



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Thursday 29 March 2018**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 29 March 2018

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

## General Question Time

### Bellgrove Hotel (Discussions)

**1. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Glasgow City Council, Police Scotland and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde regarding the Bellgrove Hotel. (S5O-01957)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Discussions between the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council remain on-going, as we consider that the wellbeing of the Bellgrove's residents would be best met through adopting a wider approach to address issues such as the provision of homelessness services for those with the most complex needs.

The homelessness and rough sleeping action group published its recommendations for ending rough sleeping earlier this month. They contain measures to support vulnerable homeless people with complex needs, who include many of those who reside at the Bellgrove. The measures include proposals to move to a rapid rehousing model and a housing first approach to people experiencing homelessness, which seeks to support those with needs such as mental health or addiction needs.

We have accepted all the recommendations in principle and will work closely with our partners to implement them. That includes continuing to work with Glasgow City Council to improve options and outcomes for those who currently use the Bellgrove Hotel.

**John Mason:** I welcome any progress to provide more support for what can be up to 140 vulnerable men in that establishment.

Does the minister agree that we also need a change in regulations? Either we need to tighten up on houses in multiple occupation licensing, or the Care Inspectorate needs to be given more power so that it can go into places such as the Bellgrove.

**Kevin Stewart:** The Bellgrove Hotel is not typical of homelessness accommodation. The case involves many complex issues, as Mr Mason is well aware. For that reason, I think that legislative change is unlikely to achieve the desired result.

It is the responsibility of local authorities to administer the licensing of HMOs, and they have a duty to take into account the condition of the living accommodation, as well as the safety and security of persons likely to occupy it. Glasgow City Council has previously taken action through HMO licensing to compel the owners of the Bellgrove Hotel to improve electrical safety and bathroom facilities.

The Care Inspectorate, which Mr Mason also mentioned, regulates the provision of care services as defined in schedule 12 to the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. However, as the Bellgrove Hotel is privately owned and the owners do not provide any care to the residents, there is no requirement for regulation by the Care Inspectorate.

That is why both the Government and the council believe that the solution has to be part of the wider delivery of homelessness services in the city. In that regard, the measures recommended by the homelessness and rough sleeping action group will play a vital role in resolving the situation at the Bellgrove.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Question 2 was not lodged.

### Council Tenants' Rights (Communal Repairs)

**3. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to protect the rights of council tenants who are in a minority position regarding essential communal repairs. (S5O-01959)

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Local authorities are required under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to keep the houses that they let

"wind and watertight and in all other respects reasonably fit for human habitation."

They are also required, under the Scottish social housing charter, to ensure that homes let by them in their capacity as a registered social landlord comply with the Scottish housing quality standard.

Where the local authority owns of some the flats in a tenement, it should work with other owners to maintain any part of the building that provides support or shelter to any other part. Local authorities have the same rights as other owners to enforce common works and carry out emergency works, and they also have recourse to their general powers to require owners in tenements to carry out work to repair or maintain substandard housing by serving work notices and maintenance orders.

**Angus MacDonald:** The power to recover what is referred to as "missing shares", which was introduced in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, is

very welcome. However, if local authorities are not prepared to use that power, tenants are left living for considerable periods in often unacceptable conditions. Responding to Ben Macpherson's members' business debate on 9 January, the minister stated that he intended to extend the missing shares powers later in the year. What progress has been made on that, and what more can the Scottish Government do to ensure that local authorities use the powers that they already have under the 2014 act to address the issue?

**Kevin Stewart:** Missing shares powers are available only if a majority of owners agree to carry out works. With substandard housing, all local authorities have powers to require owners to carry out work to bring houses up to standard. If housing is below the tolerable standard, the local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that it is closed, demolished or brought up to standard within a reasonable period.

Regulations to extend missing shares powers to permit registered social landlords to recover missing shares for common works are being drafted and will be laid before Parliament shortly.

It is for local authorities to determine how best to make use of their statutory powers to meet local conditions and priorities. However, I commend the work that is being taken forward by Scotland's Housing Network to share best practice and encourage the effective use of the new powers. I hope that all local authorities will take account of what the Scottish Housing Network is doing in that sharing of best practice.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Councils are largely not using the powers that they have because they see doing so as a risk. That aside, the minister will be aware that a cross-party working group is being established, co-convened by Ben Macpherson and me, to look at the very complex issues around tenement repairs. Will the minister pledge to work closely with our group as we develop proposals to solve the problems?

**Kevin Stewart:** On Graham Simpson's comment about councils' use of their powers, I am pleased to say that some councils that previously were not using missing shares powers are now doing so. I encourage all local authorities to use those powers to help the citizens in their areas.

I am more than willing to listen to the views of the group established by Ben Macpherson, and I will continue to work co-operatively and collaboratively with everyone on the issue. I wish the group well in its deliberations and I look forward to hearing in the very near future what it is up to.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 4 was not lodged.

### Bullying (School Environment)

**5. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that, in instances of bullying, schools act to protect both parties and ensure that the school environment remains a safe place. (S5O-01961)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Bullying of any kind is entirely unacceptable and must be addressed swiftly and effectively whenever it arises in schools. The Government has fully funded the respectme service, Scotland's anti-bullying service, since its inception. In 2018-19, we will provide more than £280,000 to respectme. That is direct support to all those working with children and young people to address all types of bullying effectively.

To support schools and local authorities, in November 2017 the Government published "Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People", which provides an overarching framework and context for all anti-bullying work undertaken in Scotland. It reflects the getting it right for every child approach and promotes working with children and young people to help change their behaviour.

**Brian Whittle:** I agree that the vast majority of schools act swiftly and appropriately to deal with instances of bullying. I raise the matter because of a disturbing case of a constituent's daughter who has been bullied for the past six years, in and out of school. Can the cabinet secretary tell me what recourse is available to parents when a school has not acted on bullying in the way that he would wish?

**John Swinney:** The approach that I set out in my original answer is designed to provide the reassurance that in all schools there is good practice that refers to and takes account of the "Respect for All" approach and the services that are available from respectme. If Mr Whittle wishes to raise the specific circumstances with me, I will look into them and raise the necessary concerns with the local authority and the school concerned to make sure that they are properly addressed.

Just the other week, the respectme organisation marked its 10th anniversary with an event in Parliament, which I attended. That evening, there was a presentation from Holy Cross high school in Hamilton on the new approach that the school is taking to tackling bullying. It is, in my estimation, one of the finest examples of a cohesive strategy to tackle bullying and to make sure that schools are the safe places that all of us want them to be.

There is excellent practice out there in Scottish schools. As with all challenges in education, the challenge is to make sure that such practice is

systemic, so that all young people in all circumstances have access to high-quality support in resolving these issues.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** What measures are in place in schools to educate pupils about the damage caused by insidious online bullying, which of course follows pupils from school to their bedroom?

**John Swinney:** Christine Grahame raises a very significant development in this area. Young people might have felt that they would have some protection at home from some of the experiences of bullying that they might fear in the community or at school, but digital connectivity and social media have now established the further connection that Christine Grahame mentioned.

I assure Christine Grahame that, in “Respect for All”, further steps have been taken to ensure that the behaviour that she quite rightly highlighted is fully incorporated into our thinking. The example that I cited to Mr Whittle of the experience in Holy Cross high school in Hamilton is a very good example of how the digital dimension has been fully incorporated into the approaches and support that are envisaged in the anti-bullying policies that are being pioneered in our schools.

### Review of Corroboration (Sexual Crimes)

**6. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to review the requirement for corroboration in relation to prosecuting reported sexual crimes. (S5O-01962)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** We proposed abolishing the requirement for corroboration in all criminal cases during the passage of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016. At that time, however, there was no legal or parliamentary consensus for the abolition.

We therefore asked Lord Bonomy to review what additional safeguards might be required if the corroboration rule were to be removed. The review recommended a wide range of substantive and constructive criminal justice reforms. One of the key recommendations of Lord Bonomy’s group was that research into jury reasoning and decision making should be undertaken, so that any changes to our jury system are informed by evidence that could point to safeguards if the rule were to be abolished. We took forward that recommendation, and that research is now well under way and is due to be completed in autumn 2019.

Any future consideration of corroboration reforms needs to await the findings of that important research and needs to be considered in

the wider context of that recommendation and the other recommendations of the Lord Bonomy report.

**Monica Lennon:** Emma Bryson is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse who recently bravely told her story to *The Scotsman*. Her case could not be prosecuted due to the requirement for corroboration. Rape Crisis Scotland says that that is the most common reason that is given to rape survivors for there being no prosecution. As the cabinet secretary is aware, in 2016-17 only 13 per cent of reported and attempted rape cases were prosecuted.

It has been three years since the Scottish Government made the commitment to review corroboration, to which the cabinet secretary referred. I welcome the update that the cabinet secretary has given, but survivors of rape want justice now. What decisive steps will the Government take to improve prosecution rates for this abhorrent crime?

**Michael Matheson:** I accept that the conviction rate for rape continues to be low in comparison with the rate for other offences. That reflects, in part, the challenging evidential requirements of proving rape, which includes the requirement for corroboration.

Monica Lennon will be aware that when the Scottish Government introduced the proposal to Parliament, her party opposed the abolition of corroboration—and in a very vigorous fashion. However, we have taken practical measures to address some of the issues in respect of improving the rate of convictions in rape cases. For example, we strengthened the law on sexual crime with the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009, which introduced for the first time a statutory definition of consent in rape cases. Just last year, we also introduced a new requirement for statutory jury directions to be provided by judges in rape trials.

It is worth pointing out that, overall, although the number of cases in which there are convictions remains too low, they are at twice the level they were at 10 years ago, and the level has nearly tripled since 2010-11. A key part of the work that has been done to help to address the issue is to make sure that we have enough advocacy workers to work with women who report rape, which is why we have continued to give funding to Rape Crisis Scotland to provide advocacy workers.

I hope that, as appears to be the case from the tone of the question that has been asked by Monica Lennon, there has been a change of heart in respect of the Labour Party’s position on corroboration, and that it will support any future

proposals to abolish it, if the Government introduces them.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** Will the cabinet secretary outline what action the Scottish Government is taking to reduce levels of domestic and sexual crime, and what support is given to the victims of such crimes?

**Michael Matheson:** We work with a range of stakeholders on matters relating to domestic abuse and sexual offences. As I have mentioned, we have already strengthened the legislation on definition in rape cases. In the past few months, we have also taken action with the passage of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, which provides an extended definition of domestic abuse that includes psychological, coercive and controlling behaviour.

Police Scotland has a domestic abuse task force that targets prolific offenders in domestic abuse, and it has introduced a domestic abuse disclosure scheme that has been operating since October 2015, with some 900 people having been told that their partners have histories of abusive behaviour.

As I also mentioned, advocacy workers have an important part to play in working with individuals who have experienced sexual crime, which is why we have provided £1.85 million to Rape Crisis Scotland to allow it to pursue an advocacy project to provide advocacy workers across Scotland—including, for the first time, in our island communities on Shetland and Orkney. Just last month, I announced an extension of that funding in order for Rape Crisis not only to continue the existing advocacy project but to increase support in areas where there is greatest demand.

We will continue to work with a range of organisations to ensure that we are doing everything possible to tackle domestic abuse and sexual crime.

### **Cannabis-derived Therapies (National Health Service)**

**8. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the prescription of cannabis-derived therapies on the NHS. (S5O-01964)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison):** Regulation for the licensing, safety and efficacy of medicines is currently reserved to the United Kingdom Government, and is the responsibility of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, which operates on a UK-wide basis. All medicinal products must be fully tested and researched before they can be licensed by either the MHRA or the European Medicines Agency. If a pharmaceutical company obtains such a licence, it

is for it to make a submission to the Scottish Medicines Consortium, requesting that the medicine be considered for routine or restricted use in NHS Scotland.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am very grateful to the cabinet secretary for that answer. My constituent Murray Gray suffers many violent seizures every single day, due to a rare form of epilepsy. He is just five years old. The only relief that can be afforded to Murray is in the properties of the cannabis derivative cannabidiol—also known as CBD—which is legal, but is not currently available on the national health service, for the reasons that have been outlined by the cabinet secretary.

Murray's mother Karen is willing to procure and administer cannabidiol herself, but wants medical support and advice in order that she can do so safely. Will the cabinet secretary work with NHS Scotland to permit the family's neurologist to support it in safe use of the therapy, and will she agree to meet Karen and myself to discuss the wider issues around Murray's situation?

**Shona Robison:** I have every sympathy for Murray Gray and his family and, of course, I would be happy to meet them. However, I see that in an interview that he gave to *The Scotsman* on 22 March, Alex Cole-Hamilton said that the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland will not approve a licence for cannabidiol's use. I hope that, in my first answer, I made it clear to Alex Cole-Hamilton that it is not the Scottish Government or the NHS that approves licences for use of such products. He was simply wrong about that. Under the terms of the current United Kingdom-wide regulations, manufacturers of medicinal products must, for good safety reasons, have a licence for their medicine before it can be placed on the market in the UK.

Currently, no licences for cannabidiol products have been obtained. At the moment, Sativex is the only medicine containing cannabis extracts that has been granted a licence for use in the UK. In order for it to be made available on the NHS in Scotland, a submission has to be made to the SMC, as I said in my first answer. A decision on whether to make a submission is entirely for the company, and it has so far chosen not to do so.

I am happy to continue a dialogue with Alex Cole-Hamilton, but it is important that we get the facts straight about where licences are issued. That is not done by the Scottish Government or the NHS in Scotland. I am happy to meet the member and the family that he mentioned to discuss the issue further.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Economic Growth

**Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):**

The rate of economic growth in Scotland is a third of the rate in the UK as a whole. Also, the Scottish National Party's economic plan has been lost in the weeds thanks to a myriad of different strategies, advisory groups and bodies that are now cluttering the landscape. Does the First Minister think that those two facts are connected?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** On the landscape, of course the Scottish Government has recently established the new strategic board to better align the work of our enterprise and skills agencies. I seem to recall that many aspects of that board were opposed by other parties in Parliament. We want to ensure that, through that strategic board, which is ably chaired by Nora Senior, we get maximum impact and value for the around £2 billion that we spend every year on enterprise and skills.

The point about economic growth is interesting. I suspect that Ruth Davidson has partly been prompted in her questioning by yesterday's Fraser of Allander institute report. I am sure that she paid it very close attention because, for the past number of months now, she has hitched her wagon to the claim that growth in Scotland is projected to be lower than that in the rest of the UK. However, yesterday's Fraser of Allander institute report shows that its growth projections for Scotland for next year and the year after are actually higher than the Office for Budget Responsibility's projections for the rest of the UK, and that projected unemployment is lower than that for the UK. I suggest that, when we add that to the fact that productivity growth has been higher in Scotland over the past decade and the fact that our international goods exports are growing at a faster rate than those in the rest of the UK, Ruth Davidson's arguments are simply shown to be nonsense and fall to pieces altogether.

Particularly today, which marks a year to go until Ruth Davidson's party drags us out of the EU against our will, she has no credibility on the economy for as long as she supports a hard Brexit. She cannot lecture others on economic growth when she supports a policy that all the experts say will hit growth in this country by more than £2,000 per person. Ruth Davidson's credibility on the economy is zero.

**Ruth Davidson:** I am delighted that the First Minister mentioned the Fraser of Allander institute's report on the Scottish Government. If

the Presiding Officer will permit me the time, I will quickly run through the list that it produced setting out the Scottish Government's streamlined plan for the economy. There is an economic growth strategy, a digital strategy, an energy strategy, a circular economy strategy, a climate change plan, a trade and investment strategy, a labour market strategy, a social enterprise strategy and a hydro nation strategy. There is a strategy action plan for women in enterprise, a science, technology, engineering and mathematics strategy, a manufacturing action plan, a youth employment strategy, an innovation action plan, a national islands plan, an agenda for cities and, finally, an Arctic strategy. Those are overseen by a grand total of nine Government agencies and 32 local authorities and, in turn, they are informed by at least 18 further advisory boards.

Let us look at what the Fraser of Allander institute says. It says:

"Back in 2007, the Scottish Government promised a streamlined and effective policy landscape for the economy. Ten years later it may be time to look at this again."

That is the institute just being polite, is it not?

**The First Minister:** Ruth Davidson mentioned the Arctic; it is certainly true to say that Scotland is going cold on the Tories. That is the case.

Ruth Davidson lists a number of strategies. The women in enterprise strategy, for example, is extremely important. We know that if women were to start businesses in Scotland at the same rate as men do, it would be worth billions of pounds to our economy. Having listed the strategies, will she perhaps, when she stands up to ask her next question, list the ones that she wants the Scottish Government to scrap? I would be keen to hear her answer that question.

The strategic board is all about making sure that all that work is aligned. I think that Nora Senior, who is chairing the board, will do a very good job, and the board is already hard at work.

Ruth Davidson wants to quote the Fraser of Allander institute. Let me quote some more from the institute's report:

"Scotland has a strong and prosperous economy".

That is on page 4.

"Scotland retains clear economic strengths."

That is on page 24.

"Scotland's labour market has held up ... well despite a challenging growth environment."

That is on page 16, as is:

"Unemployment ... remains low by historical standards".

On page 4, again, the institute says:

“Scottish exports have grown relatively strongly in 2017.”

As I said, the Fraser of Allander projections for growth for Scotland are higher next year and the year after than the OBR’s projections for the UK are, which seems to hole Ruth Davidson’s argument entirely below the waterline.

I come back to what is possibly the most important quotation in the report. It is on page 4 again, if Ruth Davidson wants to look it up. As I said—and I know that Ruth Davidson does not like hearing this—it is particularly relevant today. It is:

“Brexit remains the biggest challenge on the horizon.”

As long as Ruth Davidson is supporting a policy that is going to damage growth in the economy, she has no credibility. Perhaps when she gets to her feet in a few seconds’ time she will tell us whether she will go back to her old position of supporting membership of the European Union. If she will not go back to that position, will she go back to her old position of retaining membership of the single market? If she does not, I say again that she has zero credibility on the economy.

**Ruth Davidson:** The truth of it is clear. If strategies and press releases were enough to grow the Scottish economy, we would be steaming ahead by now, but as it is, we are trapped in a Scottish National Party slow lane.

I know that the First Minister likes to point the finger at Brexit for everything. She has done that twice already today. How can she explain this, then? Not only is growth for Scotland running at a third of the rate of that of the UK but small business confidence in Scotland is at minus 18, whereas in the rest of the UK it is at plus 6—a 24-point gap.

The First Minister blames Brexit for everything. Is it just conceivably possible that our problems lie slightly closer to home?

**The First Minister:** I can understand why Ruth Davidson wants to ignore what I have pointed out twice, which is that the economic growth projections in the Fraser of Allander institute’s report, for next year and the year after, are actually higher for Scotland than the OBR’s are for the rest of the UK.

I am not sure whether Ruth Davidson is prepared to lay the reasons for that at Theresa May’s door, but she wants to ignore the elephant in the room, which is Brexit, so let me remind her of some of the figures. It is simply not credible for a member to come to the chamber and say that they are really, really concerned about economic growth when they know—as Ruth Davidson does—what the figures show that the impact of Brexit is going to be. If we fall back into World Trade Organization trading rules, we know that that will hit our economy to the tune of more than

£2,000 per person, with an 8.5 per cent hit to our gross domestic product. A free trade agreement with the EU would reduce growth by 6.1 per cent, which is £1,600 per person. European Economic Area membership—the least damaging option—would still hit growth by 2.7 per cent, or £700 per person.

Does Ruth Davidson want to tell us which of those options she supports? All of them hit growth in our economy. It is the Tories who are taking us out of the EU, and as long as that is the case, they have no credibility when they come to the chamber and talk about economic growth—and everybody out there knows it.

**Ruth Davidson:** Here is where we stand. Scotland is economically underperforming now. The First Minister says that Brexit is to blame, but there is still a year to go. We have had 10 wasted years under an SNP Government.

This is the Government’s record. We have the lowest rate of business growth in the UK. Productivity in Scotland is at the lowest level for eight years. For the next three years, we have the weakest projected economic growth of any country, not just in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development but in the European Union.

Is it not time that the First Minister stopped blaming Brexit and looked to herself to get Scotland’s economy moving?

**The First Minister:** Let us look at Scotland’s performance. I will not repeat the Fraser of Allander report’s points about growth for the fourth time. Perhaps when Ruth Davidson gets the chance, she can go and read them.

Let us look at some of the other aspects of growth. Productivity growth has been higher in Scotland during the past decade than it has been in the rest of the UK. Figures from the past year show that international goods exports are growing at a faster rate than those in any other part of the UK, at 19 per cent. Unemployment is close to a record low. For 11 of the past 13 months, unemployment in Scotland has either been lower than or the same as it is in the rest of the UK. Youth employment is at a higher rate than it is in the rest of the UK. Female employment is at a higher rate than it is in the rest of the UK.

Scotland’s economy is strong and we are determined to make it even stronger. However, we are against the challenge of ideologically-obsessed Tory Brexiteers who want to rip our country out of the EU against our will. That is the reality.

## Teachers (Industrial Action)

### 2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):

Three years ago, the First Minister told the *Daily Record* that education was her top priority. She said:

“Over the next months and years, making sure the Scottish education system becomes, genuinely, one of the best in the world will be a driving and defining priority of my Government.”

How does the prospect of Scotland’s teachers taking industrial action because of this Government’s mishandling of their pay and workload help with that aim?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Clearly it does not, which is why we do not want to be in that situation. That is why we became the first Government anywhere in the UK and, when we take the national health service out of the equation, the only Government in the UK, including the Welsh Government, that has lifted the 1 per cent public sector pay cap.

Pay negotiations are under way. In the case of teachers, those are tripartite negotiations that involve the unions, the councils as employers, and the Government. The Government is involved in the negotiations. I hope that they will continue constructively, and that we reach an end result that avoids the scenario that Richard Leonard has outlined and makes sure that our teachers get the decent pay rise that they deserve, and that we can all get on with the rest of the detailed work on raising attainment in our schools.

I should point out that I did not just say what I said three years ago in the *Daily Record*; if Richard Leonard had been listening, he would have heard me say it countless times since.

**Richard Leonard:** The fact is that, under this Government, teachers have seen their pay fall in value by 25 per cent in real terms. They have gone from being among the best-paid teachers in the developed world to among the worst. They have seen 3,500 of their colleagues disappear from the classroom. They are now teaching some of the biggest classes in the western world. Is it any wonder therefore that so many teacher training places lie vacant? Is it any wonder that Scotland’s teachers feel undervalued? Is it any wonder that they are saying that now is the time for action? The First Minister cannot close the attainment gap between the richest and poorest children in our schools with underpaid and overworked teachers.

I have recently spent a few mornings on the picket line outside Scotland’s universities. I do not want to find myself on the picket line outside Scotland’s schools, but if I have to, I will. I value education and I value our teachers. What will the

First Minister do to show that she values our teachers?

**The First Minister:** With my colleagues in the Scottish Government, I have lifted the 1 per cent public sector pay cap. That was the starting point for the tripartite negotiations that I have spoken about.

It is a bit rich, is it not, for Richard Leonard to come here and ask me those questions—of course, he is perfectly entitled to do so—when his own Labour colleagues in Wales have not done what the Scottish Government has done? They have not lifted the 1 per cent public sector pay cap, but we have done that because, uniquely among Governments across the United Kingdom, we recognise that that pay restraint cannot continue. That pay restraint was designed to save jobs during the recession, but we recognise that, with the rising cost of living, that is not sustainable. That is why we have taken the action of lifting the 1 per cent public sector pay cap, and we will now go into negotiations not just with teachers but with the health service unions, to ensure that our public sector workers are properly rewarded and that we get on with the job of improving the quality of our vital public services.

