

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 16 February 2000
(Afternoon)

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 16 February 2000

Debates

	Col.
TIME FOR REFLECTION	1071
POINT OF ORDER	1073
Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West).....	1073
DRAFT CENSUS (SCOTLAND) ORDER	1074
<i>Motion moved—[Mr McCabe]—and agreed to.</i>	
<i>Motion moved—[Tricia Marwick]—and agreed to.</i>	
<i>Motion moved—[Mr Jim Wallace].</i>	
<i>Motion moved—[Irene McGugan].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Tommy Sheridan].</i>	
The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace).....	1074
Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP).....	1083
Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP).....	1086
Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	1089
Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab).....	1092
Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP).....	1093
Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD).....	1095
Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab).....	1095
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab).....	1100
Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP).....	1101
Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab).....	1103
Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab).....	1104
Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP).....	1106
Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab).....	1107
Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con).....	1109
Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab).....	1111
Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP).....	1112
Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD).....	1113
Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	1114
Tommy Sheridan.....	1116
Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP).....	1117
The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie).....	1119
DECISION TIME	1123
BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE	1128
<i>Motion debated—[Dr Ewing].</i>	
Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP).....	1128
Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab).....	1130
Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con).....	1134
Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD).....	1134
Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP).....	1136
Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab).....	1137
Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD).....	1138
The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie).....	1139

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 February 2000

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): To lead our time for reflection today, I welcome Judith O'Neill, who is a lay member of the Catholic Church.

Judith O'Neill: I quote:

"Ask and it will be given to you,
Seek and you shall find,
Knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives,
and he who seeks finds,
and to him who knocks, it will be opened."

Friends, we begin our time for reflection today with two brief parables that Jesus told his disciples. I read from chapter 15 of St Luke's gospel:

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it. And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulder, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost'.

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost'."

Each of those little stories has the same very satisfying pattern. It begins with a loss—the loss of a farmer's valuable sheep and a woman's precious coin; perhaps it was a piece of her jewellery. Then the story moves on to the search: the farmer trudging over the fields and calling for his lost sheep, and the woman lighting a lamp and sweeping the floor for her lost coin. Then come the finding and the rejoicing, and the calling in of friends for a celebration, because that which was lost has been found again.

As we reflect on those two stories of losing, searching and finding, let us bring our prayers to God.

We pray first for all who suffer loss, especially those who come to us for help. They may come over loss of work, loss of house or land, loss of family and friends by bitter quarrels or by death or, worst of all, the loss of memory. Help us to enter

into their sorrow, to bring them comfort, to join in their search, and to rejoice with them if what has been lost can be found again. For all those, dear God, we ask you to hear our prayers.

We pray, too, for all the men and women in Scotland who are ready to help those who suffer loss: for the members of this Parliament; for our ministers and priests; for our teachers and lawyers; for our doctors and nurses; for our social workers and housing officers; for the police and the mountain rescue service; for those who man our lifeboats; for those, such as the Samaritans, who answer our helplines; for loving families; and for faithful friends and good neighbours. For all those, dear God, we ask you to hear our prayers.

We end our reflection today by asking for God's blessing on ourselves and on all the work that is done in this house:

May the Lord bless us and keep us,
May the Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us,
May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us and give us peace.

Amen.

Point of Order

14:35

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I thank you for your letter of response to my inquiry about how the agenda for parliamentary committees should be decided. Rule 12.3.1 of the standing orders states:

“A committee shall meet to consider such business on such days and at such times as it”—

the committee—

“may from time to time decide”.

My understanding of the English language indicates to me that that means that it is the committee as a whole, rather than the convener alone, which decides the agenda of a committee meeting.

I should be grateful if you would be good enough to clarify the contents of your letter to me, in which you state:

“The only formal option available to a member seeking to influence the shape of an agenda would be to lodge a motion ahead of the previous meeting of the committee. This would need to be consistent with the Rules in Chapter 8 (e.g. Rule 8.2). However,”—

this is the important part of the letter—

“the convener does have the authority to decide which, if any, motions to take and in effect, therefore, controls the agenda.”

My understanding of rule 8.2 is that it refers to motions for meetings of the Parliament. Surely the procedure for committees should be different, otherwise a convener can use his or her powers to stifle debate. I would, therefore, be grateful if you could arrange for the matter to be considered by the Procedures Committee.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): I am perfectly happy to ask the Procedures Committee to have a look at the matter, but in general the standing orders as set out for the chamber apply equally to committees. It is for the conveners of committees to rule as I rule in the chamber.

I will be happy for the member to publish my correspondence—I think that members would rather see it than have it debated as a point of order. By all means allow the Procedures Committee to have a look at it, as well.

Draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000

14:37

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): I move without notice,

That motion S1M-552 be taken at this meeting of the Parliament.

Motion agreed to.

Mr McCabe: I wish to move motion S1M-552 because the draft census order is somewhat unusual, in that it is subject to both affirmative and negative procedures. Suspension of standing orders will allow the debate to follow the normal pattern.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to suspend Rule 8.6.1, Rule 10.7.1 and Rule 11.4.1 of the Standing Orders for the period of the debate on the Census (Scotland) Order 2000 on 16 February 2000.

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: We will now proceed to the debate on motion S1M-459.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I understand that motion S1M-519 in the name of Kate MacLean has been withdrawn.

The Presiding Officer: You have pre-empted me—I was about to inform members that Kate MacLean's motion has been withdrawn. In the interests of the chamber, I am happy to accept a motion without notice for a member to propose a similar motion. Is that what you are seeking to do?

Tricia Marwick: I move without notice,

That motion S1M-554 be taken at this meeting of the Parliament.

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I will call Irene McGugan to move her motion in place of that of Kate MacLean at the appropriate time.

I now call Jim Wallace to move motion S1M-459.

14:39

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): The 2001 census will be a landmark event, as it will be the first census of the new millennium and the first to be conducted under the auspices of the Scottish Parliament. Once every 10 years, the census provides us with an opportunity to collect information about every person resident in

Scotland, which will enable policies to improve the social and economic condition of Scotland's people to be soundly based.

The draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000 sets out the Executive's proposals for the date of the next census, which it is proposed should be 29 April 2001.

The purpose of the order is to prescribe the date on which the census is to be taken, the persons by whom and with respect to whom the census returns are to be made and the particulars to be stated in those returns.

