everyone, but the reality is so different for people who are deaf.

When I met Ian Galloway, he told me about something that we could and should tackle here. He visited the Scottish Parliament to give evidence to a committee and found that there was no BSL interpreter. We can make a start close to home.

I hope that the consultation and the forthcoming national plan will break down the barriers that I have mentioned and raise awareness.

15:45

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am with Fulton MacGregor, as I begin by apologising to the interpreters—possibly not for my accent, although I will try to avoid going into the depths of the Shetland dialect, but for my pace of speech. This is an occasion when we should consider such things carefully.

About now, President Clinton will be speaking in Northern Ireland at the funeral of Martin McGuinness. If I have heard one person whose use of pauses is utterly dramatic, it is Clinton. There is something in that for us to remember in the debate. We should recognise that how we speak is as important as what we say.

I appreciated the remarks that the minister made at the beginning and the reasoned tone with which he expressed them. The conciliator is on good form today. I pay tribute to Mark Griffin for the work that he did in the previous session of Parliament and for his thoughtful speech today. I

did not know the historical perspective that he gave earlier, but we are the better for having had that put on the record. I also thank Jeremy Balfour and others for providing intensely thoughtful contributions on this really important area of public policy.

I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, for having to leave before the end of the debate. The Loganair flight to Sumburgh waits for no man or woman and certainly not for the Shetland Islands MSP, so I am afraid that I will be away.

Improving services for British Sign Language users is a worthy public policy goal, and the national plan that the minister set out is to be welcomed for its commitment to ensuring that BSL users feel supported from their early years into employment and beyond. The plan is a positive step for non-BSL users, too. By integrating British Sign Language into schools, workplaces and public services, we all benefit from working towards a more inclusive society, which is one of the aspects of this place that we hold dear.

I was particularly taken by the section in the plan on education, not least because of the work—Mark Griffin referred to it—that was done in the previous session of Parliament and by previous education committees. I thank my colleague and friend Liam McArthur for his role in that. We rightly invest much attention in and give much debate to the funding of education to ensure that pupils from all backgrounds thrive in school—indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills made a speech on that very subject this morning—and it should be no different for pupils who use BSL. More teachers being qualified in BSL will undoubtedly help those for whom the language is their primary means of communication, but it may also help the wider school. The plan notes that we should take advantage of children’s appetite to learn, and bringing BSL into the classroom will increase tolerance and understanding and at least help to remove the sense of isolation that many people with hearing loss feel.

The plan’s emphasis on health and mental health is to be commended and pushed. No individual should be left feeling that they cannot access important services or left confused about their care because no one is available who is qualified to tell them what they need to know in the right language.

Proper funding is crucial if ministers are to meet the ambitious plans that have been set out today. Currently, my Shetland Islands constituency has no BSL interpreter, which limits the opportunities that are available to those who are deaf or hard of hearing in the islands. Remote videoconferencing could help to address that but, without the necessary investment in broadband connections, supporting BSL users who are older or less

confident with technology may be a great challenge. Improved broadband services are now required for many of our public services, particularly in rural and island areas.

Similarly, helping more BSL users to access university and achieve a degree and helping more of them into sustainable employment requires the resources and the commitment of those who provide support services.

My party is happy to support the Government's motion and we welcome the consultation. All too often, politicians are accused of telling people how things should be, without seeing what works. It strikes me that the BSL community has, rightly, been a part of the plan's formulation—I took on board the minister's point that there will be 30 more meetings to discuss the on-going work. I am sure that BSL users will provide their thoughts on the draft plan over the coming weeks and months.

Creating a more equal place for BSL in Scottish life requires us all to work together, across all sectors. One of my constituents who is a BSL user told me that his dream was to one day be Prime Minister—I apologise to the minister, as he said "Prime Minister" and not "First Minister", although that might just have been a constitutional slip of the tongue. However, because he is deaf he thinks that it

"sounds like an impossible dream".

He has urged us all to take action to improve the position and provision of BSL. In that way, he said, "I might have a chance".

That seems to be the right ambition for not just my constituent but all of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You paced yourself with admirable restraint, Mr Scott. Your delivery is usually much faster.

I call Maree Todd.

15:51

Maree Todd (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. As you will have seen by my saying thank you in BSL, I am determined to include a few signs in my speech today. I welcome—in BSL—the students from Heriot-Watt University who are here today, including my constituent Caitlin Bogan, who is studying for an MA in BSL.

Thursday 17 September 2015 was the most important day in the history of BSL in Scotland. On that date, the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill was passed unanimously by all parties in the chamber. The bill became the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. We should all be proud of the leadership that the Parliament has

shown on equal rights for deaf people, and proud of the work of Mark Griffin, as members have said.

Scotland was the first part of the United Kingdom to recognise signing for the deaf as an official language. Thanks to the 2015 act, the Scottish Government and public bodies now have a responsibility to promote the language and make public services accessible for BSL users. However, that is just the start. The consultation that we are debating today is a key part of the policy-making process and is an opportunity to ensure that we get it right for BSL users in Scotland.

Another first that is worth celebrating is that this is the first time that the Scottish Government has produced a bilingual consultation in BSL and English.

We want to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live in, work in and visit, and we celebrate and recognise the value, richness and diversity of BSL. In Scotland, BSL is the first and preferred language of many deaf people. It is definitely a language in its own right: it has its own grammar, structure, syntax and regional variations, as we have heard. Each country has its own national sign language and, like any language, each has a cultural significance.

Language is vital for all of us. The ability to discuss politics might not always be welcome, but the ability to say I love you—I just demonstrated it in BSL—is part of who we are as human beings.

As a society, we should recognise the cultural and linguistic identity of deaf people who use BSL to communicate and we should adapt our services. That involves removing the barriers that deaf people face to accessing public services, employment and education services. There are many examples of deaf people being unable to access crucial information, such as when they go to the doctor or the dentist. When individuals feel excluded from public life and the national conversation, that has an impact on their mental health. It is therefore critical that BSL users and young people feel supported. That is especially so for young people, as the impact of deafness in childhood can be significant.