That is what I am doing, and I will continue to get on with that job. Richard Leonard can go and spend his time in whatever way he sees fit.

**Richard Leonard:** This is urgent. The pay review is due to conclude with a pay rise being implemented in April, which is this weekend. The First Minister sits at the negotiating table. Local authorities have had their budgets cut year on year. The only thing that can stop our schools facing industrial action, and our children’s education facing disruption, is the Scottish Government finally paying teachers what they are worth. If education really is the First Minister’s driving and defining priority, will she agree to fund a proper, fair pay rise for our teachers?

**The First Minister:** Local government budgets are being increased in real terms in the coming financial year—I should remind Richard Leonard that he and his Labour colleagues voted against that in the budget. Again, it is a bit rich for him to come here and ask me to do things that he and his colleagues, here in Scotland and elsewhere across the UK, do not do when they have the opportunity.

As I said, there are real-terms increases for councils. Also, as we have discussed many times in the chamber, £750 million is being directed to our attainment fund over this session of Parliament; much of that money goes directly to headteachers to spend on measures to raise attainment.

I make no apology for the fact that we will take forward the discussions on teachers pay in the proper way, through the tripartite negotiation framework that is in place. As Richard Leonard rightly says, the Government is a part of that, and we will take forward those negotiations in good faith. I would have thought that Richard Leonard, as a former trade union official, would welcome that commitment to on-going proper negotiation.

**The Presiding Officer:** There are a couple of constituency questions, the first of which is from Fulton MacGregor.

#### **TOM Group Ltd (Administration)**

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I am grateful that you have allowed me to ask this question, Presiding Officer, in place of my colleague, Alex Neil, who is unable to do so as he is at a funeral.

Following yesterday's announcement that TOM Vehicle Rental Ltd in Airdrie is to close with the loss of more than 400 jobs, many of them in my constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston, will the First Minister outline what support she and the Scottish Government are providing to ensure that those jobs are saved?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I was extremely concerned to learn that TOM Group Ltd has entered administration. I know that this will be an extremely difficult time for the employees of that company and their families, and for the local community that is affected by the decision. Scottish Enterprise has contacted the administrators to understand whether it can provide any assistance, and I noted remarks from the administrator regarding the potential to find a buyer for Alistair Fleming Ltd in Kilmarnock, which may see the employees of that subsidiary transfer to new owners.

In addition to working positively where we can with the administrators, our partnership action for continuing employment team yesterday met employees at the base in Airdrie. Arrangements are under way for a PACE event to take place next Friday, 6 April, to which all employees will be invited. By providing skills development and employability support, PACE aims to help anyone who is affected by redundancy to get back into work as quickly as possible. I can assure Fulton MacGregor, and of course Alex Neil, who is the constituency member, that the Scottish Government will continue to take whatever action we can to support both the company and, crucially, the employees affected.

#### **NHS Ayrshire and Arran (Deficit)**

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** The First Minister will be aware of NHS Ayrshire and Arran's projected

year-end deficit of £23 million, which was caused by efficiency savings not being delivered and, more understandably, by winter pressures through December, January and February and the need to provide bed space and local doctors to meet the highest demand rate in Scotland at that time. Notwithstanding the efficiency savings not being met, will the First Minister support NHS Ayrshire and Arran's request for loan funding or brokerage—to use the technical term—to cover that deficit?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I understand that the matter is already being discussed with NHS Ayrshire and Arran and there is a commitment from the Government, in principle, to provide brokerage support to deal with the situation that John Scott has outlined. I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport would be happy to update him when discussions conclude.

#### **Trade Union Facility Time (West Dunbartonshire Council)**

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** On the day that the First Minister was meeting the Scottish Trades Union Council to discuss fair work, Scottish National Party councillors in West Dunbartonshire Council were cutting jobs and trade union facility time. Does the First Minister agree with that attack on trade unions and does she believe that those actions fit with the fair work agenda that she is so right to promote?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** It is for local councils to take decisions as they think appropriate. However, that particular case was raised by trade unions in that meeting—rightly and understandably—and I made clear to them, as I make clear publicly in Parliament today, my support for properly resourced facility time, not just because that is right for trade unions but because it helps employers and is good for positive industrial relations. I saw that in the health service when I was health secretary and that principle also applies more widely.

I consider the cutting of facility time by any employers to be a false economy. I encourage all employers—local authorities or any other public or private sector employers—to see the value of facility time.

#### **Ayrshire Growth Deal**

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** On a visit to Ayr today, the Prime Minister announced that the United Kingdom Government will formally begin talks with local partners for a new growth deal for Ayrshire. That is after considerable pressure being applied by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown. Patricia Gibson MP led a

House of Commons debate on the deal and pressure also came from the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee. The deal is expected to significantly bolster Ayrshire's economy, create jobs and boost productivity. The First Minister will welcome the announcement, but does she agree that we need a timetable for action, which the Scottish Government and the three Ayrshire councils have sought since 2016, and which we did not get from the Prime Minister this morning?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I agree with that very much. If a commitment to talk about an Ayrshire growth deal is enough for the Tories to cheer, it shows that they do not have very much else to be cheerful about. I welcome the commitment, as far as it goes. However, the time for talking is coming to an end. In Ayrshire, it is time for the Tory Government to put its money where its mouth is. The Scottish Government is ready to do that, but when will the Tories be ready to do that, too?

We have at least matched every growth deal that has been announced so far—in some cases we have more than matched the growth deals. I do not know why the Tories are dragging their feet over my home county of Ayrshire. I hope that we can tie them down to a timetable and replace the warm words that we heard from the Prime Minister this morning with cold hard cash from the Tories. That is what people in Ayrshire want.

#### **Road Equivalent Tariff (Northern Isles)**

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Last August, the First Minister finally committed to introducing road equivalent tariff on northern isles ferry routes from the summer of 2018—10 years after RET was introduced on west coast routes. However, as we approach the Easter weekend, there is still no sign of the cheaper fares being introduced and, more worryingly still, there is no formal start date. Does the First Minister accept that the on-going lack of clarity is unhelpful, particularly for the islands' vital tourism sector, which relies heavily on advance bookings over the peak summer period? Will she commit to ensuring that a formal start date for the long overdue introduction of RET on routes serving Orkney and Shetland is announced before Parliament returns after the Easter recess?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I certainly agree with Liam McArthur about the potential of RET. We have seen that potential turn into reality in other parts of Scotland, where it has already been introduced. I will ask Humza Yousaf to write to the member with an update on the timescale and start date. I am sure that he will be very willing to talk to the member further. I am sure that Liam McArthur will bring the matter back to

Parliament if he is not satisfied with that answer—but I hope that he will be.

#### **Brexit**

**3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** It is just a year until the United Kingdom Government proposes to take us out of Europe in defiance not only of how people in Scotland voted but of the facts about the country's best interests. As ever more information becomes public about the fundamentally compromised nature of the referendum process, it is hard to believe that the UK Government's Brexit extremists are not only unwilling to take seriously the questions about the legitimacy of the result but are even prepared to use the sexuality of a whistleblower to discredit him.

Will the First Minister commit to continuing to oppose the Brexit process in principle? If that is done to us and we are dragged out of Europe, will she commit to immediately campaign to get us back in as a full member state?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I do not think that my views on membership of the European Union are any mystery. I oppose Brexit in principle, I do not want us to leave the EU, and I want Scotland to continue to be a proud European nation.

On other aspects of Patrick Harvie's question, many of the revelations and allegations that we have heard over the past couple of weeks are deeply and profoundly concerning. The outing of the whistleblower by a number 10 member of staff was utterly disgraceful and should be condemned by everybody, and the Prime Minister's response to that was woefully inadequate.

In the past days, serious questions have been raised about the conduct of the leave campaign. It is clear that I cannot answer those questions, but they merit serious and in-depth investigation.

Today, we are one year from the date when the UK is supposed to leave the European Union, and it is utterly inexplicable and shameful that people do not have any more detailed answers to the questions that they had about the future relationship with the European Union than they had on referendum day. That is largely because we have a deeply divided Tory party that puts its ideological interests ahead of the interests of the country. For as long as that remains the case, the interests of not just Scotland but the whole of the UK will be deeply damaged. That will be the Tory legacy to Scotland and the rest of the UK, and future generations will never forgive the Tories for that.

**Patrick Harvie:** The Greens will certainly continue to be committed to this country's European future. We are a European country, and

we will continue to be so even if it takes time to get back in.

The Scottish Government's Brexit legislation at least has better inclusion of environmental principles than the UK legislation has, and the Scottish Government has said that it supports evidence-based policy. However, the Scottish Government does not always like the consequences. Fish are one of the environmental resources that can clearly be managed only on a shared basis among countries. Does the First Minister accept that, without the common fisheries policy, we would not have cod left in the sea or in the shops? Surely the Scottish Government must accept that, whether we are in or out of the European Union, that shared approach to a shared environmental resource will always be necessary.

**The First Minister:** Over the past number of years, Scottish fishermen have discharged their responsibilities to conservation, and they should be credited for doing that. Equally, what my party and I think is on record. I think that it was back in 2004 that a Scottish National Party MP introduced a private member's bill in the House of Commons to argue that we should come out of the common fisheries policy. Even taking into account the points that Patrick Harvie has made, the common fisheries policy is not fair to Scottish fishermen. That is why I do not support it.

More generally, Patrick Harvie is right to say that our UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill gives greater protection to the European charter of fundamental rights and to environmental protections, for example. It is possibly because the UK Government knows that the Scottish Government wants to continue to extend such protections that it is still trying a power grab to centralise those powers in Westminster, rather than passing them to exactly where they belong, which is the Scottish Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** There are a couple of supplementaries.

### Seasonal Migrant Labour (Agriculture)

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware of the importance of continuing access to seasonal migrant labour for soft fruit farmers in my constituency and wider Scottish agriculture. On 4 February, on a visit to Angus, Michael Gove promised farmers that there would be "complete clarity" around establishing a seasonal agricultural workers scheme by March. Here we are at the end of March, and there is nothing.

In the past few days, the Conservative chair of Westminster's Environment, Food and Rural

Affairs Committee has accused the Minister of State for Immigration of "fiddling while Rome burns" over this issue. Does the First Minister share my deep concern about the impact that that disgraceful Tory inaction is having on Scottish agriculture?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** This is the point at which the Tories in the chamber look at their feet—[*Interruption.*]—or they make lots of noise just to try to hide their deep embarrassment at what is happening. The lesson of at least the last year—perhaps Ruth Davidson might want to listen to this—is that we cannot trust a single word that Michael Gove says. When his press releases are co-authored by Ruth Davidson, we clearly cannot trust a single word that she says either.

The fact of the matter is that the clarity that was promised by Michael Gove and others has not been delivered. We have no more clarity today than we did on referendum day or on the day article 50 was triggered. That is disgraceful and it matters to people the length and breadth of this country—it matters to people in our rural economy; it matters to people in our financial services sector; and it matters to people in our national health service. Instead of shouting abuse when people have the temerity to raise the issue in the chamber, the Tories should be utterly ashamed of the position that their party has put this country in.

### Protection of Mountain Hares

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** New footage of the sickening slaughter of mountain hares has been reported by the BBC today. Has the fact that the evidence comes from well-regarded animal welfare groups finally convinced the Government that voluntary restraint is sadly lacking on too many Scottish shooting estates? When and with whom will the urgent meetings that the Government is now seeking take place, and when will the Scottish Government introduce new legal protection for this fabulous iconic animal?

**The First Minister:** I share Alison Johnstone's concern—and her anger, which is evident in her voice—about some of the images that we are seeing on our screens today. There is real public concern about this iconic species of the Scottish mountains, and that is a concern that we share. Large-scale culling of mountain hares could put their conservation status at risk: that is clearly unacceptable. I know that the pictures to which Alison Johnstone refers will be distressing to many people.

Alison Johnstone asked who will be at the meetings that the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform has talked about. The meetings will take place with all relevant stakeholders, landowner groups, gamekeepers, and environmental organisations. I

make it very clear that the Government is exploring all the available options in order to prevent mass culls of mountain hares. One of those options, of course, is legislation and a licensing scheme. What we are seeing is not acceptable. That is the very clear message from the Government.

### Food Banks

**4. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the role of food banks. (S5F-02192)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** My view is very simple; nobody in a nation as rich as Scotland should have to use food banks, so we will continue to challenge the United Kingdom Government welfare cuts that are pushing so many people into crisis and dependency on food banks.

We want to eradicate the need for emergency food support in Scotland. We have established a £1 million a year fair food fund, which supports people, in dignified ways, to reduce and remove reliance on emergency food. Last week, we announced a further £1 million over the next two years to support children who face food insecurity during school holidays.

We should remember, notwithstanding our disgust that anybody has to rely on a food bank, that for some people they are a lifeline right now, so we should also take the opportunity to thank the people who contribute to food banks and the many volunteers and staff who support them.

**Christine Grahame:** I thank the First Minister for her answer. There are at least seven food banks in my constituency; one has given out food to 471 children. Although I am sure, as the First Minister has said, that we would all want to record our thanks to the people who support food banks as volunteers or contributors, is not it shameful that there is a need for them? Should not we all say that they should not exist in the first place? Does the First Minister agree that they are a terrible indictment of failing Tory policies, in particular benefits system policies, because their use is being exacerbated by the roll-out of universal credit? There can be no greater indictment than to have children queuing for food parcels.

**The First Minister:** I absolutely agree with that. The situation is an indictment of austerity policy and it is an indictment of Tory cuts to the social security safety net that should be a valued part of any decent society. People do not have to take my word for that; the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said that just the benefits freeze

"is the single biggest policy driver"

behind rising poverty, hitting families who are in work and families who are out of work.

The Resolution Foundation estimates that the UK Government's policies will leave the poorest third of—[*Interruption.*] Ruth Davidson is chatting away, but she might want to listen to this. The Resolution Foundation estimates that the UK Government's policies will leave the poorest third of households on average £745 a year worse off by 2022. It also said that

"The coming year ... is set to be the second biggest single year of welfare cuts since the crisis".

Tory cuts are driving people to food banks across our country. That is utterly disgraceful. We should aspire to be a country in which no child and no family has to rely on food banks. That is why we will continue to do everything that we can through the funds that I have already mentioned. It is why we will continue to argue against the cuts and continue to argue for power over welfare to lie with the Scottish Parliament, so that we can ensure dignity for the poorest people in our society.

### British Transport Police (Merger)

**5. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that more than £400,000 was spent on consultants to oversee the British Transport Police merger. (S5F-02196)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The costs of integration that were identified by the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland are small in comparison with the operational costs of transport policing. As is the case with any transformation, the service will require access to specialist skills and expertise, if it is to deliver. The total cost of the contract—£400,000—is split equally between Police Scotland and the British Transport Police Authority, which reflects the partnership approach to integration. That amount covers the total cost of the contract up to 1 April 2019. In securing those skills, we expect the service to demonstrate best use of public funds, with the necessary oversight being provided by the SPA.

**Liam Kerr:** That is not the only cost that is spiralling. Last week, the British Transport Police Authority board was told that another £700,000 could be spent on consultants in the next year, and that is just scoping. This morning, there were reports that there is a potential pensions black hole of £100 million. The British Transport Police Federation has proposed an alternative structure that respects devolution of transport policing, but avoids many of the problems. Is not it time to back those plans?

**The First Minister:** On pensions, it is important to point out again that the Scottish Government has made a very clear commitment to a triple-lock guarantee that will protect the jobs, pay and pensions of British Transport Police officers and staff who transfer to Police Scotland.

The integration is overseen by the joint programme board, which has already done analysis that is leading to re-evaluation of the timescale for integration. It is right and proper that that continues to be overseen by the programme board, which involves the SPA, the British Transport Police Authority, the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government. Decisions will continue to be taken properly and in good order, and we will continue to do everything that we can to engage with the staff who will be affected, as we proceed with integration over the next few months.

### Response to “Punish a Muslim” Campaign

**6. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to reassure and protect communities in response to the “Punish a Muslim” campaign. (S5F-02197)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I utterly condemn this disgusting, so-called campaign. I do so in the strongest possible terms and I am sure that that sentiment is shared by members across this chamber. We must all stand together against such hate and we must be clear that, in Scotland, we will always challenge prejudice and discrimination.

We are engaging with the United Kingdom Government, Police Scotland and the Muslim Council for Scotland to ensure the safety of our valued Muslim communities. On Tuesday, Police Scotland and Scottish Government officials attended the second meeting of the cross-party group on tackling Islamophobia at which the issue was discussed. We are also taking active steps to tackle prejudice and hate, as outlined in my recent correspondence with Anas Sarwar.

**Anas Sarwar:** I ask members to imagine that they are a Muslim woman or child—I emphasise “woman” because there is a clear gendered nature to racism and Islamophobia—and that they are reading the following:

“Punish a Muslim ... There will be rewards based on actions taken ...

10 points: Verbally abuse a Muslim

25 points: Pull the head scarf off a Muslim ‘woman’

50 points: Throw acid in face of a Muslim

100 points: Beat up a Muslim

250 points: Torture a Muslim using electrocution, skinning, use of a rack

500 points: Butcher a Muslim using gun, knife, vehicle or

otherwise

1000 points: Burn a ... mosque”

That is shocking, shameful and sickening. Will the First Minister and, indeed, the Parliament send a message to all our diverse communities that Scotland is as much their country as anyone else’s, that this is their home and that we stand with them, and that we ask them to go about their daily lives more vigilantly, look out for each other and, if they see or suspect anything, report it to the police? Will the First Minister and the Parliament send a message to the haters that an attack on one Scot, regardless of faith or race, is an attack on all Scots and we will never let them win? [Applause.]

**The First Minister:** In some ways, I do not need to add to Anas Sarwar’s comments, because he has captured everything that needs to be said, but, to be clear that the message comes from me as strongly as it does from anybody else, I will add some comments.

I find it difficult to find words that are adequate to describe or condemn what Anas Sarwar just read out. It is sickening, appalling, disgusting and deeply disturbing. It is all of that and more, but none of that does it justice and it certainly does not do justice to what I feel and what I know we all feel about it. As many of us do, I have many friends and constituents in the Muslim community, so I know and see first hand the impact that such prejudice, hate and discrimination has on them, and I feel deeply for every one of them.

It is very important for us to recognise that the attacks are directed at the Muslim community and not all of us can pretend to know exactly how that feels, but all of us should be absolutely clear when we say that we treat such attacks on the Muslim community or any individual Muslim as attacks on all of us. For all our political divisions and debates, this is one Scotland and, for anybody who chooses to live here—no matter their faith and no matter the country that they come from—this is their country and their home. We value them and we want them here. That is the message that should ring out from this Parliament. Whatever else divides us, let us be absolutely united in saying that the people who perpetrate hate crime—that is what it is—of that nature will never be allowed to win, because Scotland will stand united against them, and that unity will always prevail. [Applause.]

### Devolved Powers (Negotiations)

**7. Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** Before I start my question, I associate myself with the comments made by Anas Sarwar and the First Minister.

To ask the First Minister what progress the Scottish Government is making on negotiations regarding devolved powers, in light of it being one year until the UK is scheduled to leave the EU. (S5F-02204)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have been clear that the Government cannot and will not recommend that the Scottish Parliament gives its consent to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill without changes being made to protect devolution. We have already set out to the United Kingdom Government the changes that could resolve the issue, but it still insists on the right to take control of devolved powers without the consent of this Parliament, regardless of its views. We have repeatedly said that we are ready to agree UK-wide frameworks where they will be in Scotland's interests, but they have to be agreed and not imposed.

Last week, the Parliament overwhelmingly agreed to pass the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill, which provides an alternative should an agreement with the UK Government not be reached on changes to the withdrawal bill. However, we continue our discussions with the UK Government and will continue to make every effort to reach a conclusion that respects the devolution settlement. Proper respect for the devolution settlement is absolutely a red line. I have said that before and I will continue to say it.

**Ivan McKee:** I welcome the document that the Government published today outlining the concerns of real people on Brexit. Does the First Minister agree that many of those concerns could be addressed by staying in the single market and, therefore, it is time for the UK Government to take seriously the proposals that have been made to keep the UK in the single market and the customs union rather than continuing to put Scotland's future interests at risk?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I agree. I want us to stay in the European Union. I could not be clearer about that, but, if the UK is to leave the European Union, there is absolutely no doubt that the least-worst option—if I can describe it in that way—is to remain the single market and the customs union. All the economic analysis shows that that is the least-damaging option, and many of the other worries that people have about, for example, freedom of movement and the impact on different sectors would also be allayed if we were to stay in the single market and the customs union.

I still hope that we can find consensus that unites us around that issue. What gives me hope is that I know that Ruth Davidson used to believe it, because the week after the referendum, I think, she challenged me in the chamber to protect our membership of the single market. If she can find it

within herself to stand up and be counted on that again, I would certainly welcome that.

I also know that there are voices within the Scottish Labour Party who, just today, are saying to Richard Leonard, "Stop supporting a Tory hard Brexit." I think that the wording is, "Will he rise to the challenge?", and I think that some of his colleagues have said that future generations will not forgive those who stand idly by and watch the Tories do real economic damage to our country.

I hope that Ruth Davidson rediscovers her former convictions and I hope that the voices in Scottish Labour that are calling for membership of the single market manage to turn Richard Leonard away from being a hard Brexiteer and towards a more sensible position. If that happens, this Parliament can be united, and then perhaps we can have greater influence on the direction of travel in the UK. My challenge goes out to those across this chamber to unite behind what is right for Scotland.

## Scottish Apprenticeship Week

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-10268, in the name of Jamie Halcro Johnston, on Scottish apprenticeship week 2018. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that 5 to 9 March 2018 is Scottish Apprenticeship Week; understands that this year's theme is Apprenticeships are the Business; appreciates that the week aims to highlight the importance and value of apprenticeships to individuals, businesses and the economy, with events, visits and activity taking place across the country to encourage more employers to take on apprentices and ask young people to consider an apprenticeship; notes the emergence of foundation and graduate schemes, which now complement modern apprenticeships; acknowledges that Members are being encouraged to get involved by visiting an apprenticeship employer or training provider in their area, and hopes that all of the employers, training providers and apprentices involved in the activities have a successful week.

12:48

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** First, I thank the businesses, employers and everyone else who contributed to this year's Scottish apprenticeship week. Special mention must go to Skills Development Scotland, which helped with much of the organisation and arranged the visits that many members who are in the chamber will have enjoyed. I am sure that we will hear more about those experiences later.

I understand from SDS that 99 visits to businesses and training providers took place as a result of apprenticeship week, involving 92 MSPs from across all parties. Over 120 organised events took place, with a further range of employers, training providers and partner organisations taking the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of their apprentices.

This year's theme, "Apprenticeships are the business", was designed to convey the value of apprentices to employers across the country. My visit was to Leonardo's airborne and space systems division here in Edinburgh, and I was heartened to see the business's commitment to investing in building skills and providing training. I thank Allan Colquhoun and his colleagues at Leonardo for what was a fascinating and encouraging visit. As well as the work that the apprentices are doing on cutting-edge technology as part of their normal role, it was great to see some of the work that they are doing in their spare time to help to adapt sensor technology to help students at the Royal Blind School. I commend them for that and wish them every success with it in the future.