An Executive note explaining the draft order was tabled when the order was laid. Annex A of that note comments fully on the articles and schedules.

Briefly, article 4 stipulates the persons with respect to whom the returns are to be made—essentially, all usual residents of a household. Visitors are not covered where they are staying on census night but are required to be included on a form for their usual address. There are special provisions for students and boarding school children at the parental home.

Article 5 stipulates the persons by whom the returns are to be made, both for private households and for communal establishments. Articles 4 and 5 should be read with schedule 1. Article 6, which stipulates the particulars that are to be supplied in different situations, should be read with schedules 2 and 3.

Providing that the census order is approved and, subsequently, formally laid, we will follow it up with further subordinate legislation in the spring, consisting of the draft census regulations, which, among other things, will specify the forms to be used in the census.

The procedures for dealing with the draft order are complex, as explained in the Executive note. I will say something about those procedures in a moment.

However, I will outline first how the Executive has approached the task of deciding what priority topics should be included in the census—I am sure that most of our debate today is likely to concentrate on that aspect of the draft order.

Our proposals for census topics have been drawn up after thorough and extensive consultation with users over a lengthy period that started back in 1996. There are three criteria for selecting topics: whether they meet the priority needs of census users in Scotland, particularly central Government, local government and the health service; whether acceptable and workable questions on priority topics can be devised; and whether the census, or an alternative method, is the best method of collecting the information required. Also, we have had to have regard to the

overall length of the census form, taking into account the implications for user response and cost.

Since publication of the draft order on 10 January, almost all comment has focused on additional questions that particular groups wish to be included, notably religion, more information on ethnic group, language spoken in the home, the Scots language and income.

By way of contrast, one can observe that there has been little or no comment on the additional questions that we are proposing to ask this time, compared with 1991. I will rehearse those questions, which are on general health, provision of unpaid care, year of previous employment, size of work force at place of work, place of study and journey to place of study. Those new questions, along with income, are the expressed priorities of those who make most use of census data.

We have had to reject several topics that the main census users wanted to be included. For example, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities would have liked extra questions on sources of income, second and holiday homes, five-year migration patterns and the number of paid jobs held by individuals.

Reflecting the additional questions that we have included and a more user-friendly layout, the proposed census form for 2001 requires three pages per person and, with household questions, the standard five-person form will be 20 pages long, in comparison with a 12-page form in 1991, which catered for a household of up to six people.

Quite simply, we cannot keep adding questions to the census form without that having an adverse effect on response rates and, inevitably, costs. It is right to give priority to the topics that have commanded most support during an extensive consultation process.

I have said that it is important that the census form does not exceed three pages per individual, in addition to the household section of the form. First, the cost escalates sharply if we have to move beyond three pages. Secondly, and more important, the professional judgment not only of our own registrar general but of the other census offices in the United Kingdom is that there will be a significant adverse effect on the user-friendliness of the form and, therefore, on response rates, if that threshold is exceeded.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I am interested in the reference that has been made to escalating costs. For the benefit of everyone in the chamber, will the minister give us an indication of the costs that would result from expanding the census form?

Mr Wallace: I have received estimates that

indicate that an extra page would cost an additional £600,000 to £1 million; the more pages were added, the more costs would increase.

That is why three pages per individual, taking around 10 minutes to complete, is proposed in all parts of the UK. I believe that that strikes the right balance between the interests of the form-filler in every household in the country and the needs of users for more information.

In deciding which questions to include in the census, we must also have regard to whether the census is the best way of collecting information on particular topics, compared with other approaches such as household surveys.

First, the census has the distinction of being a comprehensive survey of everyone in the country on a compulsory basis. However, it must be remembered that the census form is a self-completion form. As a consequence, it is something of a blunt instrument when dealing with complex issues or where there are problems of definition. Other methods of collecting information, such as sample surveys that allow follow-up questions, are more appropriate to topics where qualitative issues need to be explored in depth.

Secondly, the census is uniquely able to provide reliable, authoritative and comparable statistics at small-area level—at the level of local authority wards, for example. Indeed, data are often produced for smaller areas to permit users to create their own areas. If information is not needed at that very small geographical scale, the required data can often be collected more cost-effectively by means of sample surveys.

I refer now to the further additional questions that have been suggested by a number of people, the case for which has been made by the Equal Opportunities Committee.

I will deal first with the question on religion. It must be said that religion did not emerge as a priority of the main census users in Scotland—central and local government, and the health authorities. However, the Churches and other religious groups were broadly in favour of including a question. There has also been support from a number of academics, and a proposal to break down the Christianity category—which is not proposed in England and Wales.

I think it right that we gave a lot of weight to the views of the main census users, who did not see a religion question as a priority. However, we have been prepared to listen carefully to other views that have been put forward and to change our initial view where convincing reasons have been advanced. I acknowledge the strong feelings on the issue that have been expressed by the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Commission for Racial Equality and others. In particular, I

acknowledge the force of the argument that users may not have given full weight to the developing agenda of equality-proofing and social inclusion. The main purpose of a religion question is to help prevent discrimination against minority religious groups as part of our wider social inclusion agenda. In the light of the arguments that have been made, the Executive has decided that a religion question should be asked in the census in Scotland, as in other parts of the UK.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank the minister for his concession, which will be broadly welcomed by all religious groups. In my constituency, the Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities all broadly favour the inclusion of a question on religion. However, the Jewish community has some reservations. It feels that, because of the discrimination and intolerance that it has suffered in the past, many members of the Jewish community will not fill in the census form accurately. The community welcomes the chance to be consulted on the form that the question should take.

Mr Wallace: I assure Mr Macintosh that there will be consultation. I am sure that the Jewish community will want to make its views known.

The inclusion in the census of a question on religion will require a change in primary legislation, as we propose that penalties should not apply to those who refuse to answer the religion question, unlike other questions in the census. That may be of interest to Mr Macintosh and others, and mirrors what is proposed in other parts of the UK. I sincerely hope that members who have pressed for a religion question to be included in the census will help ensure that a census amendment bill completes its passage through the Parliament as speedily as possible, so that the timetable for the census is not placed in jeopardy and the extra costs can be contained.

Procedurally, we propose that the draft census order, which we commend to Parliament today, should be passed, because, pending the change to primary legislation, it is not possible to include a religion question in the order. Once the primary legislation is in place, we intend to bring forward an amended order and census regulations to include religion. Passing the draft order today will enable the date of the census to be fixed and will allow the process that authorises the registrar general to appoint census field staff to proceed without a delay.