Ninety per cent of deaf children are born to hearing parents, and there is a general lack of understanding of deafness and its impact on a child's life. There are definitely challenges for BSL users in school, but I will take the opportunity to tell members about the great things that my local school is doing.

We should all be proud of what has been done in the Highlands. Dingwall academy is one of the very few schools to deliver a BSL unit; all students in first year, including my son Gregor this year,

take BSL classes as a taster along with other modern languages such as Spanish, French, Gaelic and German. That is where Caitlin Bogan first had the opportunity to study BSL, and for her and other children at the school, that has led to further education and—hopefully—career opportunities. The school is keen for BSL to have an accredited school qualification and have the same status as other languages, and I support it in that.

Dingwall academy sees the value of BSL. It recognises that deaf students need to study their own language as much as English speakers need to study English. Deaf children's literacy skills tend to be poorer, and they struggle with deconstructing sentences. As a result, the school's approach is definitely all about raising attainment.

Every young person in the school is valued and recognised as having needs, and the school wants to be inclusive. Dingwall academy does not want BSL to be just an add-on; it wants BSL to be embedded. That is all about tackling social isolation and the mental health problems that deaf students face. When they can communicate, the challenges are lessened. Parents' feedback is that they really value that; indeed, some parents talk about the value of having kids who can now communicate with deaf siblings.

Dingwall academy is a shining example of what deaf and hearing children can achieve with the right support in BSL, but what it is doing goes beyond qualifications to social life, family life, inclusion and reducing stigma. I am sure that we can all agree that deaf children must be given the same opportunities to flourish as others.

Finally, I say in BSL: thank you.

15:57

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Like others, I welcome the consultation and look forward to the changes that will ensue from it. First, I pay tribute to Cathie Craigie and Mark Griffin. Cathie Craigie campaigned on the issue, and Mark Griffin took up the work when he came to the Parliament—he pursued it doggedly and achieved a real change in our perception of BSL. His member's bill raised awareness, and its enactment is what brings us together today to discuss the consultation. Getting a member's bill through the Parliament is not easy, but his work and determination have made a lasting change for those who communicate through BSL.

The consultation is right to focus on access to education and services. It is shocking that attainment levels for deaf people are so low, which harms not only their schooling but their life chances and access to a career. Given that their ability to learn is being hampered by inadequate

communication, I would like greater awareness raising of BSL, and I welcome the fact that the consultation is looking at its inclusion as a language on the school curriculum. That alone will mean that more people will be able to communicate through BSL.

I did a short BSL course that was run by trade union learning. The basics were surprisingly easy to learn—as Maree Todd has shown, the language is to some extent intuitive—but, because I have not used it since, my knowledge and ability have pretty much gone. It is therefore important that BSL is used more often to ensure that people can build up their skills and be able to sign when the need arises.

The statistic has been mentioned that 90 per cent of deaf people have hearing parents. If those parents have no knowledge of BSL at their child's birth, they will be playing catch-up throughout its life. We all know that babies and young children learn at a phenomenal rate—much faster than adults. A child's influences and learning come from its parents. Therefore, if the parents have some prior knowledge, that will keep them ahead of their child and help them to deliver support.

The National Deaf Children's Society tells us in its briefing for the debate that it has obtained Big Lottery funding for its everyone together project. That project gives early years support to 350 families and professionals who are working with deaf children. The family sign language project offers families BSL language courses in group and one-to-one sessions.

The society flags up to us the challenges and omissions in the consultation. It highlights the lack of interpreters. Given that the consultation is geared towards education and service delivery, it is difficult to see how 80 interpreters can adequately meet demand. According to the society, there are about 3,850 deaf children in Scotland and 3 per cent of them use solely BSL. If those numbers carry across to the adult population, the number of interpreters is surely inadequate for deaf people to be able to access even the most basic level of services.

The society flags up the minimum levels of qualification in BSL that are required for professionals who work with deaf learners and feels that increasing the qualification level is something that is missing from the plan. I understand that we need a lot more people who are fluent and qualified in BSL to be able to meet demand, so if we need to raise the qualification levels, we need more people to be trained. That needs to be an aspiration to ensure that young deaf people have the same educational opportunities as their hearing peer group.

A worrying statistic is that 40 per cent of deaf children experience mental health difficulties, compared with 25 per cent of hearing children. To an extent, that is not surprising. I led the members' business debate on Tuesday on loneliness. It is clear that loneliness and isolation lead to physical and mental health problems. Even someone who is surrounded by people will be lonely and isolated if they cannot interact with those people. There might be an interpreter in the classroom, but there will not be one in the playground. The only way in which we can address that is by making sign language—BSL—more widely used.

There has recently been a lot of concern about access to child and adolescent mental health services, which is challenging for all children, who have to wait long periods and travel to access services. That is even more difficult for deaf children, since access to services that they can communicate with is even more challenging.

We need language to communicate, and BSL—like any other language—is used to pass down culture and history through the generations. The rich and famous have their history and culture written down in history books, while the masses depend on their stories being handed down through the generations. Language is hugely important in that process, which is why we value the languages that all our communities use and why we must take steps to preserve and promote them.

Much of the debate reminds me of the early years of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, and there are many similarities over the ability to communicate and with regard to culture and history. I remember someone saying to me at that time that, while having more Gaelic taught in schools was a good thing, the real gauge of success would be to have it spoken in the playground. If we are to be inclusive, that must be our goal for BSL, too.

16:04

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I welcome the publication of the consultation on the draft BSL national plan. The national plan comes from the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, the passage of which was an important step in ensuring that, just like hearing people, deaf and blind people can communicate and be communicated with in their first language. I, too, pay tribute to Mark Griffin, who introduced the legislation as a member's bill and worked tirelessly to promote it.