In recent years, there has been a welcome political focus on apprenticeships and work-based learning. That stretches to a rare cross-party consensus that having more and better apprenticeships offers a valuable way of providing skills and training. We now have a great deal of experience of modern apprenticeships—last year, there were 26,262 starts—but this is a turning point for the new forms of apprenticeship that are coming down the pipeline. In 2016, the first foundation apprentices made a start on their learning, and there have been 1,591 participants as the scheme has rolled out nationally.

The number of frameworks has increased from eight to 10. However, in many local authorities, there is limited provision. In some parts of the country, as few as two frameworks are offered, and in areas such as the Highlands and Islands there is little room for participants to travel. Therefore, I was pleased by Jamie Hepburn's reply on 27 September 2017 to me that the Scottish Government is committed to increasing the choice for young people in Scotland's remote and rural communities, and I look forward to further news on that being rolled out.

During apprenticeship week, my colleague Ruth Davidson called for the expansion of foundation apprenticeships to every secondary school. That solid ambition would begin to address, at an earlier stage, the need to get Scotland's businesses better engaged with the education process and access to the skills pipeline that they are so reliant on. However, we also know from SDS meeting minutes in December that it expected that only 2,600 of the contracted number of 3,200 starts could be delivered in 2018-19 due to budget pressures. I caution the minister that this fledgling programme must be properly funded, and reducing growth next year would deny hundreds of people the opportunity to realise the benefits.

**The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** I caution Mr Halcro Johnston against misunderstanding what was reported in the press on that issue. SDS and the Scottish Government have been clear that the target was always for 2,600 foundation apprenticeship starts this year. SDS contracted for more than that figure, so that the target can be hit.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I am encouraged if the minister considers that the targets for foundation apprenticeship starts are being met.

At the same time, we are also seeing the introduction of graduate apprenticeships. In 2015, the University of the Highlands and Islands led the initial pilot. There are now 12 institutions delivering a range of frameworks, which are largely focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects. The target is for 4,000 starts by 2020. We look forward to seeing SDS's

latest annual report next month, when we will be better placed to assess progress.

A vital part of apprenticeship week is addressing the parity of esteem between work-based and academic learning. That must be accompanied by work across Scottish Government departments if it is to become a reality. Parity must be embedded in careers guidance across every school in Scotland. From an early age, young people must be aware of the opportunities that apprenticeships offer. Positives include innovations such as the My World of Work website, but such innovations must be publicised and embraced by the education sector to function efficiently.

We recently debated the developing the young workforce strategy. Although progress has been made since the 2014 Wood report, we need to see revolutionary change in how employers engage with the education and skills sector if we are to address the needs of our rapidly changing labour market.

Apprenticeships stretch beyond the young workforce. Of those who start MAs, 74 per cent are under the age of 25, and they are commonly entering the workforce for the first time. However, a range of people in other age brackets would benefit from effective reskilling and the apprenticeship programme is a way of supporting that.

Apprenticeships must be accessible. Some years ago, there were disappointing figures for the number of women and people with disabilities entering apprenticeships. The figures have improved, but there are still considerable gender distinctions in the various apprenticeship frameworks.

In my region, apprenticeships can be a key factor in creating a skills base that reflects local needs, as well as giving young people the opportunity to stay in their local community and learn after leaving school. The circumstances in my region are very different from those in the central belt. Typically, enterprises are smaller, and more work needs to be done to get small and medium-sized enterprises on board and engaged with providing apprenticeships. Earlier this month, following a report by the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland, I raised that issue with the First Minister. She accepted that smaller companies face barriers and that there is a need to increase the diversity of apprenticeship providers. It would be useful if the minister could expand on the Scottish Government's plans in that area.

The United Kingdom apprenticeship levy has also been a welcome move in ensuring that business contributes to the training and the skills of the workforce. As we know, the approach that

the Scottish Government has taken is different from the UK Government's plans for how the levy is spent in England.

Again, we are at an early stage, but the experience of business in accessing funding and being able to utilise it usefully, particularly in relation to the flexible workforce development fund, will be key. Questions remain over whether the fund should be broadened out to include providers other than colleges, as well as over how effectively the college sector is building on those all-important employer links.

The debate is an opportunity to highlight the important role of work-based learning and to celebrate the achievements of apprentices across Scotland. In addition to the visits by members, SDS is calling on members to be an apprentice for a day in order to get a taste of some of the hands-on work that they undertake. I call on colleagues from across the chamber, whatever area they represent, to sign up to that and to help emphasise the role of apprenticeships in their own communities.

I look forward to hearing today's speeches and again offer my thanks congratulations to everyone involved in making apprenticeship week such a success.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A lot of members wish to speak, so I ask everyone to adhere strictly to four minutes. It would be appreciated if folk could say all they had to say in even less time.

12:55

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** I thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for bringing this important topic to the chamber for debate.

As part of Scottish apprenticeship week, the motion encouraged members to get involved by visiting an apprenticeship employer or training provider in their area. I am pleased to say that, like many colleagues, I took part in the week and visited the Irvine paper mill, where I met an interesting and bright group of modern apprentices. They were all in different phases of their apprenticeship, but they had one thing in common. They had not been told about the possibility of apprenticeships in their schools. That raises the question of whether apprenticeships are as widely promoted at school as they should be, and what more we can all do to ensure that our young people are aware of all paths available to them. The young folk I met are all enjoying high-quality learning and work experience in their engineering apprenticeships and will have a good job in our local community by following that path.

One key element of raising the profile of this opportunity is that we need to stress the parity of esteem between vocational or work-based learning and academic paths. An obvious way to do that is by making sure that information about apprenticeships is more widely and positively promoted in schools. I recently raised this issue at the Education and Skills Committee with the Minister for Employability and Skills, who acknowledged that, although the situation is improving, it can still be a bit patchy. I understand that the developing the young workforce strategy is making sure that more young people are aware of apprenticeships as a post-school option, and I would be encouraged to see that further rolled out, as the minister suggested.

I also agree with the minister that the careers information and guidance offered by Skills Development Scotland could be broadened out and offered to young people earlier, so that they are aware of apprenticeships—foundation, modern or graduate—at an early stage in their school life. The chair of the National Parent Forum of Scotland, Joanna Murphy, has pointed out that promoting apprenticeships in secondary 5 and 6 is too late and that, instead,

“All options should be outlined to pupils in a broad sense in S2, so they can make the right decision for them based on all the options available.”

She also stressed that

“Parents certainly don’t hear enough about the different options available to their children. Parents are often hesitant to support ‘unknown’ routes and can inadvertently negatively influence their children.”

I am glad that the minister is open to doing more to ensure earlier and more diverse careers information and guidance and I look forward to monitoring progress on this, as we work to raise young people’s awareness of all the opportunities that are available to them, including quality apprenticeships.

I am also happy to say that I will be taking on the challenge of being an apprentice for the day. I am not sure where I will be going in my Cunninghame South constituency, but I hope that it will be something that does not involve wearing a hairnet or something unflattering, although you never know. I am sure that it will be great fun anyway.

12:58

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** I congratulate my colleague Jamie Halcro Johnston on achieving cross-party support and bringing the debate to the chamber. Indeed, it is a topic which is close to my heart, as I am an employer who is keen to see apprenticeship programmes flourish and nurture new talent. As

such, I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, in particular to the businesses that I own, in which I currently employ six apprentices, who benefit from Construction Industry Training Board funding. I aim to take on a further six later this year.

To date, we have taken on over 150 apprentices. There is a reason why employers such as me are so keen on apprenticeship programmes. They are a productive and effective way for any business to grow its own talent. They also allow businesses to nurture the motivated, skilled and qualified workforces that they require in their companies.

Productivity is a term that we often refer to in the chamber in relation to our economy, but we also measure productivity at a micro level in businesses. Apprenticeships help to boost productivity as they reduce staff turnover and recruitment costs. There is an added bonus of employees feeling more valued, which boosts staff morale, loyalty, commitment and retention.

Those are positive attributes for a company that lead to confidence from shareholders and potential employees and clients. CITB Scotland has found that 80 per cent of employers feel that their workplace has become more productive through having apprentices, so apprenticeships challenge the status quo for a business and encourage innovative ways of working. The number of apprentices receiving support from CITB Scotland has gone up 36 per cent since 2011 and CITB Scotland is now the single largest training provider of modern apprenticeships across all frameworks in Scotland, so businesses are clearly catching on to those benefits. Many of us in the chamber will be keen to ensure that apprentices are not there just to benefit businesses, however. I am therefore pleased that the format of apprenticeships will ensure that the largest beneficiaries are the apprentices.

Generally, apprentices are registered with one of the trade bodies, ensuring that they are employed and paid appropriately. In addition, they study at college and gain experience on site over a four-year period. There are slight variations in the length of apprenticeships, with some being two-year adult apprentices, but, by and large, the same college curriculum is mirrored across colleges in Scotland to ensure that all apprentices get the same off-site training.

Construction is not just about bricklaying, as there have been a lot of advances in technology and there is a growing demand for technical roles in the industry. We need joiners, plasterers, managers, surveyors, civil engineers and more. More than half of those in the construction industry are reaching retirement age, so I encourage those seeking jobs or those in school who are thinking

about potential careers to consider a career in construction. There is a real opportunity for the next generation to take advantage of what is an ever-growing industry.

If there is one ask today, it is for tradesmen to remember when they were starting training and to be keen to participate in taking on an apprentice, as someone once did for them. That would help to improve on-site training and, if enough tradesmen took part, it would allow apprentices to rotate around mentors, which would benefit them.

I am very proud to be an employer with apprentices and I will continue to champion the benefits that they can bring to businesses across Scotland.

13:01

**Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** I thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for securing the debate, and I am delighted that we have an opportunity to recognise modern apprenticeships. I am very proud that the Scottish Government has delivered more than 200,000 modern apprenticeships since it first came to power in 2007, and I commend the commitment to raising the number to 30,000 per annum by the end of this decade.

I was one of the 99 MSPs who had the fantastic opportunity to visit apprentices in their constituencies. I went to the McGill's Buses depot in Johnstone; the company also has a depot in Barrhead. McGill's has apprentices from across my constituency of Renfrewshire South and beyond. We have debated buses often of late in the Parliament for many reasons, but McGill's is a fantastic employer that has been giving brilliant opportunities to young people. On my visit, I met a range of apprentices who cover a range of trades—coachbuilders, mechanics and electricians—and it was clear to me how much they value their opportunity and how much pleasure they take from it through camaraderie and friendships.

However, some points were raised that echoed points that Ruth Maguire highlighted about the need to do more to increase awareness of modern apprenticeships. I commend Skills Development Scotland for the work that it does to raise awareness, but there is always more that we can do. It is also important that parents know about modern apprenticeships. If there is lack of awareness and understanding of what a modern apprenticeship entails, parents, as key influencers, might not have the confidence to back a young person and recommend that they take up a modern apprenticeship.

The key issue of parity of esteem has been raised in the debate. I agree that we have to have

parity of esteem between vocational and academic learning. My father and two of his brothers were apprentices in the different era of the late 1960s, when somebody could walk into a yard on a Friday and get a job for the Monday. My father and his brothers were born in a single-end in Barrhead in the late 1940s and early 1950s and they left school with no qualifications. My father was an apprentice electrician who was able to go on to work abroad, to work in the health service, to do his City and Guilds examinations, to progress to become an electrical engineer, to become a manager and to develop continuously before eventually retiring as an estates manager in the health service. My uncle started off as a mechanic, got a job with Scania and then set up his own business that had a seven-figure turnover. That speaks to me of the nature of on-the-job learning and the capacity to adapt.

One of the challenges that we face is the ever-increasing pace of change in the workplace. The jobs of 10 years ago might well be obsolescent in 20 years' time. The capacity to continuously reinvent oneself by retraining and reskilling so that one does not end up in an ossified role will be vital.

Alexander Burnett made an eloquent point about the benefit to employers in that regard, with particular regard to productivity. A thought that struck me when Mr Burnett was speaking was that one of the challenges that we face on productivity is that although many businesses are good at innovating, there are challenges for them in taking up innovations. Apprentices, who have on-the-job learning hardwired into them, will be far more skilled at seeing opportunities to take up and apply innovations.

Apprenticeships are great for apprentices themselves, but they are also fantastic for employers and great for the Scottish economy overall.

13:05

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I thank Jamie Halco Johnston for bringing the debate on Scottish apprenticeship week to the chamber today.

It is a week that I always try to mark. In previous years, I visited Torness nuclear power station and met some of EDF's marvellous young apprentices there, so for something different this year I visited Yester Farm Dairies near Gifford—a family-run dairy farm that is well known locally and increasingly well known nationally for its milk and cheese. There I met Carol Wakefield, who has since successfully completed her modern apprenticeship in dairy skills. When I met Carol and the team, they were battling to cope with the disruption caused by snow and the red weather

warning. Despite the severity of the weather, they managed to keep the local shops—and my fridge—stocked with milk when the supermarket shelves were empty. I wish Yester Farm Dairies and Carol Wakefield the very best for the future.

We have heard from many members how modern apprenticeships open up fantastic opportunities for training and qualifications, and they are indeed a vital part of our education system and the developing the young workforce strategy.

In many ways, the current modern apprenticeship programme dates back to the budget dispute of 2009. At that time, modern apprenticeships were really in decline; there had been a fall from around 17,000 starts to around 10,500 starts over a short, two-year period. As a result of the negotiations that were held with the then Government in order for it to get its budget through at the second opportunity, the number of apprenticeship places was increased again, so the downward trend was reversed.

Since then, we have made real progress on expanding modern apprenticeships, which is very welcome. The Government is now making progress towards the target of 30,000 MAs by 2021. However, we need to be careful to look at the detail of that, because the truth is that there was a significant increase in the number of modern apprenticeships in 2009-10 as a result not of more opportunities being made available but of the recategorisation of level 2 training programmes as part of the modern apprenticeship level 2 framework.

Indeed, just recently the minister wrote to me to confirm that, of the apprenticeship starts in 2016-17, 17,263 were level 3 and the target for next year for level 3 is 20,000. However, Audit Scotland's most recent report on the apprenticeship programme shows that well over 20,000 level 3 apprenticeships were created every year between 2003 and 2006. Comparing like with like shows that the modern apprenticeship programme at level 3 and above is still below the peak that it was at 15 years ago.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I understand the point that Mr Gray is making, but does he accept that in many circumstances a level 2 apprenticeship is appropriate and is still a valuable experience for a young person to go through?

**Iain Gray:** I absolutely do accept that. Indeed, Carol Wakefield's apprenticeship, which I mentioned earlier, was a level 2 apprenticeship in dairy skills. My point is simply that we should not get too carried away with the progress that we have made as far as numbers are concerned. As other members have said, there are other problems—for example, on gender balance.

We all agree that expanding the modern apprenticeship programme is important. However, we need to consider not just the number of people on such programmes but their quality and balance, as they are a critical element of building our economy and creating opportunity for the next generations of young people.

13:10

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I add my congratulations to Jamie Halcro Johnston for securing the debate. I fully support the aim of highlighting the importance and value of apprenticeships to individuals, businesses and the economy.

As the motion encourages us to do, I marked Scottish apprenticeship week by visiting an apprenticeship employer in my area: BSW Timber Group in Dalbeattie, which is the United Kingdom's first fully integrated forestry company. In February, the company was named youth employer of the month by Skills Development Scotland because of its commitment to growing talent. Across its site in Dalbeattie, BSW employs 150 people and 30 apprentices—including Katie, Scotland's first female saw doctor, whom I met on my visit there. In fact, BSW recently launched the UK's first saw doctor apprenticeship, in partnership with Inverness College.

It was very interesting to meet the apprentices and to see the highly technical work that they perform at the mill. While I was there, I also spoke to Tony Lockey, the group's learning and development manager, who is clearly passionate about helping his apprentices to get the most out of their time at BSW. The company offers good opportunities and jobs in rural areas, which can be challenging to find, so I was delighted to support the work that it is doing and to recognise its good employment practices and the opportunities that it offers to young people in the local South Scotland region.

Scottish apprenticeship week truly gives us the opportunity to promote the value of our young people and to examine how we can support young folk from all walks of life to fulfil their potential. We know that university is not the optimal place for everyone to develop their specific skill sets. Apprenticeships offer high-quality work-based learning that allows employees to learn on the job, reflect on their work and learn through experience. Such an approach not only helps young people to gain the qualifications and confidence that they need to succeed but allows businesses to develop the talent that they need in order to grow.

More than 90 per cent of apprentices are still in employment six months after completing their modern apprenticeships, and 96 per cent of

employers say that former apprentices are better equipped to do their jobs. To build on that progress, as has been mentioned, foundation apprenticeships have been developed to provide work-based learning opportunities for senior secondary school pupils. Such apprenticeships last two years, with pupils beginning in S5 and spending time out of school at college or with local employers. I am delighted that, this academic year, Dumfries and Galloway College secured the contract to deliver foundation apprenticeships in engineering, business skills, social services and children and young people. Over 10 years in government, the Scottish National Party has supported 7,000 modern apprenticeships in Dumfries and Galloway, which is an increase of almost 60 per cent since 2007, so I am pleased that there will be provision of foundation apprenticeships in the region.

I will close by acknowledging the progress that is set out in the developing the young workforce annual report for 2016-17. The programme's headline aim of reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021 was met four years ahead of target. Although there is more to do—particularly in tackling gender imbalances, as has been mentioned, and in improving employment opportunities for those who are less able, those who are care experienced and those from ethnic minority backgrounds—we are well on the way to improving the life chances of Scotland's young people.

Presiding Officer, I, too, would be very happy to be an apprentice for the day, and perhaps I will do so at BSW. Through a quick Google search, I see that there are 26 opportunities in the south-west that I would be happy to take up.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Does that mean that you are going to take all of them up, Ms Harper?

13:14

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I, too, thank Jamie Halcro Johnston and congratulate him on securing the debate. I apologise for being absent from the chamber briefly at the start of it. I also thank SDS for its work on apprenticeship week. As we have heard in the debate, and as we have seen from the briefing, the level of involvement that it has managed to secure from members of the Scottish Parliament is highly impressive.

In previous years, I have met apprentices at Orkney Builders, although every second apprentice that I came across seemed to be a fellow member of the Sanday parish cup team, so this year I instead went to visit E Fraser Electrical in Finstown, where I met Bruce Simpson and the

team of apprentices there. Much like Ruth Maguire's experience, they were at various stages of their apprenticeships, but all were very positive about the experience that they were having and the skills that they were gaining through the apprenticeship. If there was a concern, it was simply that having one afternoon in which to take forward the apprenticeship is often not enough to enable meaningful work to be undertaken. That might need to be looked at.

Apprenticeship week has successfully served to help to raise awareness of the importance of work-based learning. There is a need to expand not just the number but the range of those who see apprenticeships as a way of helping them to fulfil their potential. Too often, individuals are pigeonholed into apprenticeships or a more academic route. As we have probably all seen at local level, that misunderstands the value of apprenticeships.

In the statistics from SDS, it is encouraging to see the increased number of modern apprenticeships in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics frameworks. That needs to be improved further, as does the proportion of female participation. To follow on from a point that Emma Harper made, and having raised the issue in the past when I was a member of the Education and Skills Committee, I am pleased to see the increased number of modern apprentices drawn from traditionally underrepresented groups, whether that be those with a disability, those with care experience or those from ethnic minority groups. Everybody would accept that there is still a way to go, but that is encouraging. Iain Gray was right to remind us that we need to look beyond and behind the statistics but, nevertheless, the direction of travel seems positive.

Having set out that positive prognosis for the apprenticeship programme, I want to spend a couple of minutes on a concern that I have raised with the minister previously and on which we had correspondence last year. Although the Construction Industry Training Board does excellent work at local level, there is real concern about the move away from indentured craft apprenticeships. There appears to have been a lack of prior consultation before the decision was taken, and there is a feeling that the needs of small and medium-sized construction firms are not being properly reflected. The concern that has been raised with me is that there is a dilution of the value and attractiveness of apprenticeships. When the minister wrote to me last year, he said that he would update me on the engagement with the United Kingdom Government on the review of the industry training boards, so perhaps he could do that in winding up the debate.

I look forward to taking part in the apprentice for the day scheme in due course. I might need to reassure my constituents that I will be under strict supervision and that I will not be allowed to rewire anybody's house, despite my presence at Fraser Electrical earlier this month.

I again congratulate Jamie Halcro Johnston on securing this worthwhile debate. I hope that the efforts of SDS, through apprenticeship week and the apprentice for a day scheme, will encourage more people to see such work-based learning as a way of fulfilling their potential.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A few members still wish to speak, so I am happy to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I ask Jamie Halcro Johnston to move such a motion.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Jamie Halcro Johnston*]

*Motion agreed to.*

13:18

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** I, too, thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for bringing the debate to the chamber. He was actually one of three MSPs to lodge a motion on Scottish apprenticeship week 2018. I am grateful that his was marked for members' business so that it could be debated today. I lodged one of the motions, although mine acted as an amendment to another one in order to ensure that the Scottish Government, trade unions and professional bodies were all recognised for their roles in developing, supporting and sustaining apprenticeships. Without all partners working together, the range of apprenticeships in Scotland would not have been able to grow as it has done over the past decade.

The aim of Scottish apprenticeship week is twofold. First, it is to highlight the enormous opportunities that apprenticeships offer in allowing people to work and earn while studying for a recognised qualification and, secondly, it is to celebrate businesses that value training their employees.

For the past two years I have been delighted to visit employers and apprentices in my constituency during Scottish apprenticeship week. Last year, I had the opportunity to visit Arnold Clark's Rutherglen branch, and while I was there it struck me that not only do the apprentices regard the experience as overwhelmingly positive but the company thinks that that is the case, too. When I visited, Barry Johnston, service manager at the branch, said that the apprentices who he works with are "invaluable" to the business.

As members have said, the theme of this year's Scottish apprenticeship week was "apprentices are the business", in recognition of the value that work-based learning brings to employers across the country.

To mark this year's initiative, I visited MD Electrical Contractors, which is based less than 200 yards from my constituency office in Rutherglen. The company has taken on a number of young adults and school leavers. Such people make up the majority of apprentices across the country. It is unfortunate that some people think that once someone's school studies have ended they must go on to further education and attend college or university. That is a myth, because many people go straight into the world of work and have successful lives, and others think that an apprenticeship is the avenue that will best suit them. It was clear that the apprentices at MD Electrical Contractors thought that undertaking an apprenticeship was the best move for their chosen career path.

Another employer in my constituency who has made great use of the apprenticeship scheme is Clyde Gateway URC, which is Scotland's largest and most ambitious regeneration programme. In partnership with Glasgow City Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Scottish Enterprise, it is working to achieve unparalleled social, economic and physical change across Rutherglen and the east end of Glasgow. The company is a major source of employment locally. Niki Spence and Jim Clark kindly supplied figures to me, which show that Clyde Gateway has directly created 58 apprenticeships, the vast majority of which have been in construction.

Another myth that, collectively, we must bust is that apprenticeships are for men. A number of Clyde Gateway's construction apprenticeships have gone to women, and the company recently awarded permanent contracts to three females who had gone through finance and administration modern apprenticeships.

I thank Skills Development Scotland for its briefing paper, which showed that 60 per cent of modern apprenticeship starts last year were male and 40 per cent were female. The proportion of female starts at level 3 and above has risen each year since 2014-15, but we must not rest on our laurels until our apprenticeships provide the same opportunities to women as they do to men.

As we heard, MSPs are being encouraged to become an apprentice for the day at some point during the year. I look forward to meeting that challenge. Scottish apprenticeship week might have ended at the start of March, but we must not forget to promote the benefits of apprenticeships all year round.