We prefer a religion question that includes a broad breakdown of Christianity. We also favour making a distinction between the religion to which people regard themselves as belonging today and the religion in which people were brought up. The registrar general will make proposals available shortly.

I refer now to ethnic group, a question on which is proposed in the draft order, along the lines of the successful question in the 1991 census. Representations have been made by the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Commission for Racial Equality and others that a more detailed breakdown of ethnic group would be useful in connection with equality-proofing and social inclusion policies.

The Executive has listened to those concerns and is prepared to consider an expansion of the ethnic group question in Scotland, subject to the overriding requirement that the census form should not exceed three pages per individual, or 20 pages in total. The registrar general will shortly be consulting interested parties, including specifically the Equal Opportunities Committee, on the form that the ethnic group question should take.

I hope that Parliament will recognise that we have been prepared to listen to concerns and to change our stance where convincing arguments have been advanced, despite the additional costs and complications to the census timetable. I have always argued that this should be a listening Government. This is an example of how the Scottish Parliament can and should work.

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Of course we welcome the concessions and believe that the minister is totally trustworthy. I wonder, however, when he decided to make the concessions and why they do not appear anywhere in the Executive motion that is before Parliament today.

Mr Wallace: That is rather obvious. The motion before Parliament today was lodged on 10 January, before the Equal Opportunities Committee had had an opportunity to consider the matter and to make its views known. I appeared before the Equal Opportunities Committee last week and got a clear steer on the committee's views. There have also been on-going discussions with members of the committee since then, as there have with others, such as the Commission for Racial Equality, who have made their views known. In the light of those discussions, I am able to give Parliament more information.

Mr Salmond: The minister, as he well knows, is perfectly capable of lodging an amendment, which would adjust the Executive's position. Usually undertakings given to Parliament are accompanied by some indication in the business bulletin, not just the minister's verbal assurances.

Mr Wallace: I am not sure whether Mr Salmond was listening. I made it clear that we cannot include anything in the order that relates to religion, because we do not have the necessary primary legislation, so it would not be competent to

do so—hence the need to give an undertaking. The principal thing is that we want the order to be passed today so that the date can be fixed and the registrar general can start to take in hand some of the essential preparations. It would not have been competent to include any reference to religion in the order. I have given a commitment that primary legislation will be introduced shortly and that we will, thereafter, introduce an amended order.

I have indicated that we will consult on the form that the ethnicity question should take. There is a proposal to expand the ethnicity question, which would not require an amendment to the order. There are other proposals that would require an amendment to the order, which could be included at the same time as the amendment to introduce the religion question.

I do not want to pre-empt consultation on that, which is why there is no specific amendment today. However, Mr Salmond has my undertaking that we will consult on the form that the ethnic group question should take.

After equally careful thought, we have concluded that no useful purpose would be served by the inclusion of a question on language spoken in the home. In Scotland, the Commission for Racial Equality proposed that question to identify cases where a lack of ability in English could be a barrier to the effective uptake of services, including education. The case was also made on behalf of metropolitan authorities in England. However, tests show that it was not possible to collect the information that was required from a question about language that was spoken in the home. Census users were informed, in 1998, that the question had failed to offer an effective means of measuring ability in English, which had been put forward as the main requirement. It is significant that every other part of the United Kingdom has also concluded that such a question should be omitted.

We have also heard arguments for the inclusion of a question on the Scots language. The hard fact is that the term "Scots" means different things to different people. Research by the registrar general has demonstrated that responses to questions about the Scots language vary significantly according to the terminology that is used. According to the report in the Scottish Parliament information centre, when asked:

"Can you speak Scots or a dialect of Scots, e.g. Shetlandic,"—

and that might cause some controversy in Shetland—

"Glaswegian or Buchan?,"

31 per cent of respondents answered yes, and 69 per cent answered no. To the simple question:

“Can you speak Scots or a dialect of Scots?”, 33 per cent answered yes and 63 per cent answered no. However, when the words

“e.g. Doric, Lallans, Buchan”

were added to the question, 17 per cent answered yes and 83 per cent answered no.

The reliability of any statistics that were derived from a census question on that issue would therefore be somewhat suspect. That is quite different from the position of Gaelic, on which we are proposing to include questions, as there are no such problems concerning the definition of Gaelic.

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Given those statements, will the minister explain why he lent his support to the campaign to include a question on the Scots language in the census?

Mr Wallace: I am better informed now. I have the information from the research that has been conducted, which shows how unreliable an answer to a question on the Scots language would be.

The fact that we have taken that view does not demean the importance of the Scots language in Scottish cultural life. We are providing financial support for the “Dictionary of the Older Scots Tongue”, the Scottish National Dictionary Association, the Scottish Poetry Library and the Scots Language Resource Centre, which totals £135,000 in the present financial year.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer: The minister is winding up now.

Mr Wallace: In education, curriculum guidance advocates teaching a proper awareness and an appreciation of Scots by including Scots literature. It is clear that there is a commitment to the development of the Scots language, which does not require a census question to underline it.

Finally, I shall say a few words about the amendment in Mr Sheridan’s name, on the subject of income. In contrast with religion, more detail on ethnic group, language in the home, and the Scots language, there was widespread and well-argued support from the main census users in central and local government for a census question on income. However, after careful consideration, and despite that widespread support and the strong case made by users, we have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the risks to the census as a whole from including a question on income would be unacceptable. There are also doubts about the quality of the data that would be obtained.

Tests that were carried out by the registrar general indicate that response rates to the census

as a whole—not just to the income question—would fall by some three percentage points. That reflects a view that is held by many people, that a question on income in a compulsory census would be intrusive. That is a serious shortfall in relation to the overall underenumeration of some two percentage points that occurred in 1991.

Moreover, we know that the drop in response rates to the census as a whole would be considerably more in areas such as inner cities and areas of deprivation. Those are the very areas which policies that are based on census data are designed to help. Given the importance of the census, we have reluctantly concluded that we cannot afford to take the risk of an income question undermining the valuable information on other topics that we need to underpin our policies.

I can tell Mr Sheridan, and others whom I know are interested in the issue, that there are alternative sources. A report that was published by the census offices in September drew attention to the availability of small-area income data from the Department of Social Security, the scope for modelling income data, and the development of other sources such as Inland Revenue data, new survey data, new modelling techniques and private sector data. We intend to pursue that, with the objective of producing and disseminating data by the time the census outputs are available in 2002 and 2003.