I welcome the consultation on the draft plan. It is essential that we take this opportunity to challenge ourselves to be sufficiently ambitious, given the barriers that we know that deaf and deafblind

people face in playing a full role in society. In some regards, however, the consultation may fall short of the intentions of the section of the act that requires the Government to produce such a plan. In examining some of the issues, I will focus particularly on BSL in our education system.

As the consultation says, 90 per cent of deaf babies are born to hearing parents. As we know, a secure attachment between child and parent is hugely important for the child's wellbeing, yet parents in that situation face great challenges in getting the support that they need to communicate with their child. A friend of mine who has a deaf son—a lovely young man who is now working—told me how she felt when she found out about her son's condition. She told me:

"I was totally petrified and felt helpless. I had never met a deaf person in my life and here I was staring into the face of one."

We need to make sure that all hearing parents of deaf and deafblind children get the support that they need from the earliest point. That is why I welcome the Government's aim that, by 2023, families and carers with a deaf or deafblind child will be given information about British Sign Language and deaf culture and will be offered support to learn to sign with their child.

The consultation refers to a range of steps that we should take to achieve that, and some are encouraging. I was really pleased to see a focus on developing key materials in BSL about play, so that deaf children are able to enjoy the same play activities as hearing children. Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees all children in signatory states the right to play, and that is a welcome step towards achieving that right for deaf children.

However, although I welcome the commitments that the Scottish Government is making to the improvement of access to resources for hearing parents of deaf children, I believe that we can make them even more specific. For example, although it is great to see a commitment to continuing the support for families and carers with deaf and deafblind children to learn BSL to a level that is appropriate for communicating with nought to five-year-olds, that commitment could be stronger. I would like to see a pledge that all hearing parents of deaf and deafblind children will have a right to access BSL learning opportunities and gain BSL qualifications.

I now turn to how we can improve the experience of school for deaf and deafblind pupils. In 2012-13, Scottish Government figures showed that some 10 per cent of deaf and deafblind pupils left school with no qualifications, compared to 0.9 per cent of pupils with no additional support needs. The figures also showed that hearing-impaired pupils were about half as likely as pupils

with no additional support needs to enter higher education, and, for both those measures, there was a worsening rather than improving trend. We need to do better for deaf and deafblind students in our schools, and the better training of teachers should be one of the most urgent areas for improvement.

Members may be surprised to learn—I certainly was—that there is no single national standard to which teachers of deaf children must be qualified in British Sign Language. The Scottish Qualifications Authority offers five levels of qualification in BSL, but many teachers of the deaf are qualified only to the most basic level. Mark Griffin highlighted that point, too. Deaf students can find themselves significantly more advanced in BSL than their teachers, which will clearly have a detrimental impact on the education of deaf and deafblind children and young people. I realise that the minister recognises that as an issue and has pledged to investigate the level of BSL qualifications that teachers of the deaf have. I welcome that. Nevertheless, I question whether merely investigating that by as late as 2023 is sufficiently rapid action.

That work could be supported by clearer routes into deaf education. Although several Scottish universities offer undergraduate degree courses in deaf studies, British Sign Language and interpreting—such as those at Heriot-Watt University, in Lothian—no universities currently offer courses in the teaching of deaf children and young people. Therefore, I encourage the Government to ensure that such a degree is available in Scotland in the near future. Increasing the number of appropriately qualified teachers is an important step, but having more teachers who are deaf themselves could make a huge difference, as the presence of a deaf role model can be hugely important for deaf children and young people.

I was pleased to see that the consultation mentions working with the General Teaching Council for Scotland to remove barriers to registering deaf people who want to become teachers. I would like a specific pledge to increase the recruitment of deaf people as deaf teachers to be in the final version of the plan.

Jeremy Balfour touched on the issue of wider school inclusivity. Making the formal classroom environment more inclusive and accessible is a good start, but we also need to ensure that the wider school environment is wholly inclusive of deaf pupils. Deaf pupils often report that they are excluded from breaktime activities, so it is essential that we have a wraparound model of support.

Maree Todd talked about the initiative that Dingwall academy has shown. It has been a

pioneer in using BSL teaching to create a more inclusive school environment for deaf pupils by offering BSL as a language option, sitting alongside the traditional languages such as French, German and Gaelic. Some 87 pupils out of 240 applied for 20 available places during the first year that the course was offered. Over the following three years, the numbers requesting to study the course were three to four times the allocated number of places. Margaret Kinsman of Dingwall academy said:

“As well as opening doors for hearing children, the development of BSL at Dingwall has been little short of a revelation for deaf pupils in mainstream classes.”

She said that it has enabled barriers to be broken down and new friendships to develop. It is hugely transformative and has great potential. Will the Scottish Government go further and encourage other schools to follow the example of Dingwall academy?

I welcome the pledge that by 2023 education authorities and schools should know that BSL can be part of the language offer and that data will be gathered on how many schools are offering BSL as a language-learning opportunity. I ask the minister to consider what else could be done to enable more schools to offer BSL.

The fact that we are having this debate says a lot about how far we have come in making Scotland a more inclusive place for deaf and deafblind people. I very much welcome the draft national plan. It is clear that we can do more. We have a real opportunity to do more together and I look forward to working with the ministers and other colleagues to achieve that.

16:11

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I am pleased to contribute to today's debate on Scotland's first-ever British Sign Language national plan. Although I have no BSL users in my family, I have family members with severe hearing loss. I am pleased that we are tackling issues and formulating a plan around communication for all, across our society. My thanks go to Mark Griffin for his work in getting his member's bill passed.

The issue here is that we all have the right to communicate, no matter our circumstances. BSL is a language, but not enough people have access to it. There are adopters who would like to be able to communicate with deaf friends, family or clients and BSL users who find themselves unable to communicate with those with whom they interact throughout their lives.

I want to talk about a constituent of mine who will be very pleased that we are having this debate and will be doubly pleased that there are BSL signers in the chamber translating our spoken

words for BSL users. Her name is Rosemary Mitchell and she lives in Ellon. Last year, Rosemary found herself in a situation that would be tremendously difficult for any daughter: her mum was terminally ill with cancer and was receiving palliative care. The family, who thought that they had experienced every possible difficulty in communicating throughout their lives as a family using BSL, were experiencing something new. Most of the time, Rosemary had to be her mum's 24-hour interpreter because there simply were not enough interpreters in the north-east of Scotland to meet the demand.