13:22

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for bringing this debate to the Parliament, and I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a business owner and modern-apprenticeship employer. Indeed, when Skills Development Scotland got in touch with me after it heard that I was interested in getting involved in apprenticeship week, the business that it suggested that I should visit was my own.

I visited Forbes Technologies in Kelso, which specialises in the production of industrial plastic tanks for virtually every field of industrial activity world wide. Forbes apprentices undertake a vigorous programme, which includes on-the-job training in state-of-the-art 3D computer-aided design technology. Apprentices can work towards a qualification in mechanical engineering, and they learn invaluable skills there during their course. For example, they can specialise in industrialised welding of fibreglass.

I want to sing the praises of one of the apprentices who, as part of his apprenticeship, had to spend time studying away from home. That was not ideal, but he stuck with it and three years down the line he is developing his skills and has recently taken on a mortgage to buy a home in Kelso.

It is so important that modern apprenticeships enable local people to live and work in their communities. Sometimes it does not suit a young person to leave home to study. The issue might be transport, expense or the thought of leaving friends and family. Skills Development Scotland is aware of the issue and has worked with a local training provider to deliver the theory element of the qualification closer to Kelso, to support young people. The young person who I met clearly demonstrated the value of apprenticeships and why Parliament must do as much as possible to promote the scheme.

Borders College is also responding to sectoral needs and offering an array of modern apprenticeship courses from business to construction, engineering, health and social care. Borders College plays a strong and important role in preparing young Borderers for a future life in which they can make a real difference to the economy, socially, and financially.

I also want to use today's debate to bring something to the minister's attention. When I visited Forbes Technology, I noticed that every person in the building doing these very technical engineering jobs was male. I make a plea for us to put some real effort into increasing the opportunities for young women in STEM subjects.

As a local MSP for the Borders, one of my focuses is on making it an even better place for young people to live and work in. One of the ways in which I worked towards that recently was when I hosted an event that invited 150 school pupils from across the Borders to highlight the opportunities that we have in different sectors, particularly in tourism and hospitality, as well as apprenticeships. The tourism sector across Scotland faces gaps, and apprenticeships can act as a bridge to closing that gap and preparing the future workforce for the sector while helping it to evolve and grow.

The same skills shortages are felt in other sectors. One sector that has had attention recently is the tech sector. Again, Borders College has taken the initiative by offering a coding class to young teens, which is a super-encouraging move, because we are all facing a world in which coding has become an essential skill. However, to ensure that full advantage is taken of that development, we must encourage apprenticeships in those industries, and there is so much opportunity in Scotland that we can explore.

If we are to do that, we must knock down the barriers to entry in every industry, from engineering to tech, hospitality and tourism. We should promote apprenticeship schemes to knock down those barriers and ensure that Scotland retains its world-class status in the sectors that I have just mentioned.

I have been championing young people since I became an MSP and I hope that the Borders will become a better place for everyone to live and work in. Like other members, I look forward to taking up the challenge of an apprenticeship, and I have asked my team to look for something that involves making gin.

I wish continued success to all apprentices and all those businesses that get involved with the training.

13:27

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** I thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for bringing the motion to Parliament in recognition of the importance of Scottish apprenticeship week.

The programme has, time and time again, proven the benefits that it brings to individuals, businesses and the economy. It pulls together employers, apprentices, training providers, colleges, councils, schools and many other partners to create and celebrate a week of work-based learning that can prove invaluable for young people across Scotland.

Apprenticeships are a solution to balance an academic education with work-based learning.

The Scottish apprenticeship programme matches young people from secondary school to graduate level with companies and businesses and gives them a chance to explore fields that they are interested in, meet working professionals, and form the skills and connections they need to advance in their careers.

From an employer's perspective, apprentices are also beneficial. They offer the opportunity to find young talent and allow employers to co-ordinate with schools, colleges and training providers to ensure that apprentices have the ability to learn the skills that they require.

The success of the Scottish apprenticeship programme is evidenced by the expansion it has achieved during the past few years. The flagship programme—modern apprenticeships—is on track to have more than 27,000 young people engaged in an apprenticeship this year. The foundation apprenticeship, which was introduced four years ago, opened doors to secondary school pupils and brought education closer to industry. The graduate apprenticeship programme, which was offered for the first time this year, increased the scope of the young people involved to include those who are seeking a diploma of higher education up to a masters degree, allowing them to attain certification via employment.

The continued growth in participation and the scope of the Scottish apprenticeship programme can be attributed to the value that our young people and employers gain from it. During Scottish apprenticeship week, I welcomed the opportunity to witness the value of the programme at first hand. My visit to G1 Reeds in Kirkcaldy gave me a challenging start. I had to find out where it was and its unassuming residential front surprised me. However, on entering the building, the first sight that greeted me was the world pipe band championship trophy. I was impressed when I found out that G1 Reeds make the very reeds and chanters that were chosen by the 2017 world pipe band champions. I understood how G1 Reeds has achieved such global success when I witnessed the meticulous work that its dedicated team creates. The reeds, chanters and other pipe band products that are made by this company are of the highest standard.

That small company employs eight people and two apprentices. It was inspiring to see how enthusiastic the two young apprentices were about the work that they were doing, and how dedicated they were to ensuring that their work was of the finest quality. G1 Reeds was definitely the most unusual workplace that I have ever visited, but I left absolutely impressed, and sure that the Scottish apprenticeship programme provides countless benefits to apprentices and to employers.

I thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for bringing the motion for this debate to the chamber. Scottish apprenticeship week is worth celebrating because it highlights the achievements that the programme has produced in the short time that it has been running. Scottish apprenticeship week allowed me to discover a talented company in my constituency, and to see exactly how fully and enthusiastically the apprentices are engaged in the business and in the work that they do.

13:30

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** I too thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for securing this debate.

During this year's Scottish apprenticeship week, I was invited by the Apex Hotels group, which is headquartered in my constituency, to visit one of its hotels to meet some of the modern apprentices. I spent an enjoyable afternoon speaking to the young people about the benefits of undertaking a modern apprenticeship and their experience of working for the Apex group. They highlighted the benefits of earning while learning, on-the-job training to develop skills through hands-on experience, and support from the company to improve their qualifications.

The Apex Hotels modern apprenticeship scheme was launched back in 2012 by the then Minister for Youth Employment, Angela Constance, to set young people up for a career in hospitality. The programme gives apprentices the opportunity to learn skills and acquire knowledge in many different areas, from food and beverages to front office, and from housekeeping to catering. The family-owned hotel group aims to make working as a modern apprentice a positive, educational and tailored experience, providing apprentices with the knowledge, skill set and confidence to set them on the right track for a fulfilling and rewarding career in the hospitality, leisure and tourism sector.

Since my visit at the beginning of the month, when Apex Hotels had 43 apprentices, it has taken on an addition 11 young people, taking the current number of apprentices to 54.

Having seen the benefits of the approach to the business, Apex Hotels became one of the five founding members of the Scottish apprenticeship in hospitality programme, which was created in 2014; the other founding members were the Gleneagles hotel, Blythswood Square hotel, Cameron House hotel and the Torridon hotel. There are now 14 hotels in Scotland that deliver the programme. The two-year course, with the option of a specialised third year, is a world-class, industry-led hospitality programme that is aimed at 17 to 24-year-olds. It allows young people to work

on real projects with experienced colleagues, and to reflect on and develop their work through practice.

The apprenticeship was created to attract the best young people in Scotland to consider hospitality as a rewarding career opportunity at a time when, because of the growth of leisure, travel and tourism over the past decade, we are seeing an inevitable global expansion of the hospitality and tourism industries. What helps to make the programme unique is the opportunity to participate in learning journeys and master-classes designed and delivered by top industry professionals.

The benefits of an apprenticeship to young people have been clearly illustrated in the debate. However, as the theme of this year's Scottish apprenticeship week is business, I want to finish by saying why the Apex Hotels group makes that investment in young people and their career development. Two things were mentioned to me. First, it gives the company the chance to grow its own talent, because it delivers the training and it knows its apprentices best and can provide them with the support and the mentoring that are right for the individual, allowing them to succeed in the company's environment. Secondly, the mentoring, coaching and confidence building make the Apex hotel group an attractive employer—somewhere where people want to work—which plays an important part in staff retention.

Apprenticeships in Scotland have come a long way and the benefits that they bring are well recognised. They provide the opportunities that our young people need and the expertise that our industries require. As Scotland builds the skilled workforce that it needs for the future, it is clear to me that apprenticeships will play a significant role.

13:34

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I, too, thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for bringing this important issue to the chamber. Yesterday, we were given a timely reminder of the importance of modern apprenticeships in developing our young workforce. I raised at First Minister's questions the issue of the TOM Group in Airdrie, which has announced its closure. Hundreds of jobs will be lost. Although Airdrie is not in my constituency, it is very near, and many of the people whose jobs are at risk will be from Coatbridge. I welcome the First Minister's response and her commitment.

As members may remember, I lodged a similar motion for debate in anticipation of Scottish apprenticeship week last year. It is an event that I have now had the honour to participate in for a second year running. Scottish apprenticeship

week 2018 had a successful run in the week beginning 5 March, with MSPs and ministers attending 99 visits all over Scotland, at which they met foundation, modern and graduate apprentices.

This year, I had the pleasure of meeting modern apprentices at the Gartcosh-based Lochview nursery, where the training that the apprentices receive and the work that they do exemplified this year's theme, which is, as Gordon MacDonald said, "Apprenticeships are the business", recognising the value that apprentices bring to employers across the nation. The programme is an extraordinary opportunity for our young people to take advantage of the paid work-based learning process of an apprenticeship, ultimately making them attractive to employers and more likely to move into employment.

Lochview nursery is doing an outstanding job in equipping future childcare providers with both qualifications for the specific role and skills that are transferable across the sector. That work is particularly necessary at the moment, because of the Scottish Government's commitment to increasing early learning and entitlement to free childcare, which is scheduled to go from 600 hours to 1,140 by 2020. That will undoubtedly create a greater demand for people who are trained in childcare. Thus, the apprenticeship programme not only furthers the careers of young people, but can be a crucial component of answering the changing demands of our economy.

As I said, this is not the first year that I have witnessed the great work of the apprenticeship programme. Last year, I had the chance to visit Monklands hospital, where I spoke to GRAHAM Construction apprentices about their programme and training methods. Both visits were great experiences, and I heard from very enthusiastic young people on both occasions.

Predictably, Presiding Officer, I will stick to my constituency. I recently welcomed the minister, Jamie Hepburn, to Stepps for his visit to Solutions Driven recruitment, a firm that helps employers with their recruitment challenges. The minister heard about the good work that the firm has accomplished in its 20-year history—it has celebrated both platinum certification by investors in people and the gold award for good practice from investors in young people. Those awards speak to the firm's commitment to the recruitment, training and retention of young people in the workforce. I can confirm, as other members have, that over the coming months, I will take part in SDS's apprenticeship for a day programme in my constituency, although I have not yet determined where.

Apprenticeships are a vital part of supporting our young people into work, and the extra investment and focus over the past decade have

transformed apprenticeships across the board. Countries with well-developed vocational learning systems and significant employer engagement have the lowest levels of youth unemployment, so by investing in modern apprenticeships we are paving the way to a better future for all our children.

Apprenticeships are particularly beneficial for people who may feel that college or university is not the best fit for them. Instead of penalising such young adults, apprenticeships offer them an equally rewarding and successful path into the world of employment. Apprenticeships are a vital part of building a stronger Scotland and ensuring that we have a talented and multi-skilled workforce that will help to build our economy. It is in all our interests to ensure that modern apprenticeships are easily and equally accessible to all Scotland's young people, so that we develop the leaders and innovators of tomorrow.

13:38

**The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** I join others in thanking Jamie Halcro Johnston for bringing the debate to the chamber. I also thank the large number of members who have taken the time to contribute, which I very much welcome; it reflects the Parliament's cross-party interest in the subject. I join Jamie Halcro Johnston in thanking Skills Development Scotland for the year-round work that it undertakes in relation to apprenticeships, and in particular for Scottish apprenticeship week. I also record our thanks to training providers and colleges for the training that they offer.

It is also important to thank employers; we must remember that every apprentice is an employee and we rely on employers to take them on. Without the commitment of employers, it would not be possible to welcome the great expansion in the number of apprentices that we have seen. We also need that commitment in order to ensure that there is employer input to the design of our apprenticeship system. The Scottish apprenticeship advisory board, which is facilitated through Skills Development Scotland, contains many representatives from industry and other interested parties who inform the design of our system.

In that regard, I join Alexander Burnett in calling for more employers to become involved and take on apprentices. I offer some moderate words of caution to him, however. First, we probably should not talk about "tradesmen", but about "tradespeople". We do not want to reinforce gender stereotypes, which are a significant challenge for us in relation to apprenticeships.

We want people who are involved in trades to take on more apprentices. However, we should not talk about them in isolation because, as we have heard, our apprenticeship offer goes much wider than apprenticeships in only the trades. Failing to talk about that sometimes reinforces misconceptions about what apprenticeships are about.

The full blast of winter was unleashed across Scotland the week before Scottish apprenticeship week, so I was a little apprehensive about the impact that it might have on the number of scheduled events and visits. Iain Gray timed his visit absolutely right; he must have been one of the few people who managed to source a supply of milk that week, so his visit was very convenient.

Despite the challenges that the weather posed, thanks to the resilience and commitment of everyone involved, including members in the chamber, there was a minimal impact. A number of members have referred to there having been 99 visits by MSPs over the week, which is a fact that they must have drawn from the SDS briefing. I have something of an advantage in that I engage with Skills Development Scotland probably more regularly than other folk, so I can tell members that that number has been revised upwards. There were 103 visits over the week, including 25 ministerial engagements. The number is up from 90 visits the year before. The eighth Scottish apprenticeship week was one of the biggest and best yet, which is very important.

Tom Arthur, Ruth Maguire and others rightly talked about the need to ensure more parity of esteem between vocational education—in particular, apprenticeships—and other post-school destinations. I take that challenge very seriously. We have faced that challenge historically, which is why I mentioned that we should be cautious about talking about the trades in isolation. We are investing time and effort in improving parity of esteem through careers advice and through our educational offer in schools.

I think that Jamie Halcro Johnston offered some words of caution about pace in relation to foundation apprenticeships. If we look at the issue reasonably, we see that 340-odd foundation apprenticeships started two years ago; that this year 1,200 will start; that next year 2,600 will start; and that the year after that our commitment is that 5,000 apprenticeships will start. That is pretty significant growth in a short time, and our ambitions go further still.

Embedding the thinking about apprenticeships in the school environment opens up the minds of young people, teachers and parents. It is critical that young people understand the apprenticeship offer while they are still at school.

I will not go through the visits that members made over the course of the week. However, I will say that it was heartening to hear about the range of visits and that everyone found their experiences to be enjoyable and rewarding, which was certainly how I found my visits to be.

I went to see Strathclyde partnership for transport at the Broomloan depot for the Glasgow subway. I am delighted that it is taking on the first batch of apprentices that it has had for some considerable time. Crucially, some people who have worked for SPT for a long time have been given apprenticeship opportunities and the chance to upskill: guys in their early 30s, who have worked for SPT for about 12 years, will get the opportunity to do an apprenticeship. In this case, it happens to be actual “guys”—although that is another reminder that we need to broaden the range of people who participate.

I also met more than 40 apprentices from the hospitality sector, including Rosie Wilkins, who was the Scottish apprentice of the year in 2017. Gordon MacDonald will be delighted to hear that Apex Hotels Ltd was represented. Hospitality is an important example of a sector in which the jobs have traditionally been viewed as being somewhat transient and as not representing a long-term career. The fact that there are apprenticeships in hospitality is very welcome, because it shows that people can build a career in that sector.

A couple of issues were raised around the equalities agenda, which we take very seriously. Skills Development Scotland is working to its equalities action plan. There have been some improvements, but there must be more. We will continue to work to that plan.

Jamie Halcro Johnston mentioned the apprenticeship levy. I say, happily, that we are taking a different approach from that which is being taken in England. On our performance, over the first three quarters of this year, 70 per cent of the targeted number of apprenticeships for this year have started, which is the same position as we were in at the same point in 2016-17. In England, in the first quarter since the introduction of an apprenticeship levy, there was a 59.3 per cent reduction in the number of apprentices from the figure for the previous year. In the second quarter, there was a 26 per cent reduction.

Our figures are a result of Scotland having a high-quality offer, because we are not following what has been done in England. I believe that England has set too ambitious a target in terms of the raw numbers, which has led to concerns about diminution in quality. We are not doing that here. We have a high-quality offer, which is what we all want, and is what Scottish apprenticeship week should remind us about. I welcome the fact that

we have had the chance to debate that this afternoon.

13:46

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## **Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018 to 2022**

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a statement from Angela Constance on “Every Child, Every Chance: Scotland’s Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan for 2018-22”. The cabinet secretary will take questions after her statement. If members wish to ask a question, they should press their request-to-speak button.

14:30

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** I am delighted to introduce “Every Child, Every Chance: Scotland’s Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan for 2018-22” to the chamber.

It is an important day for this Parliament. This is the first of three plans that will take us towards our ambitious 2030 targets to eradicate child poverty, which this Parliament unanimously agreed to in November last year. The consensus that we needed to set statutory targets to reduce and ultimately eradicate child poverty, and to take the action that is required to meet them, was important. It showed that, no matter what part of the political spectrum we come from, we recognise that there is deep-seated, long-standing poverty in our country and we recognise its causes and consequences, and it showed that we want that to change.

The plan could not be more timely. Last week’s child poverty statistics show that, over the period from 2014 to 2017, 24 per cent of children were living in relative poverty after housing costs. Too often, the real damage behind the statistics in such research can get lost in numbers. We cannot forget that behind every statistic there is a child and a family for whom, and a community in which, life chances are being determined by not potential but circumstance, and that is simply unacceptable. Our independent projections show that if we do not step up our action now, United Kingdom Government welfare cuts could drive more than one in three children in Scotland into poverty by 2030. That is not a future that I am prepared to accept.

The projections are stark, but poverty is not inevitable, and we, as a Parliament, agreed to take on that challenge when we voted unanimously to pass the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

We are building on strong foundations to continue to support families on low incomes. Our commitment to the real living wage, free prescriptions, free school meals and the baby box, and our massive investment in early learning and childcare and affordable housing reflect our determination to tackle poverty, as does the £100 million annual investment to offset the damage of UK welfare cuts, including the full mitigation of the bedroom tax. Our challenge is not just to mitigate UK Government cuts, but to lift people out of poverty.

Before discussing the detail of the plan, I thank all those who have contributed to its development. We consulted people from around Scotland with direct experience of poverty and, perhaps most importantly, we engaged with parents and children themselves. Equality and poverty stakeholder groups and parliamentary committees also offered the wealth of their experience in various areas and, last year, we established the Poverty and Inequality Commission so that our actions could be informed by independent expert knowledge.

The commission’s advice has been invaluable and we have taken full account of its recommendations. It suggested:

“The Delivery Plan should be clear how its proposed actions will support children from high risk households”,

so the plan focuses on families at most risk of poverty, which we have called “priority families”. They are lone parents, families with a disabled adult or child, young mothers, minority ethnic families, families with a child under one, and larger families with three or more children.

Our plan mirrors the advice of the commission in its structure. It focuses first on actions to make progress on the three key drivers of child poverty: work and earnings; costs of living, including housing costs; and social security.

Alongside the interventions that are aimed at the drivers of poverty, the plan includes action to improve long-term outcomes and quality of life, which was another recommendation from the commission. Our aim is not simply to tackle family poverty now, but to prevent family poverty in the future. Our actions aim to equip children and young people living in poverty now with the skills, experiences and resilience that will enable them to avoid poverty in 2030, when they might be parents. For example, we are investing £2 million in testing the innovative children’s neighbourhoods Scotland programme in an urban area, a small town and a rural community.

The plan also provides £1.35 million new investment for the further education sector to support and scale up preventative approaches, which helps to ensure that young people who have grown up in poverty have sustainable routes to

positive destinations and out of poverty. We will also invest an initial £500,000 in a new tailored community education programme on site for Gypsy Traveller pre-school children and their parents.

The plan sets out a range of collaborative, cross-Scotland partnership actions in recognition that the Government cannot eradicate child poverty on its own. We are establishing a new £7.5 million innovation fund together with the Hunter Foundation. That joint investment will support new approaches to preventing and reducing child poverty. We are also providing £500,000 for the healthier, wealthier children approach to income maximisation. That will help to secure financial and practical support through healthcare settings across Scotland for pregnant women and families with children who are at risk of, or experiencing, poverty.

Our interventions tackle the key drivers of child poverty, starting with parents' work and earnings. Sustainable, fair work is a long-term route out of poverty, so I am pleased to say that we will invest £12 million in new support for parents' employment that will be developed alongside our national devolved employment support service, fair start Scotland. That will support at least 38,000 people over three years and have positive impacts on around 7,000 children.

Our actions in that section of the plan also include our intention to build a living-wage nation, which will lift at least 25,000 more people on to the living wage in the next three years, and a new package of support for equality at work that comprises new action on the gender pay gap, a new approach to employment developed with disabled people, new support for flexible working and increased funding for the workplace equality fund.

We will also take a range of action to help families with the everyday costs of living right now. We will work to introduce a new minimum amount for the school clothing grant, providing more money for school uniforms and sports kits. We will invest £1 million in delivering support for children who experience food insecurity during school holidays. We will also provide new support for childcare after school and in the holidays.

There will be a new focus on families in our warmer homes Scotland programme, which will deliver an annual average saving of £350 off fuel bills. We will invest £3 million in a financial health check guarantee, which will help low-income families to maximise their incomes and get the best deals. We will also provide £1 million for the Carnegie UK Trust's affordable credit loan fund, which will increase access to credit and reduce problems caused by insecure incomes.

I turn to the new social security powers, which give us new opportunities. Our new best start grant will provide children in low-income families with payments at key stages during their early years. It is a grant that will not put a cap on children. For a family of two children, that will be an increase of up to £1,400 more than they would get under the UK Government's current sure start maternity grant. We will also provide more support to carers by establishing a new young carers grant from 2019 and, from this year, increasing the level of carers allowance with a 13 per cent rise for our carers.

I confirm that, over and above our existing social security programme, we intend to introduce a new income supplement to provide financial support to the families that need it most. In planning to introduce the supplement over the lifetime of the plan, we will take the analysis provided by the Poverty and Inequality Commission to the next stage. We will now consider the detail of such a supplement—the level at which it should be set and those at whom it should be targeted—to help to lift the maximum number of children out of poverty. We will also identify a robust and viable delivery route to get the additional income to families. We will need to ensure that delivery costs are reasonable, that complexity is minimised and that the impact on earnings and interactions with UK benefits are fully explored and understood.

We will do that bearing in mind that our priority is the safe and secure transfer of the benefits to be delivered to this Parliament. We will not let down the 1.4 million people of Scotland who are relying on those benefits being delivered to them by the end of this parliamentary session. We will provide an update in the first progress report, which is due next year.

The plan builds on the determination that we showed by bringing the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill to Parliament and gaining unanimous support, but it is what happens next that is important now, as we work to deliver on the commitments that I have set out today. It will mean a country where every child has every chance in life, and meeting the child poverty targets means transforming Scotland.

In 2018, the year of young people, I commend the plan to Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, cabinet secretary. We move to questions from members.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement and for advance sight of it. There are some things in the statement that I am sure everyone in the chamber will welcome, but I have a couple of questions, just to explore the statement a bit further.