I will not say too much about the procedural matters, Presiding Officer, as I am sure that under your careful guidance and that of your deputies we will steer our way through the process this afternoon.

The Executive’s motion calls on the Parliament to approve the parts of the order that require affirmative resolution. That will enable the order to be made—with the advantages that I mentioned.

The changes that I have announced today will require an amendment order to be laid before the Parliament, to include a question on religion once the primary legislation has been passed, and also—depending on the outcome of consultation—to include a more detailed question on ethnic group.

We have consulted extensively, listened carefully and been prepared to be flexible where possible. I trust that our package of proposals, with the announcements that I have made today on religion and ethnic group, will command the support of the Parliament. On that basis, I commend the draft order to the Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament approves the draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000 to the extent that it relates to the following particulars in Schedule 2—

(a) in item 1, the words "indicating whether an individual form is being completed by that member";

in item 2, the words "and relationship to the first person mentioned in the return, and, as the case may be, where there are 5 or less persons in the household, the relationship of each of the previous persons mentioned in the return and where there are 6 or more persons in the household, the relationship of the sixth and subsequent persons to the two previously mentioned persons in the return";

in item 6, the words "and if married whether first or subsequent subsisting marriage";

items 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17;

in item 18, the words "or was on a Government sponsored training scheme";

items 19, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32;

and items 1, 2 and 3 of Schedule 3 to the draft Order.

The Presiding Officer: As the minister explained, the procedure is complicated. I will call Irene McGugan to move her motion. As it is not identical to the one that has been withdrawn, I should be grateful if she read it out at the start of her speech. I have arranged for 50 copies of the motion to be available on the desk at the back of the chamber, if there is any doubt about what it contains.

After that, we will move to Tommy Sheridan's amendment S1M-459.1, which is an amendment to Jim Wallace's motion.

15:01

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): On behalf of the Scottish National party, I move motion S1M-554, lodged in my name, which seeks to include a question on the Scots language in the 2001 census.

I move,

That the draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000, except to the extent that it is subject to approval by resolution of the Parliament, be not submitted to Her Majesty in Council, and call on the Scottish Executive to lay a revised draft Order which will include, within particulars to be stated in returns, in respect of any person, whether or not able to (a) understand (b) speak (c) read and (d) write Scots (including any local Scots speech form such as Buchan, Glasgow or Shetland dialects).

The Presiding Officer: Please proceed.

Irene McGugan: The motion of the Equal Opportunities Committee, which has been withdrawn, put together a package of measures to ensure the inclusion in the census of a question on religion and an enhanced question on ethnic groupings and language spoken at home, with a specific question on the Scots language. That was the unanimous position of the Equal Opportunities Committee; it was confirmed as recently as yesterday. Today, we have received a verbal assurance from the minister that he will include a

question on religion and is willing to consult on the expansion of the questions on ethnicity.

That is not enough, as those concessions are not included in the motion on which we will vote today and they do not meet all the requirements of the original Equal Opportunities Committee motion. The minister is not willing to accept a question on language spoken at home and there is no mention of concessions in respect of the Scots language.

Members might ask why it is so important to have such a question in the census. Scots is recognised by the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages as one of Europe's minority languages. It is time that it was acknowledged in Scotland.

Scots has a written history as far back as the 14th century and a literature that no other European minority language can rival. It was the official language of Scottish government until the adoption of English translations of the Bible at the reformation, and continued as the spoken language of all classes in the lowlands well into the 18th century.

The previous Scottish Parliament spoke Scots and had its official report written in Scots for about 100 years. It would be ironic if prejudice and ignorance meant that this new Scottish Parliament ignored the importance of the language. The important point is that, although the languages are closely related, Scots is not derived from English and it is not just a continuum of English—it is a language, not a dialect.

It should be a huge embarrassment to this Parliament that we have only a vague idea of the number of people who speak or understand Scots nowadays and in which areas the language is strongest. Languages cannot survive in the modern world if they are completely ignored by the education system and the media, as Scots largely is. It is not possible for local and national government to plan for educational and other provision without data on the language.

The only effective way of gathering the data nationally is through the census, as already happens for Gaelic. The information would help the planning of the promotion of Scots in schools, preparation of higher still material on Scots language and preparation of dictionaries and other reference works on Scots. It would assist in the development of all language-related industries, including broadcasting, media, publishing and academia. It would inform research into the language, its age and geographical profiles and its future prospects.

Census data could also assist in planning for cultural tourism in cases where information on local languages and culture could be a marketing

tool. The inclusion of a question on Scots in the census is necessary not only for the details that it will reveal, but for the status that it will give to the mither tongue of at least 1.5 million Scots, if the Government's 1996 estimates are accurate.

Many of us were brought up in a country where the major institutions did not recognise our language and culture as valid. Surely our new Scottish democracy must recognise the culture and speech of the mass of the people if it is to approach the ideal of inclusivity, which is cherished by all of us who worked for the creation of the Parliament.

I am encouraged by the publication of the report on the national cultural strategy for Scotland consultation. Responses came from a wide range of individuals, independent organisations and associations, as well as from major national institutions and non-governmental organisations, local authorities and trade unions. The report stated:

"There is a need to recognise the Scots language, to measure its use, to celebrate and not denigrate it, and to enable it to take its place alongside Gaelic and English."

To borrow a story from the author and broadcaster Billy Kay, in the age of despotism at the end of the 18th century, Robert Burns was advised by the anglicised elite at the head of Scottish society not to write in Scots, as it would be dead within a few generations. Thankfully for world literature, Burns kent better, and continued to express in Scots poems and songs that have inspired millions. Who could ever forget the moment on 1 July last year when Sheena Wellington stood at the back of this chamber and sang "Is there for honest poverty", which so movingly opened our Parliament and established a new democracy for Scotland?

Scots is still alive and thriving, but now needs help and support, such as that given to Ulster Scots as part of the Good Friday agreement. The proposal is that Ulster Scots will receive £1 million, 75 per cent of which will come from the UK Government, a somewhat larger sum than it has ever given to the parent language, Scots. Currently, only £112,000 per year is given to support Scots, which is almost certainly the worst-funded minority language in Europe.