There is not enough knowledge of BSL in society, or training available, for enough of us to know even the basics and to be able to ask how someone is feeling or whether they need assistance. I am one of those people; I cannot sign one single word. I am—try not to act too surprised—a child of the 1970s. At that time, there was no such thing as the BSL training that, as so many of my colleagues have mentioned, happens in schools these days.

None of the carers, the volunteers or the fantastic Marie Curie nurses who worked with Rosemary's parents could communicate with Elaine without the help of Rosemary or her father. Rosemary is now campaigning and fundraising to get BSL training for Marie Curie nurses. I have met Action on Hearing Loss and Marie Curie together to look at joint working for solutions to communications issues that deaf patients find themselves with, and I am very excited about seeing what they, working with Rosemary with a little bit of help from me—I thank them for including me in their work together—will come up with. I look forward to that. Rosemary has made a wonderful tribute to Elaine Mitchell.

I was particularly pleased to see the section of the plan that looks at how BSL interpreters can develop their skills to work in healthcare and justice settings, and moves to get more BSL training into the school curriculum as a language offer. The commitment in the plan to roll out BSL awareness training for health and social care staff throughout Scotland is most welcome.

I would like deaf awareness training to include making people aware of how they can assist lip readers. With a little awareness—such as that which we have from the instructions that we were all given today—of the need to speak clearly and at a moderate pace and to always keep our faces visible to the person who is reading our lips, we can make a substantial difference to a person who wants to be able to communicate with us in any situation. Deaf awareness is as important as all the BSL measures in the plan, and it is easily included in training for people who are going into work in any sector.

Communication is a right, and BSL awareness and training are a huge part of delivering on those rights.

16:16

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I am pleased to take part in this debate, which provides a good opportunity for members' views to feed into and inform the current consultation on the BSL national plan, which will cover the period up to 2023. I, too, pay tribute to Mark Griffin for the work that he has done in the area, especially with regard to his member's bill.

The plan rightly enjoys broad cross-party support—that has already been demonstrated today—as the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 did, of course. That was a significant landmark for BSL users in Scotland.

Like Maree Todd, who has left the chamber, I have been keen to learn some BSL. Members of the Health and Sport Committee have been given the opportunity to do that, and that has shown me what a wonderful, rich language BSL is. I recently met some young BSL signers in Edinburgh, and it really struck me then how the language is developing. One thing that I took away from that meeting was the new international sign language sign for President Donald Trump. Members can see from my demonstration what it is. That sign is part of a rich language and I will never forget it.

I urge constituents across the Lothian region, which I represent, to give their views during the consultation period, which runs until the end of May. I especially urge members of the deaf community, BSL users, those who support BSL users and young people to do so. It is vital that they give their opinions on the draft plan and suggest improvements and amendments ahead of the publication of the final plan in October.

I pay tribute to the organisations in Scotland that campaign on behalf of deaf people and those with hearing loss. Their views are very important in the consultation process, and I hope that they will all be listened to and taken into account. Those organisations include the Scottish Council on Deafness, the British Deaf Association Scotland and Action on Hearing Loss. There are also a number of fantastic local organisations throughout the country that work to support BSL users. In my Lothian region, for example, we have the Lothian deaf counselling service, which offers counselling in BSL, and groups such as the West Lothian BSL group, which offers deaf and hearing BSL users the opportunity to socialise, make new friends and meet old ones in a relaxed and informal setting.

I agree with the points that my colleague Jeremy Balfour made about BSL support in the early years

and those that Graham Simpson made on employment issues.

I will focus most of my remarks on section 8 of the draft plan, which covers health, mental health and social care. Equal access to information is a major theme of the section, as it is in other parts of the draft plan. To me, that is really important and something on which we should aim for Scotland to have a gold standard. I fully agree that all information on national health screening and immunisation programmes should be routinely translated into BSL and that that should be readily available and easily accessible. I welcome the minister's commitment on that today.

More generally, high-quality health information and advice in BSL should also be much more readily available. I support the suggestion that it should be collated and located in a central online resource that BSL users can access. As the draft plan suggests, there should also be a national source of mental health information for BSL users. I hope that the Scottish Government's new mental health strategy will include that issue. The resource should be comprehensive and user friendly and it should direct BSL users to mental health services and appropriate local support groups, as happens with ALISS—a local information system for Scotland—which is used in GP practices. It should also build on the good work of the Scottish mental health service for deaf people, which is hosted by NHS Lothian.

Clear and concise BSL information should also be made available for BSL users who wish to direct their own social care and support. I look to local authorities to take that forward and to make sure that BSL users can choose self-directed support if they want it. We should also consider carefully the specific needs and requirements of deafblind BSL users in accessing health and social care services. BSL awareness training for health and social care staff is another important consideration. I would be grateful if the minister could give more details on how the Scottish Government can support local NHS boards and local authorities to ensure that their staff receive such training, particularly given that there are time pressures and, in many cases, budget restraints.

We have not really touched on technology, although Tavish Scott mentioned it. I recently went through Heathrow airport, where there were welcome screens in BSL. It would be interesting to see how we could develop that in our public services in Scotland.

I want to end on the issue of loneliness and isolation. People who lose their hearing often go through a very difficult and isolating period. Last September, the Scottish Government committed to bringing forward a national social isolation strategy, and I hope that that presents an

opportunity to look at innovative and creative ways that we can support our deaf community in Scotland. In this day and age, we need to ensure that people with hearing loss are given the support that they need so that they realise their potential and so that we prevent isolation and loneliness.

I again welcome today's debate and I look forward to many constituents and organisations making their views known on the draft plan during the consultation period. The draft plan is positive, but the key will be the delivery of the proposals on the ground across all our public services. I urge ministers to provide the leadership and support that are required to ensure the effective implementation of the plan. Many of our fellow Scots will be watching, and they expect the Government to deliver.