First, the statement contained just one brief mention of affordable housing. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that, at the present rate, the Government will miss its target for affordable housing, which is one of the key areas in helping people out of poverty?

Secondly, the cabinet secretary will be aware that Audit Scotland reported this week that the Scottish National Party Government has not attempted to work out how much it will cost to bring the devolved social security system to Scotland. If ministers are caught out by the costs, the excess cash will have to come from her budget, which will affect the priority families that she has talked about. Will she respond to the report and reveal what steps are to be taken to ensure that there is greater transparency and a better understanding of the overall implementation costs to help with financial planning and decision making?

**Angela Constance:** I am grateful to Mr Balfour for his questions on affordable housing and transparency on the work that we are pursuing around social security costs. I will come to the point with respect to the Audit Scotland report.

Mr Balfour seems to have his criticism of the Scottish Government, but I wonder whether that implied criticism means that he is absolutely raging at his UK Tory Government. Given that 60 per cent of Scotland's spending decisions are still made in London; that child poverty is actually rising across the UK—it is lower in Scotland; that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation says that the benefits freeze is the biggest driver of rising poverty in and out of work; and that, by 2020, welfare spend in this country will be down by £4 billion, I wonder why he has nothing to say about Theresa May and her lack of action on the burning injustices in this country.

I very much expect to be held to account for our responsibilities and our decisions—I absolutely welcome that—but what is good for the goose has to be good for the gander. The Audit Scotland report touches on that, because it rightly highlights that we have two social security systems in this country, and we need to consider how they interact with each other. Much of our progress will be dependent on the DWP's co-operation with this Government. I have had at least one occasion to write to the secretary of state to query that commitment to work with this Government, and I hope that I do not have to do that again.

I very much welcome Audit Scotland's recognition, which members will see if they read the report, that

“Good early progress has been made”

on social security and that we are well prepared for the remaining work that we have to do. We

know that this is a critical year for our new social security system. Audit Scotland has confirmed that we were indeed on time with wave 1 benefits and that we have good risk management procedures in place. Last week, the Minister for Social Security made an announcement on the Scottish social security agency, which is again on track, and the first phase of recruitment has commenced.

We have bent over backwards to be transparent about the costs, including the emerging costs; we also have a detailed financial memorandum attached to the Social Security (Scotland) Bill. However, if members want us to provide even more information, we are absolutely open to doing that. As I said, the minister and I have bent over backwards to keep the Parliament, and the committees in particular, informed.

I reject Mr Balfour's suggestion that this Parliament and this Government will not meet our affordable housing targets. The latest reports, including a report from Shelter Scotland, say that we are on track to meet our target of 50,000 affordable homes. It is my view that we have lower child poverty rates than elsewhere in the UK because of our substantial investment over the past 10 years in affordable housing. We absolutely know that there is more to do, and we are up for that challenge.

**The Presiding Officer:** I appreciate that there is political interchange, particularly in the opening remarks. Perhaps we could move to questions and answers from now on.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement. I agree that poverty is not inevitable. However, although the Tories' callous benefit cuts are plunging more children and working families into poverty, the Scottish Government, after a decade in office, cannot escape its responsibility. Unfortunately, much of the statement seems to promise jam tomorrow. Will the cabinet secretary give more detail on how the Scottish Government's social security powers will be used to top up family benefits and boost incomes?

The Scottish Government's universal benefits were mentioned. With 230,000 children living in poverty and one in three children set to be plunged below the breadline over the next decade, will the cabinet secretary stop joining the Tories to block Labour amendments on the £5 child benefit top-up and support that effective and simple-to-administer policy, which we know provides no disincentive to working families? Why has she been ignoring organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group, which says that that measure would be the most effective way of tackling poverty to help give every child every chance?

I note the £1 million investment to tackle school holiday hunger. Given that North Lanarkshire Council alone is investing £0.5 million for that purpose, how can the cabinet secretary be confident that the Scottish Government's allocation will cover the costs across Scotland?

Finally, a decade on from the SNP manifesto promise of expanding universal free school meals, will the cabinet secretary stop the stigma by feeding all our primary age children and, by doing so, help to alleviate in-work poverty?

**Angela Constance:** I will do my best to answer questions as efficiently as possible. It is fair to say that, when it comes to what we need to do to tackle and end child poverty, the matter is complex. There are no silver bullets; there are certainly no 60-second soundbites.

I point Ms Smith to the independent and expert advice that we got from the Poverty and Inequality Commission, which we all agreed to establish. We have an opportunity to unite around that advice, unite against the Tories in the UK Government and the devastation that they are causing, and unite around a call for more powers. If the Tories will not fix their broken system, surely we in the Scottish Parliament should have control over the policy in order to pursue the opportunities that we all dearly wish for.

Ms Smith is a powerful advocate for topping up child benefit. I absolutely understand the arguments for that. We have just published figures that show that, if we do not do things differently, we risk 38 per cent of children in Scotland growing up in relative poverty. There is benefit to a universal social wage, but the scale of the challenge is increasing, so we need to look closely at the independent and expert advice, which points to better ways to lift more children out of poverty.

Make no mistake about it: the development of a new income supplement is a substantial undertaking that demonstrates our commitment to reach our ambitious targets to reduce and ultimately end child poverty.

We need to do a range of detailed work, which we will commence next year. The commission helpfully pointed to a package of reforms whereby, if child benefit was topped up, 20,000 children would be lifted out of poverty at a cost of £360 million. It pointed to another package of measures that was more targeted, whereby 45,000 children would be lifted out of poverty.

We intend to keep Parliament informed every step of the way in the development of a new income supplement. I want to take Parliament with us in this substantial undertaking that will involve a substantial investment. We want to debate the

detail of that. We want to debate how we get the best and most robust and reliable delivery route.

Finally, we have expanded the fair food fund—*[Laughter.]*

**Angela Constance:** This is a very important point about children going hungry in Scotland today. I find that an obscenity. I am answering members' detailed questions to the best of my endeavours.

We have expanded our fair food fund generally and, on top of that, there is additional funding to target holiday hunger and out-of-school-care hunger in children. We will take that forward in partnership with local government and the third sector organisations that I know are doing so much great work on the ground.

**The Presiding Officer:** Half of our time has gone on the first two multiclausal questions with multiclausal answers.

A further 10 members wish to ask a question. Do not give me any preamble. Ask the question and we will get an answer. Ask a question with no preamble, and we will go straight to the answer.

**Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if she is serious about combating deep-seated and long-standing poverty in our country by addressing its causes and consequences, Scotland needs to create an environment that encourages business growth and job creation? Does she agree that we need to ensure that our children have equality of opportunity, whatever their background, by listening to headteachers' concerns around staff shortages when it comes to closing the attainment gap?

**Angela Constance:** The fundamentals of the Scottish economy are strong. Part of the commission's advice on our endeavours to tackle child poverty was that there needs to be a strong focus on the economy as well as on increasing wages and earnings. We know that productivity growth in Scotland is good. We know that employment is on the up.

We know that we need an absolute focus on inclusive growth, which is about delivering growth and tackling inequalities. The biggest risk to economic growth just now is not from this Government, but from the UK Tory Government and its plans to drag us out of the European Union through Brexit.

I hope that the member gets out and about over the recess and in the weeks and months to come to speak to headteachers. I continue to do that, and I know that our massive investment of £750 million over this session of Parliament, in the form of the attainment challenge fund, is very welcome indeed and is allowing headteachers to make

flexible decisions based on the needs of their schools.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** As the convener of the Social Security Committee, I am well aware of the work that the Government and the committee need to do to ensure that all legislation and regulations are in place to deliver benefits to the 1.4 million people who are relying on them.

Given the priority that the cabinet secretary and the minister have already given to these plans, can the cabinet secretary explain how the income supplement will fit into the delivery of social security in Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** This Government's focus is the safe and secure transfer of 11 benefits to the Scottish Parliament. We are establishing the new social security agency to ensure the delivery of the benefits over this parliamentary session. We are making good progress. That will ensure that people continue to receive their benefits at the right time and that they receive the right amount. That is our top priority.

We also want to get the income supplement right. The details around that are important. We want to ensure that we reach the most people effectively and efficiently. We want to consider our options carefully, as I indicated in earlier answers, to ensure that our investment has the maximum impact on child poverty. We will start work this year on options for the income supplement, and we will provide an update in the 2019 progress report.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The roll-out of universal credit has been shambolic and has been roundly criticised by many members in this chamber. Can the cabinet secretary give an assurance to those priority families that the proposed new income supplement will not rely on, or make use of, that discredited system?

**Angela Constance:** Mr Griffin makes an important point. The Poverty and Inequality Commission's evidence on the modelling showed that there is an alternative way, other than topping up child benefit, to reach more children. What we have to do is find the right delivery route to do that. We need to explore the universal credit options—and we will do—but we are cognisant of how problematic universal credit is as a reserved benefit and that we could have the rug pulled from under our feet at any moment. The roll-out has been shambolic and has pushed people into poverty, and the benefit has become discredited although it is much needed by many vulnerable families. This is not all in our gift—the DWP would need to agree to schedule any income supplement into its work schedule and it would charge us for doing that on our behalf.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will know that the Equality and Human Rights Committee has focused a lot of its work on Gypsy Traveller children, so it was welcome to see £500,000 as an initial investment in tailored community education on site for Gypsy Traveller pre-school children. Can the cabinet secretary tell me how that will address the needs of Gypsy Traveller children in Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** We will, indeed, invest an initial £500,000 to work directly with Gypsy Traveller families and other partners as part of a tailored community education programme that will be offered on site for families. It will be comprised of three elements: specially tailored play and early learning opportunities for pre-school children; on-site adult learning opportunities for parents and carers; and work with older siblings who are of secondary school age but who are not attending school. We want those components to support children into early learning, help parents with their own literacy and numeracy and offer young people access to a range of different training and learning opportunities. It remains the case that Gypsy Traveller families are one of the most marginalised groups in society, but this Government, with this Parliament's support, is determined to change that. The member will be well aware of the work that I am leading in the ministerial working group and of our intention to engage with the Gypsy Traveller community, too.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** Given the positive financial health and other impacts of the healthier, wealthier children scheme in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, what gains does the cabinet secretary envisage for families and what outcome does she seek from the national roll-out of that successful scheme—which has been long called for and is welcomed by the Scottish Greens—with £500,000 worth of funding?

**Angela Constance:** I know that Ms Johnstone has been a powerful advocate of and champion for the healthier, wealthier scheme that has operated in the west of Scotland. It will ensure that families get better and earlier advice and that many families get the benefit or fuel poverty advice to which they are entitled, which will save them money or put more money into their pockets. I also know that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport recently replied to Ms Johnstone that she is happy to meet her to provide more information.

We have made good progress, particularly in the work around the universal health visiting pathway, which is exciting. There is so much additional investment in health visitors that it will become the norm for them to advise families of what they are entitled to and to signpost them to

other services—and that can be embedded in other children’s services.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has drawn a connection between poor mental health and child poverty. I have looked through the Government’s plan today, but I cannot see any new investment in child mental health. Can the minister reassure me that there is new money coming into mental health today for children?

**Angela Constance:** Mr Rennie raises an important point. A significant section of the plan does, indeed, address mental health, and there is, indeed, a correlation between health inequalities and poverty.

He will be well aware of the work that has been undertaken by Ms Watt. The purpose of the plan is to demonstrate how we can get more money into families’ pockets and how we can reduce their living costs. By improving people’s income security, we hope to support the work that is being led by Ms Watt to increase the amount of money in people’s pockets and, by association, improve their mental health.

The work that we are doing on the new employment service and around homelessness is important, too. We are not looking at people as two-dimensional objects. We want to work with people on the basis of their needs, whether to address their mental health or employment issues or ensure that they have income maximisation.

I hope that, once Mr Rennie connects the work that is going on in mental health with the work that is going on to reduce child poverty, he will see that it will take us another step forward.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** The Scottish Government’s ambition to tackle non-term-time hunger aligns well with Glasgow City Council’s extension of free school meals to primary 4 pupils and its new holiday hunger fund. Does the cabinet secretary agree that partnership working with councils and the third sector is vital to such success? Will she meet me and council colleagues to discuss and explore partnership working further?

**Angela Constance:** I am always delighted to meet members of any political party in this chamber as well as anybody who is working locally to tackle child poverty. As I said earlier, there is additional support in our fair food fund. In particular, we want to join up some of the work on improving out-of-school care and to increase the educational and extracurricular opportunities that children have as well as the number of projects that operate the length and breadth of Scotland to feed our children. There is additional money to address food poverty, which I hope will be welcomed.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary describe how the Scottish Government intends to support low-income families who are struggling to cope with the rising cost of rent?

**Angela Constance:** I thank Mr Golden for that question. He will be well aware of our substantial investment in affordable housing. The social rented sector works hard to keep rents affordable, although there is some evidence of rent inflation in that sector. We want to work with housing providers, particularly as they build more houses, to find better ways to make more savings—members will see that detailed in the plan—so that we can prevent rent inflation in the social sector.

We now have legislation on the private rented sector—it was the biggest shake-up in the private rented sector for more than 30 years.

On rents, we continue to fully mitigate the bedroom tax, which ensures that people can remain in their own homes, can afford to pay their rent and are not put at additional risk of homelessness.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** As a result of the Tories’ onslaught on people who are already struggling to make ends meet, we have seen a rise in child poverty in households in which someone works. What will the plan do to support parents who are in that position?

**Angela Constance:** The member is right. Seven in 10 Scottish children in poverty live in a household in which someone is in work, whereas about one in 10 children in poverty live in a household where all the adults are unemployed. Others might focus on other so-called causes, but we need to be cautious about using terms such as “worklessness”. As the plan sets out, the main drivers of poverty are inadequate income from work—which is what the plan seeks to address with the powers that we have—the high costs of essential goods and the UK Government’s continued welfare cuts. I am pleased to say that the delivery plan highlights a new £12 million programme for intensive key worker support to help parents who have been out of the labour market to get back into work and, crucially, to support parents in low-paid jobs to stay in work and progress their careers.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the statement. I apologise to members whom we could not reach.

## UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-11347, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on Scotland's support for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

I call Fiona Hyslop to speak to and move the motion. You have up to seven minutes, cabinet secretary.

15:06

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** The issue of intangible cultural heritage lies at the very heart of who we are as individuals and as members of a healthy and vibrant society. It is also timely that we are discussing this important issue in 2018, which is the European year of cultural heritage.

Standing here in this building, redolent with its own stories, we are surrounded by the tangible remains of our nation's great cultural heritage—Holyrood palace, Edinburgh castle and the buildings and monuments of Calton Hill, to name but a few. However, let us reflect for a moment on those buildings. How many of us can really say that what resonates most is the architecture, the construction techniques or the types of stone? They are important, of course, but the attraction of those buildings has just as much to do with what happened in them, the stories behind their construction, the people who stayed in them and the things that they did. Our heritage professionals are well aware of that already. When we tour Holyrood palace, we are invited to consider the fate of David Rizzio, allegedly at the hands of Lord Darnley, and not just the fine architectural details such as the Roman Doric columns and the octagonal cupola of the entry gateway.

Cultural heritage is not just about the physical aspects of culture, such as historical artefacts and buildings. It is also about the traditions, the representations and the practices or living expressions of groups and communities. Those can be enormously wide ranging—encompassing oral traditions, performing arts and traditional crafts. The intangible aspect of our cultural heritage is hugely important. It is a living form of heritage that is continuously recreated and evolves as communities adapt their practices and traditions in response to their environment. It is inclusive, representative and community based and helps to bond societies together.

I believe that to be able to move forward as a nation, we must acknowledge our roots and recognise the value of that intangible cultural heritage in defining and shaping our national identity, our sense of belonging and our continuity as individuals and communities. The success of Fèisean nan Gàidheal is an excellent example of that, for Gaelic song, story and tradition. The intangible is a critical part of how we experience our heritage—binding and connecting us to our past, our present and our future. It is of vital importance that we nurture that legacy.

One of the key issues is the risk of losing our traditions and collective memory. Education is key to transmitting intangible cultural heritage practices to our children and young people. We must also continue to encourage communities, and individuals within those communities, to become active participants in that process.

The core aim of the UNESCO convention is to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage at international, national and local levels. We already do much in Scotland in support of those overarching aims. Intangible cultural heritage is fully embedded in "Our Place in Time—The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland", which defines the historic environment as

"a combination of physical things (tangible) and those aspects we cannot see—stories, traditions and concepts (intangible)".

Similarly, intangible cultural heritage permeates all the work that is undertaken by Historic Environment Scotland. As the lead public body for the historic environment sector in Scotland, it helps not only to curate our heritage but also to tell the stories associated with it. Such activities include, for example, interpretation of all kinds that is associated with our properties in care, through the provision of things such as costumed guides, audio guides, online interpretation and educational materials, and events and interpretation at sites. Historic Environment Scotland also operates the Scotland's urban past project, in which communities are actively recording and creating intangible cultural heritage.

I commend Museums Galleries Scotland for its work in the area. The organisation became involved following requests for development support from Scotland's museums and galleries. In 2007, Museums Galleries Scotland commissioned Edinburgh Napier University to scope intangible cultural heritage in Scotland. As a result, it developed a wiki site to capture examples of intangible cultural heritage in Scotland. The site provides a place to hold information about cultural practices in our communities. It is universally accessible and everyone is invited to add content. That will help to build a dynamic inventory of Scotland's intangible cultural heritage practices.

The site includes hugely diverse entries, from the Marymass fair in Irvine to the Burry Man of South Queensferry and from the extraordinary Stonehaven fireball festival to the stories, traditions, myths and legends that are part of the living heritage of our common ridings.

The UNESCO convention provides a framework for working in the area. “Safeguarding” means ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including identifying, protecting and promoting it as well as revitalising it. To date, 175 states from across the globe have signed up to the convention; indeed, it is the fastest-growing UNESCO convention. Here in Europe, 27 states from within the European Union have signed up to the convention. With the United Kingdom’s non-ratification of the convention, we are clearly out of step not only with Europe but with the world, where other Governments fully recognise and acknowledge the importance of intangible cultural heritage.

Critically, in not ratifying the convention, UK examples of intangible cultural heritage are not eligible to be nominated to UNESCO for inclusion in its representative lists. In that, we are missing out. We have many examples of intangible cultural heritage, such as Harris tweed, the Paisley pattern and the clarsach—the list is endless. In my view, many are worthy of formal recognition and safeguarding.

In December 2017, UNESCO gave special status to the Irish uilleann pipes, which were added to the organisation’s representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. As many commentators noted at the time, that accolade raised awareness not only of the pipes as an aspect of Ireland’s rich culture but of the importance of protecting and sharing it. Of course, I very much welcome that move and congratulate our Irish friends on the inclusion of the pipes on the list, but surely Scottish piping and our contribution to world culture through piping are worthy of recognition.

To fully realise the potential for intangible cultural heritage to further engage communities and tackle inequalities and to help us to build on the excellent work that is already under way in Scotland, the UK Government must ratify the convention. The amendment refers to the Hague convention. That is hugely important and many of us have been calling for many years for the UK to ratify it. It is welcome that the UK Government has now legislated in that regard, but it has taken 13 years to do so since the UK announced its intention to ratify in 2004. Being late to the gate with the Hague convention cannot be used as an excuse not to sign up to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. I therefore urge members to make a clear call for

the UK to sign up to the convention, and to encourage it with a single positive statement from the Parliament, which has responsibility for culture and heritage.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the terms and purposes of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was adopted by UNESCO in 2003, and calls on the UK Government to ratify it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Rachael Hamilton, to speak to and move amendment S5M-11347.1.

15:13

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I welcome the debate. Fiona Hyslop will be pleased to know that Conservative members will support the Government motion. My amendment seeks to add a bit of meat to its bones. Many folk have not heard of intangible cultural heritage but, when it is explained, its purpose clearly resonates through Scottish life and beyond. I hope that members of other parties recognise that the Scottish Conservatives agree that the UK Government should ratify the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Our amendment seeks to communicate that the fact that the convention has not been ratified yet—although we hope that it will be—does not mean that work is not being done on that front.

The UK Government has ratified a number of other United Nations conventions to protect cultural heritage, including the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the 1984 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention. Furthermore, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has signalled plans to review whether the United Kingdom should ratify the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage.

The UK’s not being part of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has not prevented Museums Galleries Scotland from becoming the first UK organisation to be accredited as an expert non-governmental organisation adviser to UNESCO on the ICH convention.

There are never enough opportunities to talk about Scotland’s culture, because our culture is so rich, vibrant and diverse, and because no two places in Scotland are the same. From the Highlands to the Scottish Borders, and

everywhere in between, a wealth of cultural experience is on offer, whether we are talking about dance, food, music, theatre or storytelling.

That is certainly the case in the Scottish Borders, which I represent, with its many vibrant and culturally unique villages and towns. We have the coastal town of Eyemouth, the common ridings in Selkirk and Hawick, the civic weeks in Coldstream and Kelso and countless events, such as the Borders book festival, arts festivals and agricultural shows.

The pleasure of such events is in the enjoyment that they bring to families in the respective communities. Rich cultural traditions are passed down through the generations, which is in itself a form of protection—although it is unclear whether intergenerational methods of communication are compatible.

With the passing down of traditions comes the passing down of attitudes and values. Civic weeks and common ridings teach us important values of inclusivity, acceptance and pride in Scotland's towns and their histories. It is fundamentally important that we teach those ideals from an early age and engrain them in our communities.

Civic weeks have at their core young people; laddies and lassies are appointed as guardians of a rich tradition. In this year of young people, it is crucial to acknowledge the connection between tradition and young people. Too often, there is a misconception that traditions and the like are just for old people, but the involvement of young people is crucial to the longevity of our traditions. That is perfectly demonstrated by the role that laddies and lassies play in civic weeks in the Scottish Borders, because the most important role is entrusted to a young person in a week that is full of cultural and historical significance, and which involves people of all ages. The same is true of agricultural shows. Everyone gets involved, to try to get a rosette or a trophy. Taking part teaches hard work, respect and pride.

Culture, like food, must remain accessible to and enjoyable for everyone. Indeed, what is better than combining our culture with food? A delicious fish supper reminds us all of Scottish haddock and our rich fishing industry; haggis is eaten across the country and has us all licking our lips; and cock-a-leekie soup warms and comforts our souls.

In my passionate pursuit to add the Selkirk bannock to the ICH register, it seemed that all that I had to do was sign up to be a wiki contributor. The cabinet secretary might give the issue some consideration, because to preserve through an online format traditions that are passed down from the older generation might be a step too far, particularly for people into whose lives digital technology does not enter.

**The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan):** Does the member agree that it is more difficult to convince the younger generation to take up traditions when politicians or people in the media deprecate them? I am thinking about my constituency and the Gaelic language.

**Rachael Hamilton:** When Kate Forbes makes her speech in Gaelic later in the debate—we all have our headphones here—she will do wonders to promote the language. I heard Ms Forbes on “Good Morning Scotland” this morning, promoting the language most eloquently.

I agree with Alasdair Allan that it is difficult to get young people involved in traditions, but the Borders common ridings is a brilliant example of that, because the young people enjoy the ridings so much and are proud to take part.

I welcome the debate and support efforts to protect our culture. Like other members, I hope that the convention will be ratified soon. In the meantime, I welcome and encourage continuing efforts to promote local traditions, such as the common ridings and civic weeks in the Scottish Borders and, of course, food.