There may be difficulties in formulating a question to get meaningful data, but it is not impossible. Some teething problems are inevitable whenever any new question is added to the census. There was some confusion when Gaelic was first included in 1881; the wording of the question was subsequently refined. Nobody would suggest, however, that there should not have been a question on Gaelic, which has proved invaluable in planning Gaelic policy.

By opposing the question on Scots, this Parliament would effectively be opposing meaningful development of the Scots language, and denying equality to one of Scotland's indigenous languages.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I do not think that we can jump from one position to the other—because there is not a question in the census, that does not mean that the Parliament or the educational establishment does not wish to foster Scots. I agree that there should be investment in the language and that we should find out the relevant information, but I do not believe that the census is the only place for that.

Irene McGugan: We need a question in the census for exactly those reasons—to be able to have a base line of information from which to move forward to further investment, resourcing and support of the language.

I urge the minister to consider the terms of this motion sympathetically, as he and his colleagues have done in the past. In 1996, he tabled questions asking the then Secretary of State for Scotland whether he would make representation regarding the inclusion of a question relating to Scots in the 2001 census. Moreover, a few years ago, Henry McLeish wrote in a letter to a Scots language activist:

"I now write to confirm that I am quite happy to support moves to include a question on Scots in the 2001 Census."

Similarly, Sam Galbraith said:

"With such numbers involved, I have no hesitation in lending my support to your proposal."

Only last month, Nicol Stephen said:

"I have written to Jim Wallace about this issue and to request that a question about the Scots language is included in the Census."

I urge all members to give serious consideration to the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): I call Tommy Sheridan to speak to and move amendment S1M-459.1. You have five minutes, Mr Sheridan.

15:10

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): I welcome the Executive's decision to give way to Parliament on the questions on religion and ethnicity. It is a pity that it is not willing to give way on the question on Scots language. The Executive must learn, when it does give way, to give way with enough notice to avoid problems for committees such as the Equal Opportunities Committee, which conduct serious deliberations on these matters.

It is important that the Parliament has, in effect,

flexed its muscles on those two key questions. It is also important that the Parliament learns how to flex its muscles to impose changes on the Executive. I hope that the Parliament will flex its muscles today, not just on the addition of a question on Scots language, but on the addition of a question on income.

Why a question on income? Mr Wallace said that the 2001 census, the first census of the new century, was a landmark occasion. It is clear from various reports that income inequality at the beginning of this new century is even wider than it was at the beginning of the previous century. We must have detailed analysis and statistics to allow us to examine income inequality.

Pressure has been brought to bear on the question of income by organisations too numerous to mention and people from all backgrounds, as the minister has recognised. Social researchers—including the Parliament's own researcher—are asking for that question to be included, arguing that it is essential for gathering reasonable data on income. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other groups have also argued strongly for the inclusion of such a question.

There must be a question on income in the census so that we have a clear idea of income distribution in the Scottish population. There is no comprehensive survey of that at present, but such a comprehensive survey would be extremely valuable in relation to social and economic policy. It would allow us to get a clear picture of income distribution on a geographical basis.

There are, of course, indicators of inequalities in income and wealth in some areas. Indeed, a recent report in the newspaper that is given out free in Scotland's railway stations said that 125 millionaires live in Albert Drive, Pollokshields—the street in which Gordon Jackson, the member for Glasgow Govan, lives. That report is supposed to be reliable, but Gordon may disagree with it. Unfortunately, there are no millionaires in Pollok, but there you go.

We need comprehensive information on income distribution on a geographical basis. I would have thought that the Executive, which is trying to promote an anti-poverty policy that can be applied on an area-by-area basis, responding to deprivation in each area, would have been interested in having geographical data. If we are serious about policy change to solve Scotland's social problems, that information must be invaluable.

The Scottish Socialist party hopes soon to introduce a new proposal to abolish the deeply regressive and unpopular council tax and replace it with a Scottish service tax that would be based on ability to pay and incomes. However, there are

no reliable sources of income data that would allow the serious analysis that is required. Some sources use car ownership as an indicator of income, as if someone who has a car necessarily has a better income than someone who does not. However, ownership of a car is a necessity for a person in a rural area, rather than the luxury that it might be for someone from another area. Car ownership is a crude and unreliable source of income data.

The Executive says that it will not accept the inclusion of the question on income as it is worried that the question will deter people from filling in the census forms. However, the evidence from the census test of 1997 showed that the inclusion of a question on income—

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Would Mr Sheridan accept that the income question might be difficult for some people to answer? Mr Sheridan, for instance, would have to detail his annual salary, which is way in excess of an MSP's. Would he answer the question truthfully or would he forget to fill in the form?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must wind up, Mr Sheridan.

Tommy Sheridan: It is always good to see Duncan McNeil rise to the occasion and ask a really useful question.

I was in the middle of explaining that, according to the census test of 1997, the response rate dropped from 57.4 per cent to 54.6 per cent. It seems that less than 3 per cent of people refused to fill in the form because of the question on income. I hope that the Executive will accept that a such a drop would be worth it in order to gain essential income data.

I suggest that the question could be asked simply and could involve the ticking of a box. There could be a box for £0 to £5,000 a week or a year, one for £5,000 to £10,000 and so on. Duncan McNeil could tick the box for £40,000, as he takes his full salary. I, on the other hand, take only £20,000. The question does not pose a problem in terms of difficulty.

The income question does not seem to pose a problem elsewhere. Other countries, such as the USA, Australia, New Zealand and many European Union countries, include questions on income that give them a reliable source of income data.

I ask the Parliament to flex its muscles today. This is not a great party political issue, even though Duncan McNeil tried to make it into one when he intervened. I hope that members will show some independence of spirit and vote for the inclusion of a question on income in the census.

I move amendment S1M-459.1, to insert at end:

“but calls upon the Scottish Executive to amend the Order to include an item on income bands”.

15:18

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I intend to concentrate on the arguments for and against the inclusion of questions on religion and the Scots language in the census. I am opposed to the inclusion of questions on language spoken at home and on income, primarily because I do not think that they will provide credible information. Moreover, I believe that a question on income would result in a reduced completion rate, which is not a price worth paying.

I welcome the Executive's concession, in the face of mounting opposition, on the inclusion of a question on religion. I have that concession in writing. I must thank the many members—Dennis Canavan, members of the SNP and the Liberal Democrat party—who signed the motion that I lodged a number of weeks ago on the inclusion of a question on religion in the 2001 census. It is a pity that no member of the Labour party saw fit to sign it.