16:23

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The fifth of May 2015 was a very important day in the life of the Parliament, as it was the day that the Parliament was awarded a charter mark from Action on Hearing Loss. The charter mark is a nationally recognised accreditation for organisations that offer excellent levels of service and accessibility for people who are deaf or who have hearing loss. Perhaps more important is that it was also the day when we started the parliamentary debate on the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill. Mark Griffin came to Parliament on that day to propose that we adopt the general principles of the bill, which we gladly and unanimously did. I was happy to speak in that debate and to support Mark Griffin's proposals.

Sign language is not simply limited to people who use BSL; we all have our individual sign languages. I have just exchanged signs with the Presiding Officer in order to establish for how long she wants me to speak, and I am quite convinced that I saw her say that I have 27 minutes, although it might be that my ability to read her signs is somewhat incomplete. When we wink, the context makes it clear what we are likely to mean. If I am winking at an attractive young lady—well, members can work out that message. In other circumstances, a wink means something different. If I slap my forehead, I am saying, "I'm being stupid; I've forgotten something." If I wave my hand, it is "Hello." We are all familiar with the concept of sign language, even if we do not know a single gesture of BSL.

I have one phrase of BSL—let us see whether members know what it means. I am signing, "I am ZS", which merely leads members to another puzzle. When I worked as a software engineer, the engineers used two letters to represent themselves, and Sammy Stein had stolen SS before I got there, so I became ZS. To this day,

my intimates from that period of my life continue to know me as ZS.

There are one or two things about the Government's consultation that I have not seen before—they are particular to the consultation. First, I very much welcome the fact that people can respond to the consultation by submitting a YouTube video or a Vimeo clip as a GIF—graphics interchange format—file. Given the nature of BSL as a visual language, that is right and proper, but I would not have thought of it myself. It is something that I will try to remember.

In my intervention on the minister's speech, I mentioned Doric BSL. I was told at the back of the chamber that I had forgotten about the Weegies. I have no idea what that means, of course, coming from somewhere else, as I do.

The consultation document is impressive, but it is also challenging. It contains 55 commitments—members can see that I am using my hand, almost unconsciously, to reinforce my message. I particularly approve of commitments 20 to 22, to which several members referred and which are about offering BSL as a second language. The one-plus-two language initiative in schools is very welcome, because people who learn two languages create in their brains neural pathways that raise their overall academic achievement. I can see that in my family: I have a Danish great-nephew and great-niece whose father is Scots and their mother Danish. They are bilingual, and I can see how that helps their intellectual development.

Commitments 23 and 24 are about support during post-school education, which is also important. A close family member of mine is dyslexic. She had the right support throughout her career, including at university, where someone was able to help her to understand the questions that she could not read properly on exam papers. She graduated with an honours degree and is now a very successful manager of a pharmacological laboratory. She has put her disability, or condition, behind her, simply by getting the right kind of support.

It is worth saying that aspects of this city are relevant in respect of support for people who are deaf. Thomas Braidwood, who lived from 1715 to 1806, founded what is thought to have been the first school for the deaf, here in this city. When Dr Samuel Johnson visited Edinburgh in 1773, he said:

"There is one subject of philosophical curiosity in Edinburgh which no other city has to show; a College for the Deaf and Dumb".

Dr Joshua Reynolds, the world-famous portrait painter, was deaf, but it did not prevent him from creating an international reputation that endures to this day. John Goodricke, who died in 1786 at the

age of 21, was elected to the Royal Society right at the end of his life because he was the first person to spot the periodic nature of illuminations from particular stars and identify the reasons for that. He was a scientist par excellence who was also deaf.

It has been a matter of public policy to take an interest in deafness, and I know that it has also touched democracy. As far as I am aware, there has been only one deaf member of the UK Parliament, Jack Ashley, and he was a special case because he was elected hearing and became deaf.

Let us hope that we can continue with the Government's excellent document and support people to engage with BSL and, as a wider issue, support people who are deaf.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. I have a couple of minutes in hand. You may have up to eight minutes, Mr Griffin.

16:30

Mark Griffin: It has been a good debate this afternoon and I hope that it will assure members of the deaf and deafblind community who communicate using BSL of the strength of support in their Parliament from their Government and MSPs, and of the importance of their language, culture and the contribution that they make to society.

It is worth while reminding Parliament, as the minister did in his opening remarks, how we got to this point. Although I thank members for their kind words, it was the cross-party group on deafness that started the work on a BSL bill. Today marks more than a decade of its hard work. The process was an excellent advert for the openness and accessibility of our Parliament and democracy on a day on which we should treasure it. What has happened is a fantastic example of members of a minority group in our society coming together to form a cross-party group, setting out their priorities, and lobbying MSPs to the point at which the Government progressed provisions in a bill that was passed unanimously almost two years ago. That was a direct result of the cross-party group's dedication and hard work, so it is only right and proper that we show our appreciation and thank the members of that group.

Maree Todd talked about the fact that Scotland was the first country in the UK to officially recognise BSL as a language in its own right and, even though it predates my time as an MSP, that was also down to the hard work and lobbying of the cross-party group.

I joined the cross-party group on deafness when I was elected in 2011 because of my family history of deafness. Two of my great-grandparents were deafblind and, although they died before I was born, I grew up hearing about some of the struggles that they faced in growing up and raising a family. When I joined the group, I was shocked to find that, generations and decades later, deaf BSL users were facing the same barriers and challenges, which pushed me to start to work and support those people by introducing the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill.

As I said in my opening speech, British Sign Language is the first language of many deaf people in Scotland. BSL is a visual-gestural language that uses space and movement, and the hands, face and head are used to communicate. It has a different grammatical structure to English. Across Scotland, BSL is the indigenous manual language in the same way as English is the indigenous spoken language. As Graham Simpson said, BSL is not simply a signed form of English; it is a distinct language in its own right with vast differences from English.