I move amendment S5M-11347.1, to leave out from “, and calls” to end and insert:

“; notes the UK Government's position that it is necessary to carefully prioritise resources towards those conventions that will have the most impact on the safeguarding of heritage, such as the recent ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property; understands the importance that oral traditions, social practices and festive events have to Scotland and the wider UK's cultural fabric, and joins the UK Government's continuing calls to encourage communities to celebrate such practices and to pass them on to future generations for them to do the same, and believes that the UK Government should, in due course, ratify the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.”

15:19

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I welcome this afternoon's debate, which gives us an opportunity to highlight the rich intangible cultural heritage of Scotland and to consider the merits of ratifying the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Recognising, valuing, preserving and celebrating our intangible cultural heritage is important. I have previously raised the evidence from the Scottish household survey that points towards a growing cultural gap that is largely linked to income. People who live in our more deprived areas are less likely to engage and participate in, and to produce, our country's cultural activity. The engagement phase of the Scottish Government's cultural strategy was

published yesterday. It highlighted the growing feeling in the sector that such inequality exists with regard to access and participation, and the fact that some people are questioning whether the cultural establishment is out of touch with the community and its particular issues, interests and priorities.

That should be at the forefront of our thinking on culture. We should be considering how we can encourage and support greater equality and diversity. Although I recognise the value of the household survey measurements and I want the identified cultural gap to be closed, the value of intangible cultural heritage should be recognised for what it—often by its very nature—can involve. It is often community driven, and the skills and expressions that it involves have often been passed from generation to generation. Its value has not always been recognised, which means that it has not always had the support of the authorities but has instead been more organic and more grass-roots focused.

The Parliament has played a part in providing a greater focus for recognising the value of intangible cultural heritage. ICH helps us to share the experiences of the many communities that make up our country today, and of our diverse and shared heritage. It can be democratising and can give people an emotional connection that makes them feel that they belong to something. There is evidence to show that it can reach and engage with individuals and communities that are hard to reach.

When I met the Heritage Lottery Fund this week, I was pleased to hear that it provides grants and support to intangible cultural heritage, in recognition of the value and diversity of the heritage of local and national cultures and traditions, of languages and dialects, and of people's experiences and memories. Research by the Heritage Lottery Fund identified that young people engage more when the activity or project is about intangible cultural heritage. The fund also provides access to resources for grass-roots community groups that are doing work in that area.

Although Scotland also benefits from support from Museums Galleries Scotland, there is little formal infrastructure in the UK that is linked to ICH. Local authorities can be supportive of cultural community events, but their budgets are under increasing pressure to focus on other front-line services.

What would involvement in the UNESCO convention bring to that picture? The convention recognises the social and economic value of intangible cultural heritage as well as the risk for cultural elements that could disappear if they do not receive help. The convention recognises

heritable tangible objects such as monuments and collections, and immaterial objects such as oral traditions, festival events and traditional knowledge.

Given my earlier comments about the weakness of formal support for and acknowledgement of intangible cultural heritage across the UK, membership of the convention would mean that the UK would have two obligations: first, it would have to take necessary measures to safeguard ICH; secondly, it would have to identify and define, with community and expert involvement, the elements of ICH. That would mean the quite exciting prospect of creating a national inventory of ICH, and the cabinet secretary mentioned the work that has already been undertaken by Napier University in that regard. We would also have to develop action plans for safeguarding the country's culture.

Not being part of the UNESCO convention does not prevent a country from doing any of that, but being a member means that we can nominate heritage for inclusion in the convention's lists. It is fascinating to look at the convention's two lists. A committee meets annually to decide whether something should be included on the at-risk list—the list of ICH in need of urgent safeguarding—or the representative list. On the at-risk list at the moment is the whistled language from Turkey, and the representative list includes a host of crafts, celebration days, languages and traditions. The lists raise awareness and demonstrate diversity, and they offer the possibility of receiving UNESCO support towards safeguarding.

One way to work in partnership with other countries to support and protect ICH is to ratify the convention, and 176 countries have ratified, approved or accepted the convention since its inception in 2003.

I contend that our intangible cultural heritage in Scotland is in a fairly healthy state. Our heritage is a living piece of history that is constantly evolving and being recreated in our communities. It expresses a sense of identity and belonging, and parts of it are thriving throughout Scotland. If the UK were to ratify the convention, it would provide us with an opportunity to collectively identify and protect ICH, as well as enabling us to raise awareness and seek support on an international stage.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate.

15:25

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** I am obligated to remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer for the Cabinet

Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs.

As we have heard, UNESCO provides international recognition of nations' heritage and culture. It celebrates that diversity and reminds us of our responsibility to safeguard our heritage. Today, we consider not our nation's natural beauty nor its famed artists and influential writers but the traditions and rituals of Scottish communities that have influenced and nurtured our culture over hundreds of years—the practices that have shaped our identity as a nation.

The Scottish Government recognises the value of intangible culture, and we have heard about some of the important ways in which it is safeguarded here in Scotland. The UK Government's failure to ratify the UNESCO convention means that Scotland's world-renowned culture misses out on some of the international recognition that other cultures can secure, such as the recognition for violin making in Italy, beer brewing in Belgium, cowbell crafting in Portugal and even bagpipe culture in Slovakia. The fact that Scotland is unable to put forward its traditions and practices to be considered for inclusion on the international representative list sells Scotland's culture short.

With summer swiftly approaching, I will take the opportunity to draw attention to a couple of Scottish seasonal practices. The halfway point between the spring equinox and the summer solstice, towards the end of April, was held by Scotland's Celtic people to be a particularly special time of year that possessed regenerative powers and bestowed springtime fertility. They celebrated that transition at the ancient Gaelic festival of Beltane, at which they drove cattle through bonfires to bestow protective powers on them before they were led to their summer pastures. That ritual was practised until the 19th century, over more than a thousand years.

Equally significant was the first water of Beltane, which was supposed to hold especially potent powers. Washing oneself in it was supposed to bring health and happiness, which is how the tradition of washing oneself in the May day dew was established. I am pleased to report that my constituency holds Scotland's most famous location for that tradition—Arthur's Seat. For hundreds of years, Scots have climbed Arthur's Seat to catch the sunrise and to wash themselves in the dew in the hope that it will bestow everlasting youth. At this point, I must admit that I am quite tempted.

Although I am unsure of the mythical powers of the May day dew, I am certain of the lasting powers of such Celtic traditions. It is incredible that, hundreds of years after the original practice, we still celebrate the coming of the summer

months here in Scotland. If members wish, they can join those who will celebrate the Beltane festival on Calton hill in between the flames, or they can take a dawn stroll to the top of Arthur's Seat to wash their faces in the dew. Although the rituals have evolved and adapted—I am not sure whether cows are still welcome on Calton hill—we can see the way in which Celtic traditions still influence our modern culture.

That is why the Scottish Government is quite right to acknowledge and celebrate the central importance of intangible cultural heritage to Scottish culture. It is also why I am happy to support the motion. The Scottish Government has repeatedly called on the UK Government to ratify the UNESCO convention, and I hope that it will take note of today's debate and the calls from across the political parties in Scotland that are represented here. I hope that the UK Government will listen and will consider ratifying the convention as soon as possible.

15:29

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. We need to hold the preservation of our cultural heritage in high regard because of the great pride that we take in our oldest customs and traditions. By preserving our heritage, we can maintain the diversity of our communities and highlight traditions that have enriched our cultures throughout our history.

Usually when we think of intangible cultural heritage, we think of things such as language, customs and traditions, but such heritage goes far beyond that. Artefacts, objects and instruments are the physical pieces of intangible cultural heritage that can most easily be protected in institutions such as museums. Other sorts of intangible cultural heritage are harder to protect.

Maintaining traditions and events can be a challenge in the 21st century: it requires the public to remain engaged and interested in the tradition, as well as ensuring that the tradition is funded.

Although the United Kingdom Government has not ratified the 2003 convention, Museums Galleries Scotland has worked hard towards achieving the goals that are set out in the convention through the creation of a log of traditions, including events, foods, crafts and many other traditions that are practised in Scotland.

Highland games are a crucial part of our heritage and they need protection. They can be traced back to the 14th century Ceres games in Fife—that will please Willie Rennie. Back then, the games were used to establish who the strongest and bravest soldiers in Scotland were and to show off artistic and musical talents. Since then, the

games have become an integral part of the Scottish cultural scene and are recognised around the world.

I welcome to the gallery Don Campbell from the Scottish Highland Games Association and Robert MacIntyre, who is chairman of the Rosneath peninsula highland gathering, which takes place in the West Scotland region, which I represent.

The games continue every year, keeping up traditional events such as shot put and caber toss, along with artistic expressions in the form of traditional music and dance, with graded competitions that attract participants of all ages. Each year, the games draw thousands of visitors to Scotland, contributing to local economies and spreading knowledge of our culture. The games allow us to share that heritage with a local and a global audience.

For many smaller communities, including one in my region about which I have spoken before, each year is more of a struggle to meet the financial demands of running the games. For many communities, the highland games are the biggest event of the year and attract the most visitors to the area, so it is vital to those small communities that the games continue.

Most highland games are volunteer-run events, and the ability to access sponsorship and funding is dependent purely on the volunteers' knowledge. Many highland games organisers struggle to access funding and support. I would be interested to hear from the cabinet secretary how we can better support the highland games organisers.

The games are so important to Scottish culture as a whole, but I would argue that the importance that they have to individual communities is critical in defining those communities and in stimulating a robust local economy—as my colleague Rachael Hamilton said about the Borders.

By involving several levels of the public sector, from the Government to VisitScotland to Scottish Athletics, there is great potential to empower small communities to host their own highland games.

Highland games provide us with a chance to protect our intangible cultural heritage in a way that surpasses the conservation of old pieces of art in a museum. Highland games give us a way to continue a tradition that has been in our culture for centuries and allow us to pay respect to our past. We must do what we can to support and protect them in the future.

15:32

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am very happy to participate in the debate. They say that every day is a school day, and I have learned a great deal more about the UNESCO Convention

for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage than I knew at the start of the debate—although I confess that I was starting from a very low base.

There seems to be a simple division in the Parliament: either we endorse the convention now or we endorse it later. That does not seem like a huge amount of disagreement. Indeed, there is a huge amount that we can agree on.

**Rachael Hamilton:** So far we have heard from members of three different parties and we all support getting the UK Government to hurry up and ratify the convention. I am not sure where the member's information comes from.

**Johann Lamont:** Perhaps I misread the Conservative amendment, which appears to say that it wants certain things to be done before endorsing the convention. It does not matter. I am absolutely committed to the idea of endorsing the convention. However, if we want to support our intangible cultural heritage, we must try to understand the challenges that we face, beyond simply endorsing the convention.

I want to make some observations—I do not pretend to be any sort of expert, so forgive me if this is the political equivalent of thinking aloud.

First, there needs to be an understanding of what is intangible. For me, Gaelic is not intangible; the Gaelic language is all too tangible, and the policy choices that resulted in my generation losing the language were entirely tangible. We have to be careful about that.

I was the first person to speak in a debate in the chamber in Gaelic, which is the language of my forebears, and I made a point then about the way in which choices had been made, which meant that all too many people—certainly in my generation—lost the language. I support initiatives across Government that revive the Gaelic language.

Perhaps we are seeking to open up an understanding of culture and how we value it, so that we do not have mainstream culture and define everything else as intangible, which I do not think is intended. That means that we should challenge our notion of what Scottish culture is and recognise just how diverse it is.

I caution against defining too tightly what intangible culture is. There is the joy of the vast range of cultural experiences—the diversity of poetry, song, music and dance across our communities. Trying to put intangible culture in a box can be counterproductive. We know what it is; let us not spend too long killing ourselves with definitions.

I can think of many examples of the riches of the culture into which I was born. That was a culture of

humour, of understanding the elements and of the daily battle working against the elements, and it was shaped by the land on which people worked. It shaped the people of that land. It was a culture of seachas—storytelling—and ceilidhing. The people did not think that they were taking part in it, of course; they were simply living it, and that is how we should see it.

I recall that, as a child, I thought how far away the Gaelic culture and life that I was born into—which thrived by the fireside in Anderston in Glasgow and was alive at the hearth in my family's croft—felt from what was presented as the Gaelic culture through television, and how far even the Mod and the Gaelic institutions felt from the cultural experience that we had.

I congratulate the feis movement—I know that the minister mentioned that—for making live and visible my experience of the Gaelic language and Gaelic culture, music, drama and song. It has provided an opportunity for a younger generation that we were perhaps denied.

I want to think about the way in which we capture our history and oral traditions across a range of cultures. The University of Edinburgh's Scottish studies department did a wonderful little project that captured the voices of people from Tìree in the 1980s. I am sure that that approach has been replicated in other places. We need to ensure that we invest in those little projects. The storytelling project in south-west Glasgow is another example of capturing the range of voices and diversity. In supporting the convention, there should be a commitment to ensuring that there are the little bits of funding and work that can make a massive difference in celebrating the vast range of cultures across this country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before Kate Forbes makes the last contribution to the open debate, I draw members' attention to the headphones that are on their desks. Kate Forbes will make her speech in Gaelic, and interpretation facilities are available. I was about to do all the demonstrations, but I will not. Members can plug their headphones into the little sockets at the base of the consoles. If members are unable to hear the interpretation, they should press the audio button on the console screen and select channel 2, which is English.

15:38

**Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** Bha ùidh mhòr agam san deasbad seo air sgàth 's gun do chuir mi taic ri iomairt inbhe UNESCO dhan Gàidhlig an-uiridh. B' e beachd lain MhicLeòid, nach maireann, a bh' ann inbhe UNESCO fhaighinn airson cultur, dualchas agus seann nòs nan Gàidheal. 'S ann mar

chuidhneachain air lain Macleòid a nì mi an òraid seo.

Tha inbhe UNESCO a' ciallachadh gum bi inbhe "intangible cultural heritage" aig a' Ghàidhlig, agus tha sin a' ciallachadh gum bi dòigh eile ann ar cànan, ceòl agus dualchas a dhìon airson an ath ghinealaich. Tha a' Ghàidhlig a' fosgladh doras gu sealladh eile air ar saoghal—a' toirt dhuinn tuigse nas coileanta air ar n-eachdraidh is ar cultur, agus dealbh nas soilleire air na tha romhainn. Tha beartas a' chànan a' cur dath air an tìr, agus tha e na dhleastanas dhuinn a bhith ga dìon.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I have a huge interest in this debate because I supported the UNESCO status campaign for Gaelic last year. It was the late John MacLeod's idea to acquire UNESCO status for the culture, heritage and traditions of the Gaelic language, and it is in memory of him that I am delivering this speech.

UNESCO status means that Gaelic will have intangible cultural heritage status, which means that there will be another way of protecting our language, music and heritage for the next generation. Gaelic opens doors to another vision of our country and gives us understanding of our culture and a brighter vision of what is before us.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** A bheil am ball ag aontachadh gu bheil e math gu bheil Google air Gàidhlig na h-Alba a chur ri na seirbheisean eadar-theangachaidh aca?

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Is the member aware that Google has added Scottish Gaelic to its translation services?

**Kate Forbes:** Tha, gun teagamh, agus tha e gu math feumail nuair a tha òraid agad ri sgrìobhadh sa Ghàidhlig airson deasbad sa Phàrlamaid.

Tha inbhe UNESCO a' ciallachadh gum bi dòigh eile againn Gàidhlig a dhìon airson an ath ghinealaich, mar a thuir mi.

Chan eil cothrom againn an-dràsta, mar a thuir am ministear, a' Ghàidhlig fhaighinn air liosta UNESCO leis nach eil Riaghaltas na Rìoghachd Aonaichte ag aontachadh leis.

Tha mise a' dèanamh na h-òraid seo sa Ghàidhlig airson dà adhbhar. Sa chiad àite, chan i a' Ghàidhlig cànan ar n-eachdraidh a-mhàin. Tha Gàidhlig beò am-measg sgoilearan, choimhearsnachdan, phàrantan agus nam meadhanan poblach, ann an Glaschu agus anns a' Ghàidhealtachd.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Yes, indeed, and it is very useful when you have to write a speech in Gaelic.

UNESCO status would give us another way of protecting Gaelic for the next generation, as I said. However, as the minister said, we do not have the opportunity to get Gaelic on to the UNESCO list, because the UK Government does not agree with it.

I am delivering this speech in Gaelic for two reasons. First, Gaelic is not only the language of history; Gaelic is a living language among pupils, communities and parents and in the public media in Glasgow and in the Highlands.

**Dr Allan:** A bheil am ball ag aontachadh gur e argamaid gu math faoin a th' ann nuair a tha sinn a' cluinntinn bho àm gu àm nach eil cuideigin an aghaidh na Gàidhlig, ach tha iad an aghaidh dhaoine a tha a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig air soidhnichean rathaid no ann am foghlam?

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Does the member agree that it is a silly argument that we hear from time to time from people who say that they are not against Gaelic, but they are against people using Gaelic on signs and in education?

**Kate Forbes:** Tha mise an aghaidh nan argamaidean sin gu dearbh agus gun teagamh, agus sin aon de na h-adhbharan a tha mi a' cleachdadh Gàidhlig sa Phàrlamaid an-diugh, air sgàth 's gu bheil mi airson sealltainn gu bheil daoine a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig anns a' Phàrlamaid, tha iad a' cleachdadh Gàidhlig sna sgoiltean, tha iad a' cleachdadh Gàidhlig sna coimhearsnachdan agus tha e gu math feumail gu bheil sinn fhathast a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig an-diugh.

Chan eil mi airson seasamh an seo a' bruidhinn mun Ghàidhlig mar gur e cànan marbh a th' innte. Gu dearbh, 's e sin an t-adhbhar a dh'fheumas sinn a dìon le inbhe UNESCO.

Tha tòrr dhiofar dhòighean prataigeach airson ar dualchas agus ar cànan a dhìon. Nam bheachd-sa, cha bu chòir dhuinn a bhith a' dèiligeadh ris a' Ghàidhlig mar rudeigin ann an taigh-tasgaidh. Ged a dh'fhuiling a' Ghàidhlig iomadach buille chruaidh anns na bliadhnaichean a dh'fhalbh, tha i beò fhathast, mar a thuir am ministear, agus ag ùrachadh mar chànan sam bith eile, agus bheireadh inbhe UNESCO taic ris an amas againn uile, uile tha mi an dòchas, a bhith a' leasachadh na Gàidhlig agus ga neartachadh airson an àm ri teachd.

Sin an dàrna adhbhar a tha mi a' dèanamh na h-òraid seo sa Ghàidhlig, gu bheil mi airson sealltainn dhan a h-uile duine aig nach eil fios mar-thà cho priseil 's a tha i agus gum feum sin a

bhith air a chomharrachadh le inbhe oifigeil bho UNESCO.

Tha rannsachadh lomairt na Gàidhealtachd a' sealltainn gu bheil luach £148.5 millean anns a' Ghàidhlig do dh'eaconamaidh na h-Alba gach bliadhna. Tha sin mìorbhaileach. A bheil e ceart a bhith a' bruidhinn mu luach na Gàidhlig mura h-eil sinn ga cleachdadh? Gu tric, bidh sinn a' bruidhinn mun Ghàidhlig mar rudeigin fa leth. Bidh sinn a' bruidhinn mun Ghàidhlig gun a bhith a' bruidhinn sa Ghàidhlig.

Am-bliadhna-sa, 's e bliadhna na h-òigridh a th' ann, agus gun teagamh tha an òigridh 's na fèisean, mar a thuirt buill eile, a' dearbhadh gu bheil ceòl Gàidhealach fhathast beò.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I am against those arguments, and one of the reasons that I am using Gaelic in the Parliament today is that I want to show that people use the language in the Parliament, as well as in the schools and in the communities. It is very useful that we are using the language today.

I do not want to be standing here talking about Gaelic as though it were a dead language. Indeed, that is the reason that we must give it protection through awarding it UNESCO status. There are a lot of different practical ways of protecting our heritage and our language. In my opinion, we should not be dealing with Gaelic as though it is something that is from a museum.

Although Gaelic has suffered many a cruel blow in the years that have passed, it is still a living language, as the minister said, and it is renewing itself, like any other language. UNESCO status would support our aim to develop the language and strengthen it for the future. That is the second reason that I am delivering this speech in Gaelic. I want to show everybody who does not know already how precious it is. That must be substantiated with official UNESCO status.

The research from Highlands and Islands Enterprise shows that Gaelic has a value of £148.5 million for the economy in Scotland every year. That is wonderful. Is it correct to be talking about the value of Gaelic if it is not being used? Often, we talk about Gaelic as something apart. We talk about Gaelic without speaking in Gaelic. This year is the year of young people, and indeed the young people and the fèisean have proved that Gaelic music is still living.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** A bheil i ag aontachadh rium gu bheil na fèisean a' cur dìon air ar dualchas, gu h-àraidh dhan fheadhainn òga?

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Does the member agree that the fèisean are protecting her hopes for Gaelic, especially for young people?

**Kate Forbes:** Tha, gun teagamh. Dh'ionnsaich mi fhìn Gàidhlig tro fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, agus bha cothrom againne a bhith ag ionnsachadh mu cheòl, cultar 's a h-uile càil eile anns a' Ghàidhlig tro na fèisean. Tha iad gu math feumail airson dhaoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig agus cuideachd airson sgoilearan aig nach eil a' Ghàidhlig a bhith ag ionnsachadh. Bha mi ann an àrd-sgoil an t-seachdain a chaidh. Bha iad a' faighneachd cheistean mun Ghàidhlig ged nach robh iad fileanta sa Ghàidhlig.

Leis an sin, ma tha eòlas air ar n-eachdraidh, bheir e dhuinn sealladh nas fheàrr air na tha romhainn, agus mar sin, tha a' Ghàidhlig luachmhor agus cudromach dhuinn uile.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Yes, indeed. I learned the language through Gaelic medium education and we had the opportunity to learn about Gaelic music and culture and everything else through the fèisean. It is very useful for people who have Gaelic and for pupils who do not have Gaelic to be learning it.

I was in a high school last week and they were asking questions in Gaelic, although they were not fluent. If there is knowledge of our history, it gives us a better vision of what is in front of us. Gaelic is valuable and important to us all.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** If members wish to clearly hear the rest of the debate, assuming that the rest of it will be in English, they should please remove the headphones from the consoles. We move to closing speeches.

15:44

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** It is an honour to follow Kate Forbes and her accomplished speech, which she delivered with great style. I am sure that everybody appreciated what she did. [*Applause.*] She has probably done an awful lot more for the Gaelic language today than this Parliament has done for some time. Gaelic is a special thing that we must protect, cherish and encourage.

VisitScotland conducted a valuable experiment a few years ago. It gave diaries to some tourists who were visiting Scotland and asked them to write down what they experienced. The tourists wrote, of course, about castles, mountains, glens, cathedrals and fine architecture but, more often, they wrote about stories that they heard from locals. They heard about what Mary—a local—had experienced and about the fact that her family was born and brought up in the community where she was born. They heard the stories of peoples'

ancestors. They talked about Jimmy, who took them to the local pub to sing along to songs. Those were the experiences that the tourists cherished most. Looking at what other people see and recognise in us tells us who we truly are, so that was a valuable experiment for VisitScotland to do and reflect on. That is why it is important that we recognise intangible heritage such as our stories, experiences and lifestyles, and why the UK Government should sign up to the convention before too much longer.

I am grateful to Maurice Corry for his speech about highland games. Ceres highland games in my constituency are the oldest games in Scotland. They were established 700 years ago following the battle of Bannockburn. Robert the Bruce granted a charter to hold the games in appreciation of the support from the locals from the village in the battle. The games are still an incredibly popular event today. They are held in the natural amphitheatre in the village and they are special. They attract visitors from all over the world—America, Brazil, Australia and China—who mix and rub shoulders with the locals, and locals who have gone further afield to live somewhere else often come back to share the stories of their lives. They come back to the village each year to share the intangible culture and stories from previous years. It is the eclectic mix that makes it successful.