Many people, be they Protestants, like myself, or Roman Catholics, read with disbelief the loose and unfounded generalisations about the existence and scale of religious bigotry in Scotland that were levelled by James MacMillan last August. Although I do not doubt that his sentiments were sincerely held, they seemed to be founded on his experience in the 1960s and the 1970s and took little account of the more tolerant and open society that Scotland has become.

That is not to say that bigotry does not exist—I am sure that it still does—and we all agree that it needs to be tackled. However, the tone of Mr MacMillan's speech and the legs that it gathered when reported and discussed suggested that considerable divisions are still not being addressed. I found that many Roman Catholics with whom I discussed the speech disagreed with the argument.

It is my experience that, as a group, Roman Catholics are much more mobile and integrated in Scottish society than was suggested and that any exclusion from work or play because of religion is unusual. That is not to say that we should be complacent, which is why I support the inclusion of a question on religion in the census.

At the time of Mr MacMillan's speech, I remarked that comparative information would be useful for finding out trends in religious bigotry in Scottish society. With hindsight, I felt that it would have been useful if there had been a question on religion in 1951, 1961, 1971 and so on. That would have given us not just a snapshot of religious faith,

but information on trends in religion in society, so that we could see whether there had been any changes. If there had been such a question a good 30 or 40 years ago, work and residential patterns would have provided clear evidence that Roman Catholic enclaves, and associated poverty and deprivation, existed in Scotland. As a result, we would have called upon whatever Government was in power to introduce policies to deal with those problems.

Such evidence would not have been surprising, because many Roman Catholics—particularly those from Ireland—had come in a state of poverty and with little education, to find work in Scotland. They were always going to encounter hostility, because many people looked on them as low-wage workers who might have been taking jobs away from others. Furthermore, skilled workers saw their privileges being threatened.

However, the employment market in a truly open society is blind to people's religion and colour, which will ensure that, in time, people will progress on their own merit and through their own endeavours. As a result, we should welcome the progress in Scottish society and encourage that progress for other religious and ethnic groups with the same journey to make.

Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the Roman Catholic community in Scotland is an example to other minority groups of what can be achieved. I support a question on religious faith in the census, because it will help us to establish that there has been a positive trend for Roman Catholics and other religious groups. Moreover, if evidence emerges of bigotry towards other religious groups, public policy can be introduced to mitigate its effects. I am confident that a question on religion in 2001 and 2011 will establish that we are an open, tolerant society and that, if work needs to be done, we will see the fruit of our labours by 2021.

As for the question on the Scots language, if anyone takes the trouble to examine the Tory submission to the consultation on the national cultural strategy, they will find that we favour artistic bodies giving far greater emphasis to Scots verse, literature and language. Our traditional heritage needs not only protection, but encouragement. I do not believe that that heritage is dead, or that it is preserved in aspic or alcohol; it is living, it will continue to flourish and it will blossom, especially in our schools, which is where policy should be directed.

However, it is wishful thinking to suggest that a question on Scots in the census will progress that policy. The simple difficulty lies with what people will understand by a question that asks them whether they speak Scots. Although I accept that Irene McGugan's motion attempts to address such

a difficulty, it does not meet it, as the minister's evidence suggests.

Mrs Margaret Ewing: Mr Monteith is right to place emphasis on education in schools. Should there not also be emphasis on the Scots leid in our training colleges and Scots universities, where it is so often reduced to a very small part of the training programme for teachers?

Mr Monteith: I have no difficulty with what Mrs Ewing says, but there is a significant difference between schools providing an introduction and a background and colleges and universities providing something that people choose. I certainly support the view that Scots language should be more readily available. If a demand existed for Scots, I would support provision for it.

The Scots are linguistic masters. We can not only speak other languages, but alter our own language according to the context in which we speak or write. Scots have a wide range of linguistic registers, which we use to our advantage. A Scot working in the formal business context of Standard Life will deal with people from Scotland, people from the rest of Britain and people internationally. He or she will speak standard English, probably with a Scots accent. When our worker goes home, he or she will probably speak in a Scots form of that standard English with his or her spouse, children, neighbours and friends—a number of Scots words will permeate the conversation.

It has been my experience, particularly when I worked in London, that after a few drams or pints, a broader Scots shines through. It is not so much that Scots seek to suppress their language as that they seek to use their language in a way that will be understood by the people with whom they wish to communicate. That, and the fact that there are differences across Scotland as to what is believed to be Scots, would lead to a meaningless answer to any census question. The definition of Scots means too many things to too many people, so the question and its answer would be rendered valueless. A question on Scots might even harm the case for the promotion of the Scots language, as it might open Scots to ridicule.

As an example—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please begin to wind up.

Mr Monteith: If Hugh MacDiarmid had been asked what language he spoke, he would have had to answer, if he had been honest, English, yet Hugh MacDiarmid is famed for his use of Scots as an experimental poetic medium. We must find a fine balance in shaping our policy to promote the use of Scots. Census data might reveal the information that Irene McGugan wants, but if that information lacks credibility, it will not do its task.

In concluding my speech in the debate on a census question on Scots language, I feel that it is only right that we say that we are gaunae no dae that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open part of the debate. Members who wish to speak should press their request-to-speak buttons. Speeches will be limited to four minutes.

15:28

Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate the census, not least because, after today, I will not have to think or talk about the census for a while.

I want to explain why I withdrew so late the motion that I submitted on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Committee. The motion was submitted after we received written and oral evidence from a wide range of organisations. Although the committee came late to the process—I accept that it has been going on for a couple of years—we felt that if the Parliament wanted to demonstrate a genuine commitment to mainstreaming equality in every aspect of Scottish life, it had to address some glaring omissions in the census, even if that delayed or complicated the process or made it more expensive. It was obvious to us that previous users who were consulted had not fully recognised the emerging equality agenda and this Parliament's commitment to mainstreaming equality.

We felt that if the census did not gather detailed information on religion, ethnic background and language spoken in the home, including Scots, monitoring evidence on health, social disadvantage and discrimination could not be carried out effectively. Indeed, there was a strong argument that the inclusion of those questions in the census would validate the analysis of some of the other data and information gathered in the process.

Matters have moved at an alarming pace and the way in which they were handled was not ideal. However, we welcome the fact that the Executive has agreed to include a question on religion and has expressed willingness to expand the question on ethnicity. The Executive has agreed to consult the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Commission for Racial Equality and others on that question.