Stewart Stevenson: Does Mark Griffin think that we should start training the Presiding Officers to recognise rude words in BSL so that members can be hauled up if they use them?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We should have very limited use of BSL in the chamber unless it is for someone who requires it to communicate properly.

Mark Griffin: I hope that we will see more and more sign language in the chamber, but not using signs of such a nature that they would require the Presiding Officer's intervention.

Deaf people who use BSL are part of a recognised cultural and linguistic minority. Unlike people who speak other minority languages, many deaf BSL users cannot learn to use English because they cannot hear it. Mention is often made of the Equality Act 2010 and its effect on people who use BSL to access services, but it is important to put on the record now—as I did during the passage of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill—that deaf BSL users do not see themselves as disabled. They are as intellectually and physically capable as any member here, and they resent the fact that they have to define themselves as disabled in order to access services that we take for granted. We do not go to a foreign country where we do not speak the language and define ourselves as disabled. It is simply about people using a different language to communicate.

We must recognise that there is a minority in Scotland who use a different language and who have no opportunity to learn the indigenous

spoken language. It is up to us to address that and to adapt our services accordingly, which is something the Government clearly understands and is committed to doing, going by the consultation document that it has produced.

A number of members have mentioned the lack of BSL interpreters. Fulton MacGregor, Jeremy Balfour and Gillian Martin mentioned the figure of 66 interpreters, compared with 750 in Finland, whose population is similar to that of Scotland. As Gillian Martin pointed out, the result of that is that family members often translate for a deaf relative. As we can imagine, people will feel an obligation or a duty to help out where they can, but it is not appropriate in certain situations. If someone has a particularly sensitive medical appointment, for example, it is not appropriate for their son or daughter to be signing what could be a difficult diagnosis to their parent.

Tavish Scott and Rhoda Grant pointed out the benefits to non-BSL users of the work that the Government is doing. That enables us as a society to benefit, and our economy benefits from enabling BSL users to make that vital economic, social and cultural contribution. Rhoda Grant talked about measuring the success of BSL and of seeing BSL spoken in playgrounds. I would see the legislation as successful if that visibility was extended to include BSL being spoken on the train and the bus, in the workplace and in pubs and restaurants.

Alison Johnstone quoted the well-known statistic that 90 per cent of deaf children are born to hearing parents. A commitment was made in all political parties' manifestos in 2011 to address the issue of parents and siblings not automatically having access to learning BSL when a deaf child is born into the family, and I look forward to the Government addressing that.

Dingwall academy was mentioned—I point it out to the minister as an exemplar of work on BSL in a school. The SQA would do well to visit Dingwall academy if it is developing a qualification in BSL, because the school has a ready-made curriculum that it would be good to see being rolled out right across the country.

As for the signing that Stewart Stevenson talks about, I think it is fair to say that my winks to beautiful women are strictly reserved for my wife, and I advise Mr Stevenson, for his own safety, to do the same.

Mark McDonald: Not at your wife!

Mark Griffin: No. Certainly not at mine.

I again thank the Government again for showing its commitment to British Sign Language and for lodging the motion for debate. I encourage all members to support the motion at decision time

and, crucially, to respond to the consultation and encourage their constituents to do so, too.

16:39

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In closing this debate for the Conservatives, I start by thanking everyone who has given us excellent briefings not only in advance of the debate but over a period of several years. I also put on record my thanks to Mark Griffin and the Scottish Government for the extraordinary work that they have done to get us to this stage. Collectively, as well as being outstanding ambassadors for the deaf community, everyone involved has done a huge amount to help those of us who were previously not very well informed about the matter.

This afternoon, we have heard many insightful, thought-provoking and constructive speeches about the way forward for British Sign Language in Scotland, including some compelling anecdotes from Fulton MacGregor, Maree Todd and Gillian Martin, which brought home to all of us what this issue means to many people on the ground.

As several members have said, the greatest focus must be on how we can improve the educational experience and academic attainment of deaf learners, no matter what their background is. As the National Deaf Children's Society has pointed out in its briefing for the debate, that is currently being hampered by the absence of a complete data set on deaf pupils. That issue needs to be addressed in order to guarantee that we have appropriate BSL resource provision across Scotland for the purposes of assessing academic achievement. I will come to that in a minute.

If there is a criticism of the plan, it concerns the relative weaknesses that some believe are in the sections on improving the educational experience of deaf people. In that respect, Alison Johnstone had some good points to make.

It goes without saying that every child should have the opportunity to excel in life. However, as my colleague Jeremy Balfour said, too often, our schools, colleges and universities can be challenging environments for deaf people. If we are to get it right for every child, users of BSL should not be excluded.

Parental involvement is highlighted in the plan, and rightly so. I welcome that very much, because I believe that it is essential that parents who use BSL should have the same opportunities to be involved in their child's education as other parents. We all know that parents should have the right to be heavily involved in their child's school and the decisions that it makes about their education.

However, the key issue in all this is the attainment gap—a point that was powerfully enforced at a meeting of the Education and Culture Committee in the previous session of Parliament, when we took evidence from deaf learners and teachers, and when visits were undertaken to Windsor Park school in Falkirk and Forth Valley sensory centre. In its calls for the gap to be closed, the NDCS quite properly focuses on resources and the fact that specialist education services for deaf young people have, in some cases, been squeezed, and that there is therefore a diminishing workforce to ensure that pupils' needs are met. We know from the work of the committee that, between 2011 and 2015, the attainment gap between pupils with hearing impairments and those without increased by 2 percentage points in terms of those achieving at least one higher. Even more worrying, as a couple of members have noted this afternoon, data also shows that 11.8 per cent of deaf learners leave school without any qualifications. Mark Griffin has pointed to the work that the SQA can do in that regard, perhaps taking note of the examples that Maree Todd spoke about in her eloquent speech.