How do we support the highland games? They are held not only in Ceres, but in more than 60 other places around the country. If we add the borders games, there are even more traditional games with heavies, dancers, athletes and cyclists taking part. There are two or three things that we can do to support the games. We need to do more of what VisitScotland does to get more tourists to come to the games—VisitScotland does a grand job of promoting the highland games. We also need to encourage Scottish Athletics to do even more to get more runners and athletes to take part in the games. Further, we need to provide financial support through seedcorn funding for the games, because, with the new regulations that are in place, it is sometimes particularly challenging and difficult to make the games thrive. That is why a small grant scheme to support the highland games and make them grow and flourish is exactly what we should be doing. I encourage Fiona Hyslop in her summing up to consider providing a small grant scheme to make the highland games the best that they can be.

15:48

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** It has been an interesting, if short, debate. We will support the Government's motion, and it would be good to see a unified position from the Parliament.

The Conservative amendment sounds very similar to the reply that Lord Ashton gave in the House of Lords last April, but I welcome that the Conservatives have confirmed this afternoon that they are supportive of ratification.

The UNESCO convention has been laid out by members this afternoon, and strong arguments have been made for ratification. Ash Denham argued that, at the moment, Scottish culture loses out. I recognise that, but I also recognise that ratifying the convention would benefit the whole of the UK, which has a rich culture, whether that is Lancashire clog dancing, folk music or whatever.

I will say a word about Brexit. We must consider how culture will operate on an international stage post-Brexit. Members are familiar with concerns about freedom of movement and access to European cultural funds. Joining the convention would demonstrate our commitment to co-operative working on an international stage within culture.

Members also gave local examples from their regions and constituencies. Rachael Hamilton made points about how the list is created and whether it should be self-selecting. If we were to ratify the convention, that would provide a formal process, which would be of benefit.

Some members mentioned the role of young people and the importance of education. That point was well made. In this age of globalisation, how do we ensure that interest continues from generation to generation?

Maurice Corry and Willie Rennie both mentioned Highland games and spoke about the struggle to get volunteers and financial support for them, recognising their importance to Scotland as well as their challenges. Willie Rennie offered some solutions to that situation that would be worth pursuing; however, as I said in my opening speech, our local authorities have often played a big role in supporting such events and they are under significant funding pressure.

Johann Lamont made a point about people's understanding of what is intangible. Sometimes, the language that we use does not really help with what we are trying to explain to people. She also talked about challenging our notion of what culture is. In my opening speech, I said that intangible cultural heritage is more linked to communities and the grass roots and would widen our understanding of culture.

Many members spoke about Gaelic. The convention provides the opportunity to protect traditions that are at risk of being lost. When the Parliament was first established, there were real concerns that Gaelic was a fading language. It certainly still needs support, but we are in a much healthier place for the survival and, even,

flourishing of the language. Kate Forbes made a strong case that it is a living and expanding language. However, although Gaelic is still being spoken, it is no longer the first language for many people, and there are concerns that, as generations pass on, traditions that are linked to Gaelic—such as the stories and the psalms—will be at risk. Johann Lamont's remarks about her experience of growing up with Gaelic were perceptive and insightful.

That highlights the challenges that we have in trying to capture what is important. On the radio this week, I heard a discussion about how to preserve Doric as a language. We can all make cases for what we could put into the list and what should be preserved, but ratifying the convention would provide a way of curating that and a framework for protection. It would also be for the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage to decide what was to be included under its criteria. The list is not expansive, so we would need a UK list and a Scottish one to sit alongside what we would argue should be listed under the convention.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the Napier University report. There is an issue with the pressure that is put on some of our cultural festivals. A risk has been identified of our losing the things that are important. For example, hogmanay has become a big commercial festival that is important to our tourism. However, the traditions in Scotland are about first footing with lumps of coal. In my family, we opened the back door to let out the old year and opened the front door to let the new year in. In Fife, it was always known as auld year's night, not hogmanay. We are in a time of globalisation when there is a need to maintain cultural diversity, and being part of the convention could help us in that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have been guilty of allowing the debate to run on a bit and I do not want it to affect the next debate too quickly, so I ask the next two members to be kind and cut down their speeches a little bit.

15:53

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Good luck with that, Presiding Officer.

I am delighted to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. In fact, to be honest, I am relieved to be at the end of the debate, because I have thought long and hard about the nature of intangible heritage and culture and I could not quite put my finger on it.

As Johann Lamont said, every day is a school day. I like the definition that I found of intangible culture as

“works through which the creativity of ... people finds expression”,

because that gives me latitude to mention whatever I like. In music, it encompasses for me everything from my favourite bagpipe piece, “Highland Cathedral”, through to that little old rock band from Glasgow, AC/DC. I know that we are all “Thunderstruck”, but therein lies the beauty of the word “intangible”. How far back do we have to go to claim that something is culture?

I think that sport has to be included, too. How about bonspiel—a traditional curling tournament that is usually held on a frozen lake and can last for up to two or three days over a weekend? Who remembers playing elastics in the school playground? I think that health and safety would have a field day with that one, but I would like to see it brought back again.

I am glad that Maurice Corry and Willie Rennie mentioned Highland games. I fondly remember, during my early athletics career, getting on the ferry to Brodick and running on a 300m track on a hillside and golf course. If a runner could get their stride pattern right, they could land on all the little hillocks and run faster than everybody else. I was glad to hear Fiona Hyslop mention the Marymass fair in Irvine, which also has a great Highland games tradition.

**Willie Rennie:** Mr Whittle would have been an amateur at that time. Does he have a declaration to make about any prize money that he won at those games?

**Brian Whittle:** I thank Willie Rennie for that intervention. He is absolutely correct. There was no prize money. We used to win things that people never used in their lives, such as little china birds. I do not know where they came from. No—I have no declaration to make, and certainly not to Mr Rennie. However, I echo his call for Scottish Athletics to look at bringing more athletes to Highland games. It is an experience that is beginning to be lost, and it really helped to shape some of my previous.

I will skip over some examples, but I want to mention things such as stone skipping and tig. Do they lie within intangible culture?

Coming from God’s own country, it would be remiss of me, an Ayrshire boy, not to wonder whether our great bard, Rabbin Burns, falls into this category. His works have certainly been interwoven in my life from an early age. I remember reciting at Troon primary:

“The King cam’ drivin’ through the toon,  
Slae and stately through the toon;  
He bo’ed tae left, he bo’ed tae richt,  
An’ we bo’ed back, as weel we micht;  
But wee Jock Todd he couldna bide,

He was daft tae be doon at the waterside ...  
Och, wee Jock Todd!”

That was in 1975, when I was a runner-up in the Burns competition. That early education has followed me right through my life, and in my MSP travels I often pass by Burns’s cottage in Ayrshire, the auld kirk that spawned “Tam o’ Shanter” and Souter Johnnie’s cottage.

As I am speaking near the end of the debate, I have been able to listen to a variety of inputs to it. It was wonderful to hear Kate Forbes speak in Gaelic, which is a wonderful, lyrical language and, as she said, a living, breathing language. I am glad to say that my youngest daughter is at a school where Gaelic is taught.

However, not all culture should necessarily be resurrected. Ash Denham talked about Beltane and mentioned cattle being driven through bonfires, which we should maybe consign to the history books.

Rachael Hamilton made the good point that, during the common ridings in the Borders, attitudes and values are passed on, and the integration of the young and the old is extremely important.

Claire Baker said that social background may be a barrier to cultural heritage, but I am not convinced of that, to be honest, because—

**Claire Baker:** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, he will not. [*Laughter.*]

**Brian Whittle:** I am in my last half minute.

We have only to listen to the musings of that great poet Billy Connolly to get a view into that world and that different culture.

The safeguarding and maintaining of Scotland’s intangible cultural heritage is incredibly important, and the job of passing it on lies with all of us in our communities, our schools and our homes. We should not try to define it, because the title of this debate tells us that we cannot do that. We should enjoy it, revel in it and pass it on.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It is intangible how long Mr Whittle speaks for when we ask him to do so quickly. [*Laughter.*]

I call Fiona Hyslop to wind up. You have up to six minutes but no more, cabinet secretary.

15:59

**Fiona Hyslop:** This has been a short debate, but an important one. It is the latest in a recent series of strategic discussions about the issue. Last November, I chaired the strategic historic

environment forum, which considered intangible cultural heritage. The forum noted not only the amount of good work that was already being taken forward, but the many organisations throughout Scotland that have a keen interest in intangible cultural heritage. I was pleased to hear of the cross-party group on culture's welcome consideration of the issue in November.

Before I turn to some of the speeches that we have heard in the debate, I should declare an interest. I am currently the chieftain of West Lothian highland games, and I would like to formally invite both Brian Whittle and Willie Rennie to take part in the hill race of the games, which will take place in a few months' time.

I will reflect on some of the members' points. Claire Baker, in a very considered speech, set out a clear explanation of the obligations under the convention. I am concerned that one of the reasons that the UK has not signed up to it is that it considers that doing so would somehow open up the floodgates to costs and requests. We then had such requests from Willie Rennie and Maurice Corry for the Highland games. There have previously been discussions about that. I will ask EventScotland to engage in those again, but we should not put the issue of instant demands for funding in the way of understanding the wider obligations of the convention.

Ash Denham talked about Celtic traditions and Beltane. I know people—the Presiding Officer may be one of them—who have washed their faces at Arthur's seat. Celtic traditions tell us much about our story and they need to be expressed, too.

Johann Lamont and Kate Forbes reflected on the importance of Gaelic language and the living and developing traditions, and on how there may not be that much disagreement about what we are trying to achieve here.

The amendment to the motion is probably unnecessary commentary, because we want a clear, simple statement. I am not demanding that the UK Government sign up to the convention tomorrow—although I would like it to do that—but the motion would send a strong statement, and I welcome Rachael Hamilton's reflections on the need to help the UK to understand the importance of signing up to the convention.

Earlier this month, I discussed the matter in Paris with Mr Engida, the deputy director general of UNESCO. I assured him that, even without the UK's ratification of the convention, intangible cultural heritage is strongly supported by the Scottish Government. We agreed on the tremendous scope to use modern means, including digital technology, to celebrate intangible cultural heritage. Mr Engida expressed a keen interest in today's debate and I agreed to inform

him about the issues that were raised in the chamber this afternoon.

It is significant that UNESCO is interested in what is happening in Scotland. We should not lose sight of the fact that we have much to share with the world in the area of intangible cultural heritage, not simply in the examples that we have that are part of our everyday lives but in how we approach the subject. For example, the intangible cultural heritage in Scotland wiki site, which was developed by Museums Galleries Scotland, was copied by Norway and Finland as best practice, with other nations interested in learning from it, too. Again, I congratulate everybody who was involved in the initial development of the site.

Against that backdrop, the time is right for the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to call for the UK Government to ratify the convention. Indeed, the UK Government's ratification last year of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict may signal a meaningful shift in the UK Government's approach to culture in the wider international context. I reassure the Conservatives that that was the impression that I received from the UK's ambassador to UNESCO when I met him in Paris.

It is important to promote and safeguard our cultural practices and our living traditions for this and future generations. In that generous, encouraging and positive spirit the chamber can come together and agree to the simple motion. I understand and will reflect on the Conservatives' commentary, but I do not consider that their amendment is necessary to communicate our message. In that context, I urge the chamber, with our responsibilities for cultural heritage, to call on the UK Government to ratify the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and I ask members to support the motion.

## Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a stage 1 debate on motion S5M-11350, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. I invite members who want to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now.

16:04

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** I am pleased to open this stage 1 debate on the general principles of the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

I begin by thanking the convener and members of the Local Government and Communities Committee for their careful scrutiny of the bill so far. I welcome the committee's stage 1 report, with its recommendation to the Parliament that the general principles of the bill be agreed to. I hope that the Scottish Government's response to the report provides the committee with the assurance it was seeking from us.

I also thank the clerks for their work in support of the committee, and all the stakeholders who gave evidence to the committee. I particularly thank the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, which, with other stakeholders, have worked closely with us throughout. I am pleased that stakeholders recognised the need for the bill, and support its principles. I look forward to that approach continuing as the bill process moves towards its end.

The bill is a relatively short but essential measure that amends a number of the Scottish Housing Regulator's powers over registered social landlords. It also makes provision for ministers to be able to limit local authorities' powers over housing associations.

The bill is necessary because of the decision by the Office for National Statistics to classify RSLs as public sector bodies in the national accounts. That decision was taken because the ONS, in light of the criteria that it must apply in classification decisions, judged that some of the powers that the regulator and local authorities may exercise over RSLs amount to public control of RSLs for the purposes of the national accounts.

If left unchanged, the classification would mean that all new net borrowing by RSLs, which would have been counted as private borrowing previously, would instead count against the Scottish Government's borrowing limits. Therefore,

although the classification decision might appear to be just a technical matter, it would have the real and significant consequence of placing a new and permanent burden on the Scottish Government's finances.

One result would be that borrowing by RSLs to support our affordable housing programme would no longer count as private borrowing, but would instead count as Government borrowing, effectively adding £1.5 billion to our £3 billion investment in the programme and putting at risk our target of building 50,000 new affordable homes during this session of Parliament. As RSLs are independent of the Scottish Government, they are free to determine with their private lenders how much they borrow. Therefore, reclassification would have the consequence of the Scottish Government having to accommodate RSLs' borrowing within its budget, without being able to control or limit the level or extent of that borrowing.

The purpose of the bill is to avoid that outcome by ensuring that the powers that the regulator and local authorities have over RSLs are consistent with RSLs being classified as private sector bodies. For the most part, the bill achieves that by amending those of the regulator's powers that ONS identified as constituting public control over RSLs. The bill narrows the circumstances in which the regulator can appoint a manager to an RSL or remove, suspend or appoint an officer to an RSL; and it removes the regulator's powers to give or withhold consent to actions by RSLs, such as disposing of their assets, or restructuring themselves.

The changes are necessary because, put at their simplest, the powers that they amend currently enable the regulator to act as though it were the actual owner of RSLs. That crosses the line between what the regulator, as a public body, is able to do in respect of bodies that are classified as private, and what is incompatible with that classification.

While the changes are significant, they go just as far as is necessary to secure reclassification, but no further than that. They do not alter the regulator's single statutory objective, which remains safeguarding and promoting the interests of homeless people, tenants of social landlords and others who use the services of social landlords. They leave intact the majority of the regulator's powers. That includes powers to monitor, assess and report on how well all social landlords are performing; set standards for RSLs' financial health and governance; undertake investigations; and, where necessary, require landlords to take remedial action.

Those and other remaining powers will allow the regulator to continue safeguarding and promoting the interests of tenants and homeless people, not

least by reassuring private lenders that RSLs remain attractive businesses to lend to.

Through my engagement with the SFHA and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, I have been encouraged to hear that they recognise that the bill represents a new challenge for their members and that they are ready to step up to it. In particular, they recognise that removing the regulator's powers of consent over matters such as disposals and restructurings will place a greater onus on all their members to demonstrate to their lenders that they have robust and rigorous governance procedures in place. The committee highlighted that issue in the stage 1 report, and I know that the SFHA and the forum are keen to work with the regulator to ensure that the current review of its regulatory framework helps to strengthen further the governance arrangements that are already in place.

In our response to the report, we confirmed that we will use our regular discussions with the SFHA and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations to confirm that the sector gives proper weight to that important matter—for example, through the provision of continuous training and development for members of governing bodies. We have also worked with UK Finance to address its concerns. In response to the committee's recommendations, we will lodge amendments that will provide for the regulation-making powers at sections 8 and 9 of the bill to expire three years after the bill receives royal assent.

The bill is necessary to safeguard the Scottish Government's finances and our ambitious affordable housing programme, and I am pleased that it commands cross-party support.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Bob Doris to speak on behalf of the Local Government and Communities Committee. Mr Doris, you have five minutes.

16:11

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to open for the Local Government and Communities Committee in this debate on the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. I thank all those who contributed to our scrutiny of what is mainly a technical bill.

It is worth highlighting at the outset that there was general agreement among those we heard from that the measures in the bill are a proportionate and necessary response to the

decision by the Office for National Statistics to categorise registered social landlords as public bodies. The bill's proposals are intended to ensure that the ONS reclassifies RSLs as private bodies by removing or limiting some of the Scottish Housing Regulator's powers of intervention. The bill also provides ministers with powers to alter the regulator's powers in the future, in order to ensure that reclassification of RSLs as private bodies. Those we heard from agreed that the only way to achieve those aims was through the bill.

If RSLs remained public bodies, their borrowing to build new affordable homes would no longer be considered private borrowing but would be brought on to the Scottish Government's books, potentially adding £1.5 million of debt. That could have severe implications for RSLs' contribution to the realisation of the Government's 50,000 affordable homes commitment. We therefore agreed that the measures proposed in the bill were necessary. However, we noted that a few issues raised during our scrutiny needed to be addressed.

The Scottish Information Commissioner was concerned that the removal of some of the regulator's powers could exempt RSLs from the need to provide information under the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004. Although the Scottish Government proposes to bring RSLs within the scope of freedom of information legislation, the Information Commissioner was concerned that there could be a short gap between the enactment of the bill and the implementation of the FOI changes. That would mean that the EIRs would not apply to RSLs, thus making people unable to request such information during the gap period. The Information Commissioner was not able to say with certainty that that risk would arise, but he will have to reach a decision when the issue arises.

Both the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations assured the committee that they would encourage and direct RSLs, where possible, to continue to provide information under the EIRs during any gap period. On that basis and with those assurances and the relatively low level of risk involved, we agreed that having less formal arrangements to ensure that RSLs continue to provide that information is a more proportionate response than amending the bill.

Sections 1 and 2 of the bill narrow the circumstances in which the regulator can intervene where an RSL has failed, and those in which the regulator can remove managers or officials from an RSL or appoint managers or officials to an RSL. Most people agreed that the measures were appropriate, with some saying that they reflect

how the regulator has actually used its powers, which the regulator has confirmed.

UK Finance raised one issue in relation to the powers, commenting that the definition of “failure” could be broadened to make it clear that the regulator can intervene where the RSL is failing, rather than when it has failed or becomes insolvent. It felt that that would ensure lender confidence in the market. The Scottish Government and the regulator, however, allayed those concerns by pointing to the statutory provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, which set out regulatory interventions that the regulator will still be able to make following amendments made through the bill. The committee welcomes the fact that the minister has now also expanded the explanatory notes to provide that clarity.

Sections 3 to 7 of the bill remove the requirement for the regulator to provide its consent to RSLs where they wish to dispose of land or make certain organisational changes, such as a change in their constitution or restructuring, or to wind up or dissolve an RSL. The requirement to provide consent is replaced with the requirement to notify the regulator within 28 days of the changes being made. Any existing tenant consultation requirements are protected. The committee was broadly content that those proposals were balanced and we welcomed the reassurances that were given.

The importance of strong governance processes and their direct impact on the confidence of lenders and of RSLs themselves was highlighted to us. Although the bill removes some of the regulator’s powers in relation to RSL governance, it was encouraging to hear that UK Finance was comforted by the measures that stakeholders and RSLs will take to ensure that self-assurance processes are strong.

There are some additional powers in sections 8 and 9 that will ensure that the Government has the power to intervene and make additional provisions if we do not have the approach just right. The committee and the Government acknowledged that those powers do not have to last for ever; the bill will be amended at stage 2 to include a sunset clause, which we think is the proportionate, responsible and right thing to do.

The Local Government and Communities Committee is happy to agree to the general principles of the bill.

16:16

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):**

This is one of those debates on a bill that does not exactly set the heather on fire, but which is important nonetheless. The Housing (Amendment)

(Scotland) Bill looks, on the face of it, to be quite narrow and technical: a bit dull, you might think, Presiding Officer.

However, although the bill deals with specific accounting issues that are of interest to accountants, its implications will be far reaching. If the bill is not passed—although I am sure that it will be—that would make it extremely difficult for housing associations to play their part in meeting the Government’s affordable homes target. Although that might give Opposition spokesmen like me an opportunity to kick Kevin Stewart, which can be quite enjoyable, it would not be very responsible. So, we will support the bill at this stage and beyond.

It is useful to put what this is all about into plain English—at least, I will have a go. Registered social landlords and housing associations were classed as private bodies for accounting purposes until the Office for National Statistics decided to change their status to public bodies. The effect is that any borrowing that they do counts against the Scottish Government’s borrowing limits, which in turn means that the Government might have to limit what RSLs can borrow, which would not be good. We can see the problem. In order to remove those shackles, we have to reclassify RSLs as private sector bodies. However, we would not expect a private sector body to be as tightly regulated as our housing associations are by their housing regulator. That level of public sector control was one of the reasons behind the ONS switch in the first place, so we can see where it was coming from.

If we are to take RSLs back into the private sector, we also have to rein back the regulator’s powers. The bill tackles that, with the end result being that housing associations will enjoy more freedoms and will be able to deliver more. The bill is technical, but it is important.

It is fair to say that there has not been a great deal of interest in the bill outside the sector. The Local Government and Communities Committee received only 16 responses to its call for evidence, compared to more than 1,000 on the Planning (Scotland) Bill, which is a lot more controversial. People are generally supportive of the proposals, which will narrow the powers of the regulator to appoint a manager to an RSL, and to remove, suspend and appoint officers of an RSL.

The bill will also remove the need for the regulator’s consent to be given for disposal of land and housing assets by an RSL, for changes to the constitution of an RSL and for voluntary winding up, dissolution and restructuring of an RSL. The proposals provide the Scottish ministers with regulation-making powers to limit the influence that a local authority has over an RSL.

The Local Government and Communities Committee made a number of recommendations. I am pleased that it took on board the concerns of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee about sections 8 and 9 of the bill, which have already been mentioned and which cover ministers' regulation-making powers. The DPLR Committee considered that, in principle, the powers could be framed more narrowly. The minister agreed to add a sunset clause to both those sections, and he hoped that that—and his assertion that the powers would be used only for limited means—would address the concerns that were raised by that committee, which, indeed, they do.

Overall the bill is a sensible one that should proceed through its stages without fuss, and I commend it to Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Simpson, I understood your explanation, so thank you for putting it in simple English.

I call Monica Lennon. You have four minutes, please.

16:20

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Well, the bar has been raised. [*Laughter.*]

I am pleased to open for Scottish Labour in this afternoon's debate on stage 1 of the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, and to state our support for it. I was worried that there would be a lot of repetition in the debate, but let us just call it consensus—we will be saying lots of similar things.

I am a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee, which has produced a stage 1 report on the bill. I joined the committee late, at the beginning of this year, as work on the bill was drawing to a close, so I must pay tribute to the convener, my fellow committee members and Elaine Smith, who was my predecessor as deputy convener of the committee, and who will speak later in the debate.

Scottish Labour supports the bill because, like everyone in the chamber, we agree that it is necessary and we understand that it is a proportionate response to ensure that RSLs' debt does not affect the Government's ability to borrow money and to build the affordable housing that is so desperately needed across Scotland.

Following the decision of the ONS back in 2016 to reclassify RSLs as public sector bodies in the UK national accounts, the bill has become necessary in order to ensure that RSLs can be reclassified as private sector bodies, as they were previously. As we have heard, and as the minister explained in his opening speech, if that were to be

left unchanged, it would mean that any borrowing that was undertaken by social landlords would be counted as borrowing by the Scottish Government. As Government borrowing is limited to £450 million per year, and to £3 billion in total, that would potentially lead to a situation in which restrictions would have to be placed on how much RSLs could borrow.