I am disappointed, as was the committee, that a question on language spoken at home is not to be included in the census. We felt that some valuable information could be gathered through such a question. However, I have sought assurances from the Deputy Minister for Communities, Jackie Baillie, regarding the inclusion of a question in the boosted household survey. I hope that she will

address that more fully in her summing-up. Perhaps she will indicate whether the Equal Opportunities Committee will be consulted on that. Clearly, we would like to put forward the points that were made in the evidence that we received.

Given the change in the Executive's position and assurances from Jackie Baillie on the household survey, the majority of the Equal Opportunities Committee felt that there was no point in continuing to press for concessions. That was not the unanimous view of the committee. I accept that the time scale has made matters difficult for committee members and that had the Scottish National party not been able to lodge a motion today, it might have been left in a difficult position.

I welcome the fact that the Executive has agreed to change its position. I hope that the debate will concentrate not on how we have arrived at this point, but on what we have achieved. It bodes well for the Parliament that the people of Scotland can see how the committees and the Executive work together. It is a major step forward for equal opportunities and I hope that the debate will positively reflect that.

15:32

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Towards the end of the 18th century, John Rickman, clerk to the House of Commons, outlined 12 reasons for conducting a census. He said that the intimate knowledge of any country must form the rational basis of legislation and diplomacy. He also said that a census would encourage the social sciences to flourish. We can discount some of his other reasons for a census, such as planning the corn needs of the population, but I commend another of his reasons to the Government. He said:

"In a time when many fear the dissatisfaction of the people, doing a census would improve Government's image, as setting out to promote a public good."

We will see whether the census has that effect on the popularity of this Government. Somehow I doubt it.

A memorandum from the Scottish Executive, dated 1 February, states

"The 2001 Census, the first to be held under the auspices of the Scottish Parliament, offers a unique opportunity to collect information which can shape the policies aimed at improving social and economic conditions in Scotland."

We are all agreed about the need for the census. Where we have differed is on the kind of questions that need to be asked.

The census is a unique document. It will be pored over by researchers, local authorities, central Government and health service providers

for the next 10 years. The census is also a historical document that will provide a snapshot of the Scottish people at the beginning of the third millennium. That is why we must ensure that we include the proper questions in the census. We need questions that will reflect the ethnic, religious and social diversity of Scotland. I urge members to support the SNP motion on Scots, which was so eloquently presented by Irene McGugan.

I welcome the Pauline conversion of the Minister for Justice to some of the concerns expressed by the Equal Opportunities Committee about the type of questions to be asked in the census. Many organisations and individuals made representations, such as the Commission for Racial Equality, leading academics and researchers and the Medical Research Council. For several years, all those organisations have made representations to the minister and to the registrar general.

The Minister for Justice failed to listen, just as he failed to listen to the concerns expressed by the Equal Opportunities Committee from early January. Only last week he met the committee and said that there would be no questions on religion, on income, on languages spoken at home or on Scots. There was no question of him doing anything that would meet the concerns of the committee. He said that it was too difficult, it would make the form longer, the census was not the best tool and there was little demand from service users. There was plenty of demand from service users for an income question, but he ignored that.

Michael McMahon said that Jim Wallace's reasoning was bizarre. He was right; it was bizarre. Now he has brought the same motion here today but he has said that he will concede a question on religion and will consider a more detailed breakdown of ethnicity. Of course, that is not new information. Mr Wallace's conversion was widely trailed in the press at the weekend. He now accepts the arguments not because he is persuaded by those arguments but because the motion on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Committee was finding back-bench support and there was a risk that the motion would be defeated.

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD) rose—

Tricia Marwick: Sorry, I am almost at the end.

Since when would a motion from a parliamentary committee represent a defeat? What happened to new politics?

I welcome Mr Wallace's remarks today. I urge him to follow through on the assurances he has given today. The SNP will give every assistance in ensuring that the primary legislation needed to allow the question on religion to be put receives a

speedy passage.

15:37

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I welcome the fact that the Executive has responded to representations made directly to it and to the Equal Opportunities Committee's arguments, and I especially welcome that it has acknowledged that more weight should be given to working for equality for all people in Scotland by a variety of means. I am glad that it has agreed to include a question on religion and to expand the ethnicity question.

On the Scots language question, my head hears the difficulties but my heart responded to Irene McGugan's speech. I dinna ken fit tae dee—heid or hert.

I want to highlight a slightly different view of events from Tricia Marwick's. While what could be called the mechanics of the discussions leading to this debate have been less than satisfactory, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Parliament has been working in the way that the consultative steering group envisaged, with a committee of the Parliament sticking to its guns and having a demonstrable effect on the Executive, leading to a better conclusion.

15:38

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Like colleagues, I welcome the change of view announced by the Deputy First Minister on questions on religion and ethnicity. As he said, it reflects a listening Parliament. However, some of the listening could have taken place a little earlier and with a bit more sensitivity. There may not have been an overwhelming demand from all census users in Scotland for questions on religion and ethnicity, but both Glasgow City Council and Dundee City Council, with high concentrations of ethnic minority populations, had called for those questions.

My main interest is in the income question. The Deputy First Minister indicated that there was a large demand from census users for that and that his decision not to include it was because of practical problems, particularly the impact on the response rate. It is perhaps helpful to explore some of the arguments for an income question and on the practicalities.

As somebody with a social science background, I am conscious of the fact that most people using the census would find an income question useful for two main reasons. First, it would substantially expand the volume of knowledge about income, which is not available from other sources. Secondly, and equally important, is the extent to which an income question can validate other kinds

of information from other questions. For example, cross-tabulations could be done between income and health effects, household factors and so on. The census potentially is an extraordinarily useful tool for gathering information that is linked closely to the Government's agenda. If we are involved in a social justice agenda, the census can be used in a practical way as a tool to identify targets and measure progress.

There is a legitimate concern about response rates. The minister referred to the tests that have been done. I am not sure that I accept all those arguments because, in some ways, the response rate that one gets for tests will be different from the response rates that there will be for a census with its legal support. However, I accept that there are question marks over the validity of the income data that might be obtained from the kinds of questions that it is possible to include in the census at this late stage.