I think that we are all of the opinion that a national BSL plan will go a long way towards improving the future of pupils with hearing impairments, provided that there is an effective mechanism to measure performance and outcomes on a regular basis. A couple of years ago, the Education and Culture Committee heard the concerns of some local authorities about lines of accountability, with regard specifically to some of the existing legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, the legislation on parents' rights and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009. I think that a lot of those concerns have been addressed by the Government in this plan, but we must not lose sight of the fact that those pieces of legislation include responsibilities to help youngsters with hearing impairment.

There is an important link with our Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and Finland's sign language act of 2015, which the Education and Culture Committee considered. From the example of those acts, we can see that legislation is not enough in itself, as the better outcomes are also about recognising the intrinsic culture in the deaf community. That is something that has been mentioned by several members this afternoon—including, I may say, in relation to the unique ZS language, which we have heard on several occasions in this Parliament. Perhaps Mr Stevenson could inform us a little bit better about some of the basic principles of that ZS language from time to time. Nonetheless, he makes an important point by raising that.

The NDCS's call for a minimum qualification level in BSL for those professionals working with deaf learners to ensure that deaf learners have the same standards of teaching is clearly a good one. It would go a long way to narrowing the attainment gap. However, it would also be helpful to have further debate in this area, as other staffing issues are being discussed by the Education and Skills Committee around various aspects of minority learning, including for some ASN groups. There are implications for costs and the recruitment of the right staff. That debate is on-going in the committee just now and we should not lose sight of the fact that it must include BSL.

Of course, the attainment gap does not stop at school; it impacts on the positive destinations that deaf young people seek in later life, as we have heard from several speakers, including Graham Simpson. On average, 22 per cent of pupils with a hearing impairment go on to higher education, compared with 44 per cent of those without. The traditional system of lectures, seminars and tutorials at university can at times be a major obstacle to deaf students, although considerable improvements are being made. It is difficult for those who have hearing impairment to communicate with other students in group discussions, so the benefit of sharing knowledge and ideas is not always being extended to them.

Likewise, in a social setting, after the lectures and coursework are over for the day, the student experience can be one of exclusion for students who use sign language, so it is vital that student unions recognise the role that they can play in making sure that deaf students are represented and have exactly the same chance as others to fully participate in university or college life. To give them credit, some of the student unions have done a lot of work to make sure that that happens, although there is clearly more to do.

Mark Griffin made some excellent points about the extracurricular dimension. We need to think about that in a wider context too, because the ability to be included in the extracurricular activities that take place is important. Such activities are very much an intrinsic part of the educational experience and I would worry greatly if too many BSL pupils are losing out because they feel that they cannot contribute to those activities. We need to work hard on that.

I am conscious that I will be getting a sign from the Presiding Officer in a minute to conclude. To sum up, for far too long the deaf community has had a very raw deal, which has undermined the right of deaf people to do the best they can in their educational institution, whichever they find themselves in, and which has sometimes had serious implications for their ability to gain suitable employment and to participate fully in life in a way

that we all take for granted when we are in a non-deaf community.

The BSL plan is a huge step in the right direction and that is why we warmly welcome the progress to date and why we will most certainly be voting for the Scottish Government's motion at decision time. I end by complimenting Mark Griffin on all his work on what is clearly a very important issue.

16:48

Mark McDonald: I begin by thanking our two interpreters at the back of the chamber, Andrew and Yvonne, who have spent the afternoon trying valiantly to communicate the messages that members have been putting across in the chamber to BSL users watching this debate. I thank the interpreters very much for the efforts that they have put in to ensure that the debate is as accessible as possible.

I mentioned at the beginning of the debate the membership of the national advisory group and three of the group members are in the public gallery today—Natalie Greenall, Amy Dawson and Debra Wherrett. In particular, I want to thank Debra, who is a deafblind BSL user who has co-chaired the national advisory group alongside a member of the civil service.

I will take a moment to go through some of the points that members raised in their contributions to the debate. A number of members on all sides of the chamber, including Graham Simpson, Fulton MacGregor and Rhoda Grant, raised the issue of the shortage of qualified and registered BSL interpreters. We acknowledge that shortage, and the draft plan recognises that we need to consider ways to boost the profession and to increase the pool of qualified interpreters who are needed to work in specific settings such as health and justice. We will strive to increase the numbers of interpreters and to improve the quality of interpretation.

That brings me to another theme running through the debate—it was highlighted first by Jeremy Balfour and mentioned by other members—which is the level of qualifications among not only teachers of the deaf but communication support workers who support deaf pupils in schools. We recognise the concerns that exist, some of which were raised at the consultation event that took place in Edinburgh yesterday evening and focused specifically on education. We are clear about our expectation that appropriately qualified and skilled staff must be employed to fulfil duties under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 by providing support to pupils. We will carefully consider how we can support individuals

who require upskilling to be able to do that. I am sure that members on all sides of the Parliament would echo that aspiration.

Jeremy Balfour also raised the issue of support for families who have a deaf baby or child. By happy coincidence, the statement that I made earlier this afternoon on early learning and childcare has flowed through to the BSL debate. Our aspiration for all Scotland's children to have the best start in life extends to deaf children. We are committed to ensuring that families and carers with a deaf or deafblind child are given information about BSL and are supported to learn to sign to their child. That is one of the goals in the draft plan.

A number of members highlighted constituents in their contributions. It is great to know that there are so many individuals out there in communities who are doing great work and pushing forward to promote and encourage greater uptake and understanding of BSL. I commit the Government to working to achieve some of the goals that have been highlighted by Gillian Martin, Fulton MacGregor and Maree Todd, among others, in speaking about the work in which their constituents are engaged.

I turn to a point that Tavish Scott made. I am slightly worried that twice this afternoon he has referred to me as the great "conciliator", which I suppose is better than some of the things I am often called in the chamber. I now realise that he was not championing the fact that I have brought two consensual items of business to the chamber this afternoon—it is merely that he knows that we will rally round the motion this evening, so he was able to get away for his flight to Sumburgh. I am sure that he will check the *Official Report* of the debate later on.