As we have heard, the bill also seeks to make changes to the powers that the Scottish Housing Regulator has over RSLs in relation to their management and governance and how they buy and sell land. Reducing the powers of the regulator over RSLs will allow the ONS to reclassify them as public sector bodies, as they were before.

As we have also heard from the Local Government and Communities Committee's convener, the majority of the evidence that was received by it has been supportive of those proposals, including that from the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. Unlike with other bills, there was no need to consult widely, so the Government took the sensible approach of engaging directly with the regulator and with the groups and bodies that represent those who are likely to be affected by the bill's proposals, including tenant groups. There appears to be broad agreement between stakeholders and the regulator that changes to the regulator's powers will reflect actual practice, and that the narrowing of powers will not hamper necessary interventions.

Some concerns had been raised that the bill would potentially weaken safeguards, or have an unintended impact in respect of landlords falling out of the scope of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004, which was highlighted by Bob Doris. We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has confirmed that it will look into making RSLs subject to the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, should it be deemed that they will fall out of the EIR obligations. The fact that there would still be a gap between implementation of the bill and that of the FOI extension remains a concern, but we are all keen for the Government to work with others to resolve that, as the work progresses.

In conclusion, Scottish Labour will be happy to support the principles of the bill at decision time this evening.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Andy Wightman to open for the Green Party.

16:24

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. How long do I have?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Four minutes, please.

**Andy Wightman:** Four minutes? Goodness me!

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Is that too much?

**Andy Wightman:** We will see how I get on. I will try to stay within scope.

Like other speakers and my colleagues on the committee, I acknowledge the purpose of the bill and agree with it. I think that I agree with everything that the minister said in his opening remarks—there is a first time for everything—and with what my convener said. We will vote for the bill at decision time, so I want to use my four minutes to discuss some wider aspects of housing associations that our deliberations on the bill raised in my mind.

In the 1970s, community-based housing associations and co-operatives began to flourish, mainly in Glasgow. They worked to improve life in the city's tenements and to manage better and to improve tenement housing. That was a very welcome model of co-operation that, 40 years later, we would do well to reflect on, in terms of promoting more co-operative approaches to housing provision.

Housing associations have played an important role in the housing story since the recognition of registered housing associations in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1974. In a debate such as this, it is important to acknowledge the good work of housing associations—in particular, rural social landlords such as Lochaber Housing Association and Waverley Housing, which is in the Scottish Borders, as well as the urban organisations that house large numbers of tenants in our towns and cities. They are where we find our largest housing associations—for example, the Wheatley Group, which encompasses 12 business interests including Dunedin Canmore Housing and Glasgow Housing Association, and which last year reported a turnover of £275 million. In the course of its work, Wheatley housed 250,000 “customers”, as it calls them, across Scotland.

Although today we affirm the value and validity of housing associations as private organisations, it is appropriate to raise a question about where those organisations and the model are headed. For example, I think that we should differentiate between smaller organisations, which tend to use terms such as “tenants”, and larger operators such as Wheatley, which talk about “customers”. When the chair of the Scottish Housing Regulator was before the Local Government and Communities Committee in November last year, I put it to him that in his annual report he had highlighted the diminishing tenant participation in the larger housing associations compared with the small

ones. That brings me back to my opening point that it is perhaps time to consider moving towards a more genuinely co-operative model for housing in the social sector.

When the minister appeared before the committee in December, he warned that if the bill did not proceed, the 50,000 affordable homes target would be at risk. That is true, and the bill will overcome that issue. I do not dispute that, but we need to remember that half of the Government's affordable housing programme, at £1.5 billion, is funded by social tenants, and many of those households are among the financially poorest citizens in this country. It is incumbent on us to acknowledge that.

As I have argued, we should not ignore the role of individual tenants as full participants in housing associations. They are vital to the success of those organisations, which is why I regret the fact that, in many cases, tenants do not participate to the extent that they could. There is room for improvement on that. Those shortcomings are particularly important in the light of the fact that the bill will weaken public oversight of housing associations.

I agree with the general principles of the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. Greens will support it at decision time. I look forward to stage 2.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is a little time in hand. I was being a bit naughty—yes, I have my naughty moments.

I call Richard Lyle.

16:28

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I will get all that time, so thank you, Presiding Officer.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on an issue that is important to all our constituents, including mine in Uddingston and Bellshill. The bill concerns the responsible allocation of funds in relation to the Scottish Government's debt limit, and it is on that point that I will begin my remarks. I have no doubt that no one in the chamber fails to recognise what an emotional subject housing is. I am also confident that most of us would agree that Scotland needs more public housing. The bill is simply a reasonable administrative necessity.

**Andy Wightman:** The member says that we need more public housing, but of course the bill classifies housing associations as private organisations. Does he agree that, as well as more housing association stock, we need more public housing that is run by councils?

**Richard Lyle:** Every house that is built is a house that houses a family. The member knows that as well as I do.

The ONS acknowledges that if we do not agree to proceed with the bill, RSLs will continue to be classified as public sector bodies in the national accounts, with the result that all new net borrowing by RSLs will count against the Government's borrowing requirements. That would impose a significant, permanent and—most of all—needless burden on the Scottish Government's finances.

I am sure that all members care about the Scottish Government's ability to pay for the services on which Scottish people rely and that they do not need more convincing of the simple argument that a Government needs all available funds if it is to fulfil its obligations. Therefore, the Parliament should take steps to solve the problem of the classification of RSLs as public bodies by agreeing to the bill.

Our not agreeing to the bill would have immediate implications for the Scottish Government's commitment to build homes for families, because our commitment depends on the Government's planned financial support of more than £3 billion for our programme being augmented by private borrowing by the RSL sector of some £300 million a year. If RSLs' borrowing can no longer be counted as private borrowing, the cost to the Scottish Government of delivering on the commitment will include RSL borrowing and rise to £4.5 billion, which is £1.5 billion over budget, as members have said.

The policy is similar to policies that are being pursued—for the same reasons—by the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government in their respective jurisdictions.

The bill provides that RSLs will no longer be classified as public sector bodies. Any funds that they borrow will therefore not come out of the Government's limited budget and we will remain able to fulfil our obligations to all our constituents, including making good on our promise to build 50,000 new and affordable homes. I commend the bill to the Parliament.

16:32

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** When I was trying to put my two girls to bed last night there was great excitement, because today is the last day of term. In the end, I said, "Do you want me to tell you what I'm talking about in the Parliament tomorrow? I'm talking about the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill." Suddenly there was silence in the room and I was able to leave—the girls seemed not to want to engage with this vital subject.

**Graham Simpson:** To get your girls to bed, did you read them my speech? [*Laughter.*]

**Jeremy Balfour:** Even more exciting, I referred them to the minister's biography, which got them overly excited.

Joking apart, although the bill is technical and will not, I suspect, be remembered by most of Scotland in the years to come, it is important, as members have said.

With your permission, Presiding Officer, I will stray away slightly from the bill, although I will stick with the subject of housing. Before I entered the Parliament nearly two years ago, I worked for a small charity that tries to get more affordable housing in Scotland by redeveloping empty church buildings. We worked closely with many housing associations across Scotland. My general view is that housing associations are doing a great job and are working with the Scottish Government to try to get the 50,000 affordable houses built within the next few years. I am sure that all members welcome that.

I hope that the powers that the bill will give housing associations to borrow and follow different accounting procedures will encourage some housing associations to build. I think that some housing associations have become slightly conservative in their approach to building more houses; I came across a number that were scared to go ahead, for different reasons. Housing associations have a responsibility to work with their communities, local authorities and the Scottish Government in that regard.

**Kevin Stewart:** It is in everybody's interests to get housing associations to develop if they have the confidence to do so. If Mr Balfour wants to outline some of the reasons that he came across and send them to me, I will look at them. My officials will help as much as they can with giving housing associations the knowledge and helping to set them on the development track if that is what they want to do. I will be quite happy to hear from Mr Balfour about the reasons for lack of development in certain places.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I will certainly take the minister up on his kind offer after recess.

The bill will give housing associations greater confidence to go forward. It is in all our interests for more affordable houses to be built in the Lothian region and across Scotland. For that reason, I welcome the bill and the fact that there is cross-party consensus on it. I hope that the bill will get through its final two stages quickly so that we can move on and see housing associations flourish as they seek to serve everybody across Scotland.

16:35

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I agree with what Kevin Stewart said when he moved his motion.

As the minister said, the planned 50,000 affordable houses, 35,000 of which are for social rent, could be put in jeopardy if the bill does not go ahead. We cannot allow that to happen. We should remember that, even if we achieve those figures, we will still face a housing crisis that must be tackled.

Last year, more than 34,000 homeless applications were made in Scotland. Even 35,000 social rented houses—if they are achieved, which I hope that they will be—will not solve the housing crisis. There are 130,000 households on local authority housing waiting lists, and almost 11,000 households are in temporary accommodation—27 per cent of them are living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Can members just imagine young children sitting in their class of 30 pupils and, while some children are just getting on with their work, some are wondering where they will be sleeping that night? It is incredible that we have these housing problems in 2018 in Scotland. We need to tackle them.

The housing minister is fond of reminding us that, during the period before his party came into government, eight council houses were built.

**Kevin Stewart:** Six.

**Alex Rowley:** It was six. However, it is interesting that between 1997 and 2007, 37,200 houses were built in the housing association sector. A lot of progress was made and I was surprised to discover that there are almost 280,000 units of housing stock in housing associations. We can therefore see that housing associations make a massive contribution in Scotland.

The minister was a councillor, as I was a councillor. One of the most difficult things for me—it has continued since I became an MSP—is people coming to my surgery or contacting me for help when they are either in inadequate housing or have no housing at all. That is why it is good that we have unity here today.

**Kevin Stewart:** I, too, am glad that we have that unity today, because there is a lot of shared ambition across the Parliament to deliver affordable homes and homes for social rent across Scotland.

I recognise that, in Mr Rowley's part of the world, Fife has done extremely well in adding to our programme during the previous parliamentary session and in the current session. I hope that that

cross-party co-operation in Fife and elsewhere in Scotland will continue, so that we can resolve people's problems with getting housing.

**Alex Rowley:** We need to work together because of the issues that I have outlined. It is not acceptable for us to have this housing crisis in Scotland. All parties should work together. People's most basic right—to have a roof over their head—should be available to every individual person, every child and every family. I will therefore be pleased to work with the Government on this.

16:40

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Through the chair, I will say a couple of words to Andy Wightman, who gave us a 40-year horizon since housing associations came into play. "The Digest of Justinian" covered the co-operative housing associations in ancient Rome, and Babylon had co-operative models 2,500 years ago, so Scotland has come to the party quite late.

Members might reasonably ask why I am speaking in the debate. I forced my way to the front of a long queue that the whips had drawn up to fill the last speaking place from the Government benches. The temptation for my part arose, of course, when I read in the committee report at paragraph 10 that

"The Bill is short and technical".

That word "technical" inevitably drew me in.

It is fair to say that this is not the most contentious thing that we have debated since I came to Parliament in 2001, but it is quite interesting. It illustrates some of the unintended side effects of revising the way in which we do accounting—in particular, the accounting of bodies that have to report their assets, liabilities, income and expenditure. In 2001, I found that, under the old financial reporting standard 17, the accounts for the private finance initiative contractor Kilmarnock Prison Ltd—I was interested in prisons at that time—treated Kilmarnock prison as a disposal in the second year of trading because it had a commitment in the 30-year contract to pass the prison to the Government. It vanished off the contractor's balance sheet as an asset but, as far as the Government was concerned, it did not appear as an asset on its balance sheet until 30 years hence. That asset appeared on no balance sheet for almost 30 years, under the old system.

We are now under the international financial reporting standards and have a new thing called "contingent assets". That means that the prison now appears on the balance sheets of both Kilmarnock Prison Ltd and the Government. The bottom line of all that, in relation to the issue that is

before us today, is that we need to have the right balance as to where things appear in our public accounting.

The problem that has been presented to us by the Office for National Statistics is perfectly proper. The question is whether the associations were in a place in which they had sufficient freedom of action that they could control, manage, dispose of and buy assets without the Government telling them what to do. The next question is whether they were creating assets for the Government, and the final question is whether they, by their actions, created involuntary liabilities—contingent or otherwise—for the Government. It was uncertainties in those accounting areas that properly caused the Office for National Statistics to say that those bodies are connected to the public sector—although they are private bodies, as Mr Wightman reminded us—and are really part of the public sector. If that was the case it would, of course, inhibit the Government in its spending plans and, more fundamentally for the policy that we are interested in here, inhibit the ability of those societies to borrow money and build housing. Alex Rowley is perfectly correct to say that we have to build more houses, by whatever means.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** When he read about the bill, did Stewart Stevenson come across comments by UK Finance that lenders might have to “ramp-up their ... due diligence”? What does he think about that point?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Answer and conclude, please, Mr Stevenson.

**Stewart Stevenson:** I was very pleased that UK Finance came to a position of supporting what is proposed—I gather that there was some doubt about that initially.

Elaine Smith makes a valid point: whenever we change a system, we risk creating greater complexity. That would not be good news if it got in the way of our building more houses and made life more difficult for housing associations. However, the bill strikes the right balance and I shall be very happy to support it, come decision time.

16:45

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Although I am closing for Scottish Labour, when the bill first came before the Local Government and Communities Committee, I was deputy convener of the committee. I was involved in taking evidence on the bill and I raised some concerns about some potential unintended consequences of narrowing the powers of the housing regulator. I will return to those concerns later.

As we have heard from the minister, the committee convener and most other speakers, the main thrust of the bill is to ensure that the borrowing ability of housing associations and other social landlords will not be counted as Government borrowing. That will be done by reducing the powers of the regulator over registered social landlords and allowing the ONS to reclassify them as private sector bodies. It will also ensure that the debt accrued by registered social landlords does not become subject to further restrictions or limits as an unintended consequence of the earlier decision taken by the ONS to reclassify registered social landlords as public sector bodies.

Those who know me will be aware that I am not naturally drawn to reclassifying a body from the public sector to the private sector. I note Andy Wightman’s comments on that, too. However, as we know, the consequences of not acting, which were clearly set out in evidence to the committee, would be that the Scottish Government’s target of building more affordable homes could be impacted almost immediately if unnecessary restrictions were placed on the borrowing ability of RSLs. As Andy Wightman said earlier, that would also impact on council house building. My colleague, Alex Rowley, made that point in his speech, too. That is why there is broad consensus that the bill is necessary and why Scottish Labour agrees with the Local Government and Communities Committee and will support the bill’s general principles.

Jeremy Balfour raised an interesting point about housing associations. It brought to mind the right to buy. I was involved in the issue of the extension of right to buy to housing associations back at the start of the Scottish Parliament. It is no longer an issue, but it would have been something that would have put off housing associations from building more houses.

On the issues of concern that have been raised about the bill, I agree that further work must be done to ensure that there is no reduction in the information that RSLs are required to provide to the public. That issue was raised at the committee. I appreciate the view expressed by the SFHA and others that they would continue to expect their members to provide the information that they are currently required to provide under the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004. Nonetheless, it is still a matter of concern that, should an unintended consequence of the bill be that registered social landlords fall out of the scope of EIR, there might still be a gap in implementation between the passage of the bill and the extension of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 to RSLs.

**Bob Doris:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Elaine Smith:** I am happy to take an intervention from the committee convener, but first I was going to say that I am pleased that the Scottish Government has committed to resolving the issue with the committee, as Monica Lennon mentioned.

**Bob Doris:** It would not be ideal, but in theory, if the gap were very small, once the FOI legislation kicked in requests could be submitted under FOI and the information would still be given out. I hope that that situation will not arise and that housing associations will act in the spirit of the bill that we are discussing.

**Elaine Smith:** I am sure that the committee will take that on board at stage 2 and keep an eye on the matter.

At committee, I also realised that increased self-assessment for registered social landlords runs the risk of increased costs for RSLs. There is also an implication that local authorities will have reduced influence on housing association boards, with an associated impact on council duties with regard to housing targets and reducing homelessness. I am glad that the minister has agreed to monitor that, and, in particular, to ensure the right approach to tackling homelessness with the partnership and co-operation of RSLs. Andy Wightman's comments on that were also interesting. I look forward to seeing how he takes that forward.

In conclusion, the Scottish Government has said that, without the legislation, there would be a significant permanent burden on Scottish Government finances and controls on how much RSLs can borrow. Although the debate has been fairly technical and has maybe not set the heather on fire, as Graham Simpson said, the consequences could be real for Government spend, housing waiting lists and homeless people. Therefore, the bill is important and, as a former homelessness officer, I feel very strongly about it.

As I have said, Scottish Labour will be happy to support the bill at decision time.

16:50

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am very pleased to participate in this stage 1 debate and to close on behalf of the Conservatives.

It has been good to hear the contributions from members across the chamber, who support the principles of the bill. The consensus in the chamber is most encouraging. As a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee, I

thank all those who have worked on the bill and look forward to its proceeding.

The Scottish Conservatives support the bill. We understand and acknowledge the reasons behind it. Graham Simpson talked about its importance—why it has to be passed—and he said that the Government and RSLs are taking a sensible approach to what is happening. That is important.

Monica Lennon talked about the powers, management and governance that are required, and Jeremy Balfour touched on housing associations' lack of building and developments, and their fear. We need to take that on board, so I look forward to dialogue on that with the Minister for Local Government and Housing.

As other members have said, the change is necessary, because the Office for National Statistics reclassified our housing associations as public bodies. That means that any borrowing that is undertaken by them counts towards the Scottish Government's borrowing limits. At present, Scottish housing associations privately borrow about £300 million each year, which is about two thirds of the Scottish Government's capital borrowing limit. Without any changes to the current situation, it would be highly likely that the Scottish Government would be forced into imposing controls on borrowing by housing associations, and none of us wants that to happen. It could put in danger the Scottish Government's target of building at least 50,000 affordable homes during this parliamentary session. The Conservative Party supports that goal. Meeting that target is a challenge, and we must ensure that failure to meet it is not an option. We need those houses now. It is therefore essential that the Office for National Statistics is able to reclassify housing associations as private bodies. The bill will enable exactly that by reducing and removing certain powers of the regulator, and we are happy to support that.

In keeping with the aim of moving away from the designation of housing associations as public sector bodies, it is welcome to see the proposals in section 9 to limit local authorities' control over them. Giving ministers regulation-making powers for limiting or removing the influence that councils can have over housing associations is another necessary step to tackle the issue. It is very important that we ensure that that happens.

That is not to say that registered social landlords do not need to be regulated at all; they very much require to be regulated. It is vital that tenants can be confident in the knowledge that their homes are well maintained and that their tenancy is secure. A strong framework also gives funders of social housing the confidence to invest. That has been touched on already. There may be a lack of confidence to invest. We must ensure that that is

not the case and that we manage to challenge that and ensure that investment happens.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to strengthening building regulations to ensure the safety of the Scottish public and to increasing the number of affordable homes that are available across the country. We believe that the recommendations in the committee's report and the bill seek to address the problems. Our aim is to strengthen and support any measures that will improve the housing sector. In turn, those measures will benefit communities throughout Scotland.

I support the bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** I call Kevin Stewart to close for the Government. I was going to say that I call Alexander Stewart to do so. That would have been interesting.

16:54

**Kevin Stewart:** As long as you did not call David Stewart, who is not present at the moment. Maybe there are too many Stewarts; actually, there are never too many Stewarts.

I would like to thank those members who participated in this afternoon's debate. I certainly appreciate the consensus that there has been across the chamber and I am glad that members have supported the general principles of the bill today, and that they have recognised that it is necessary in order to protect the finances of the Scottish Government.

As members will know, this Government has a clear and defining reason for making housing a priority. Providing good-quality, warm and affordable housing is vital in order to create a fairer Scotland, to secure economic growth and to support and create jobs. At the heart of that sits our commitment to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes over the course of this session of Parliament, with 35,000 of those being for social rent, which presents a huge opportunity to meet the various housing needs of communities right across the country.

I am pleased to say that we are making good progress on that commitment thanks to partners in councils, housing associations, and the construction industry. Recent statistics show that approvals for new housing association homes are up 33 per cent on the previous year, helping to lay the foundations for a pipeline of proposals that are capable of delivering against the remainder of the 50,000 target by 2020-21.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me—there is too much chat in the chamber. What Mr

Stewart is saying is riveting and members should be listening. [*Laughter.*]

**Kevin Stewart:** I hope that I can continue to be riveting. Maybe the heather will, after all, be set alight this afternoon.

Let me be quite clear. The role of housing associations is not just about providing good-quality housing and services for their tenants, or building new energy-efficient homes; it is also about creating jobs, supporting vulnerable people—as Elaine Smith pointed out—and acting as an anchor for some of the most deprived communities in our country.

Given the crucial role that housing associations play, I am delighted that the need for the bill and its general principles have, from the outset, had the support of the sector. Both the SFHA and the GWSF have acknowledged the need for the bill—not least to underline the status of housing associations as independent, private bodies that are partners with the public sector, but not controlled by it.

Housing associations are key partners for all of us, developing and managing high-quality, energy-efficient housing across the country, and delivering the range of services to their tenants that I mentioned. Beyond that, they do so much to build and sustain the communities in which they operate, and long may that continue.

We—and they—agree on the need for them to have a strong and effective independent regulator, working on behalf of homeless people, tenants and others who use their services. One of the key benefits of such regulation is the confidence that it gives to lenders. That confidence enables housing associations to borrow at favourable rates, helping them in turn to play their part in delivering affordable housing.

Maintaining lenders' confidence has been an important objective for the Government during the development of the bill. That is why we have been in regular contact with their representative body—UK Finance—throughout the process, and why we have used our response to the stage 1 report to address concerns that they raised with us.

Another priority has been to ensure that housing associations continue to provide information requested by anyone under the environmental information regulations, as has been mentioned by many members this afternoon. I am pleased that the SFHA and GWSF share that priority, and I am grateful to them for confirming that they will be advising their members to continue responding positively to requests for environmental information even if, once the bill has been enacted and brought into force, the Scottish Information Commissioner decides that the regulations no longer apply to housing associations.

I hope that those examples illustrate the positive and constructive approach that we and stakeholders have taken to the issues that are raised by the bill. I welcome the input of the Local Government and Communities Committee, and I hope that that will continue during its stage 2 deliberations.

I thank the officials who have had to deal with what some members have said is rather a dry piece of legislation. Personally, I find it all quite exciting, as I do all housing matters. I hope that, at stage 2, we will continue to have the co-operation that we have enjoyed so far, and I thank you, Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to hold the stage 1 debate today.

## Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of a legislative consent motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill, which completed House of Lords report stage on 27 February 2018, relating to the creation of a new offence regarding the misuse of lasers in relation to vehicles, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Humza Yousaf*]

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-11397, on substitution on committees.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that Neil Bibby be appointed to replace Alex Rowley as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee.—[Joe FitzPatrick]

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The first question is, that amendment S5M-11347.1, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S5M-11347, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on Scotland's support for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)

Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 27, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-11347, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the terms and purposes of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was adopted by UNESCO in 2003, and calls on the UK Government to ratify it.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-11350, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-11345, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill, which completed House of Lords report stage on 27 February 2018, relating to the creation of a new offence regarding the misuse of lasers in relation to vehicles, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S5M-11397, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that Neil Bibby be appointed to replace Alex Rowley as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee.

*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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