Tavish Scott mentioned a constituent of his who has high aspirations to become the first deaf and BSL-using Prime Minister. I point out that the Scottish Government's access to elected office fund is a means by which his constituent and others who wish to seek elected office can do so. In the previous session of Parliament, our great friend and colleague Dennis Robertson was the first blind MSP to sit in the chamber, so I hold out hope that it will not be long before we have our first deaf MSP, and possibly our first BSL user, in the chamber.

I turn to other points that have been raised in the debate. Graham Simpson asked about the audit of interpreting services. We have committed to taking forward a landscape review of interpreting services, which will look at skill levels, training and regulation. On the issue of the committee inquiry into attainment that Liz Smith and other members raised, the Scottish Government has set up a working group to

address the inquiry's recommendations, which we are confident we can deliver on. We have already established a survey of local authorities to determine the level of qualification that BSL teachers have.

Liz Smith: The minister makes a good point. With regard to Mark Griffin's earlier question on the issue, can the minister confirm that he is having discussions with the SQA? The SQA is important for giving the BSL qualification the credibility that it deserves.

Mark McDonald: I will certainly go back and check what discussions have been had with the SQA and look at what we can do in relation to the point that Mark Griffin raised. Dingwall academy was highlighted as a positive example of using BSL that we should look at and Alison Johnstone said that we should look at how more schools could use BSL. I will take this opportunity, because ministers do not get such an opportunity often, to highlight the example from my constituency of Stoneywood primary school, which has established a BSL club that meets at lunch times and is led by one of the school's pupil support assistants, Mr McRobbie, who is a BSL user. Currently, 20 to 30 children attend the club and are learning BSL. There are therefore good examples out there. Members asked about how we can formalise such activity and ensure that children have appropriate opportunities to learn BSL and gain appropriate qualifications that would flow on from that, which is a point that merits consideration.

Miles Briggs asked how we can support local delivery in relation to the national plan. There will be a requirement on local authorities, health boards and further and higher education institutions to produce their own plans in relation to the 2015 act and how they will deliver on some of the wider national aspirations. There will be an ongoing dialogue in relation to that so that the high-level aspirations that we have outlined in the plan can be delivered at a local level.

Stewart Stevenson highlighted the fact that people can respond to the consultation via a YouTube video or a Vimeo clip and said that he will take note of that for future reference. I am sure that we all look forward to Mr Stevenson becoming a YouTube star as a consequence. Liz Smith invited Mr Stevenson to expand on the etymology of the ZS language, and I am sure that members will want to thank Liz Smith in their own way for that constructive suggestion and input to the debate.

It has been a very consensual debate on a very important issue. The Parliament came together in a fantastic way to pass the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill, which Mark Griffin introduced to Parliament. This debate is another example of the

Parliament working in the best possible and most collective way to ensure that we deliver the most positive outcomes for BSL users in Scotland.

Standing Order Rule Changes (Acting Conveners)

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-04661, in the name of Clare Adamson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on standing order rule changes.

16:59

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The Parliamentary Bureau recently wrote to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee about the situation where a committee convener is absent for an extended period of parental leave. The bureau asked us to consider whether standing orders could be revised so that an acting convener could be appointed in those circumstances.

We have considered the request carefully and we agree that it would be helpful to change the rules. The committee has proposed a new procedure in standing orders. Under the procedure, if a convener is absent for a period of parental leave, a member from the same party would be appointed to the committee on a temporary basis to cover the period of parental leave. The committee in question would then choose an acting convener from among the committee members who are from the same party as the convener. The acting convener's tenure would come to an end when the convener returned.

The procedure will allow members who become parents to retain their position as convener while taking a period of parental leave. It also respects the Parliament's decision in relation to the party affiliation of the convener.

This is a relatively small change to the rules. However, it sends out an important message that members will not be disadvantaged as a result of taking parental leave.

I am pleased to move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 2nd Report 2017 (Session 5), *Acting Conveners – Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 106), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 24 March 2017.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04776, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 28 March 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Continuation of Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Choice
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 29 March 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Finance and the Constitution;
 Economy, Jobs and Fair Work
followed by Scottish Liberal Democrat Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 March 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.45 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Mental Health Strategy
followed by Ministerial Statement: Transvaginal Mesh Implants
followed by Ministerial Statement: Unconventional Oil and Gas
followed by Ministerial Statement: Enterprise and Skills Review
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 4.45 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 18 April 2017

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

Wednesday 19 April 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform;
 Rural Economy and Connectivity
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 20 April 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.45 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of six Parliamentary Bureau motions.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2016 Amendment Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions of the First-tier Tax Tribunal for Scotland) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland Tax Chamber and Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Composition) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Tribunals (Listed Tribunals) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Tribunals (Scotland) Act 2014 (Ancillary Provisions) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions of the Upper Tax Tribunal for Scotland) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.—[Joe FitzPatrick]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We come to decision time. The first question is, that motion S5M-04789, in the name of Mark McDonald, on the consultation on the draft British Sign Language national plan, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the consultation on the first draft BSL National Plan; expresses its thanks to the BSL National Advisory Group whose knowledge and experience have informed and influenced the content of the plan; acknowledges the support and input from across the Parliament to develop and pass the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill in 2015; recognises that this is the first time that the Scottish Government has published a bilingual consultation in BSL and English; encourages people whose first or preferred language is BSL to respond to the consultation, and looks forward to the publication of the final version of the plan in October 2017.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-04661, in the name of Clare Adamson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on standing order rule changes, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 2nd Report 2017 (Session 5), *Acting Conveners – Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 106), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 24 March 2017.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that Parliamentary Bureau motions S5M-04777 to S5M-04782, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2016 Amendment Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions of the First-tier Tax Tribunal for Scotland) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland Tax Chamber and Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Composition) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Tribunals (Listed Tribunals) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Tribunals (Scotland) Act 2014 (Ancillary Provisions) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions of the Upper Tax Tribunal for Scotland) Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

Meeting closed at 17:02.

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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