If we do not accept an income question at this stage for this census, my plea is that there is a strong argument for looking at the issue again. I would not like the gathering of income information in future censuses to be lost from sight. Such a question is used in the United States of America, where there is great suspicion of Government, and it gets a 98-odd per cent return on its census. The USA does not acquire information from a single income question; the census is designed around gathering income information alongside other information.

This issue is not just about adding an income question. We need to think strategically about the kinds of information that the Government wants to get out of the census, how that information can be best used to inform our decisions and how we ensure that Government, as well as others with an interest, can operate with the greatest effectiveness. Early in the considerations of what will go into the next census, the Deputy First Minister should return to how questions on income can be incorporated into the census.

I have been assured by the Deputy First Minister that he is going to look into other sources of income information. I am grateful to him for that. It is important that we examine carefully income information, because there are problems at the present time of the under-reporting of poverty in some areas of Scotland due to the way in which existing data are collected. I have raised a number of issues with the Deputy First Minister. I will examine carefully how the minister brings forward the promises that he has given on developing other sources of income information, so that we can address the blind spots in the current data.

do. What is strange about that? There is nothing strange about that. Every language has different local forms, but no one would dare to argue that that makes the language less legitimate.

Take Switzerland, with four different official languages: French, German, Italian and Romansch. When I was in Switzerland, I asked about the diverse nature of the languages, to be told that the people in the next valley spoke a different language to the German that was used in the location that I was in. To my surprise, the other language used in the next valley was not French, Italian or Romansch, just another form of German. The Swiss are proud to be multilingual.

What about English? Are we saying that people in Cornwall speak in the same way and use the same words and phrases as people in Durham? Of course they do not, but they have a standard English.

I am sure that members will bear witness to the fact that many of our people, when being interviewed on television or radio, often are less fluid. Many are slow and pick their words carefully, sometimes coming over as uncomfortable—a bit like I am today—with the situation or, even worse, as lacking in confidence about what they are saying. That can be witnessed just as often when an interview is being carried out in English, but the person being interviewed normally speaks another language. They are the same as natural Scots speakers, who are simply translating their own language into English before speaking.

However, I would go further and say that Scots speakers are bilingual. How many here can speak another language? A few, I suppose. Of those who can, how many can read and write it? Fewer still, I expect. That is not a strange phenomenon; it is simply that people have picked up a language but have never been taught to read or write it. The majority of Scots speakers speak Scots from the day they can speak, but are never taught to read or write a single word of it.

In Scotland, an insidious campaign was mounted more than 100 years ago—it seems as if it is still working today—to kill off the Scottish tongue altogether. It did not work; it stayed with the people, if not in the schools.

It is not that long ago that Gaelic was derided and frowned upon. However, after a great fight for recognition, it is getting over its trauma. The Scots language has endured the same treatment, having been under attack from a frame of mind that stigmatises it, piling on it large doses of social prejudice. The Parliament is supposed to be committed to a programme of social inclusion. Surely that should include the Scots language.

Until we correct the barriers, hurdles and downright hostility to the people's language—the

language of the streets and of homes and workplaces—it will be treated as the ultimate Scottish cringe by those who look to some other place for their vision and their culture.

It would be nothing short of a joke or a farce for this place to call itself the Scottish Parliament, while sending out a message that it is okay to humiliate the Scottish people by not recognising their right to speak their own tongue. Ur we no aw Jock Tamson's bairns, and should we no be treated like that?

15:53

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): In terms of its subject matter, this is not the most important debate that we have had since 6 May, but in terms of the processes and founding principles of the Parliament, it is the most significant moment yet.

Before 6 May, we talked about a new politics, in which parties would relate differently to each other. We talked about an unprecedented new role for the committees in the Parliament and about a direct line, through the committees and in other ways, from people outside the Parliament into policy making. In a small way, we have seen that working for us in the census discussions that we have had. It may not yet be all power to the committees, but it is some power. This is a significant moment.

It is also the debate in which we heard a minister saying:

"I am better informed now."

I hope that we will hear that again; indeed, from back benchers as well.

It has been a debate in which the minister, who last week reported quite correctly that users did not see a religion question as a priority, said that users did not give full weight to equality proofing, thus taking on board the concerns of the Equal Opportunities Committee and acknowledging one of the founding principles of the Parliament, which is of course equal opportunities.

The reality is that people's view of the world shapes the data that they seek. Often, they do not recognise the relevance of information until they have it. Providing that information is the role of bodies such as the Commission for Racial Equality. Much of its work has been in persuading institutions at all levels in society that they must collect and use such information as an essential tool in the work of uncovering and eliminating possible discrimination and of understanding the needs of particular groups, the impact of institutions' practices on those groups and the policies that are required to overcome inequalities and patterns of social exclusion. We should be

grateful to the CRE, one of the most important bodies that came to give evidence to the Equal Opportunities Committee. It reflected the views of black and ethnic people in wider society.

I welcome the minister's announcements on the inclusion in the census of a question on religion, on the broadening of ethnic categories in the census and on the pursuit of the language issue through a household survey. I was not, initially, totally persuaded about that, but I have listened to the minister and I have had further discussions with lobby groups today.

There seems to be a view that the household survey is an appropriate vehicle for the language issue. That is because, first, there are complications in the language question—various speakers have referred to those complications. Secondly, the reliability of the household survey on the matter of language will be greater than on certain other issues such as religion, in which there is a reactivity factor that results from the sensitivity of the question.

Mrs Margaret Ewing: I am grateful to Mr Chisholm for giving way.

It seems that he is arguing, in the context of the Scots language, for a divide-and-rule attitude. I was raised in the Borders, where all my ancestors were herdsmen or orramen. I moved to Moray and people asked how I coped with the Doric, but I had no problem with it. Does Mr Chisholm appreciate that language the length and breadth of our country is very translatable?

Malcolm Chisholm: I was going to conclude by asking for assurances from Jackie Baillie that the Scots language will be assessed via the household survey. In view of some of the points that have been made about definitions, that is probably the appropriate way to carry that forward. I also seek assurances from Jackie Baillie on the size of the samples in the household survey, and a commitment to act on the findings.

15:57

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I wish to speak on an issue that was originally proposed for inclusion in the census form by the Equal Opportunities Committee. That proposal has been withdrawn as it was refused by the Executive. It was on the question about the language that is spoken in the home.

If it is accepted that Government—central and local—has a continuing need for data on the size and characteristics of the population, we should use this opportunity of agreeing the content of the 2001 census form to best inform it of the diversity and needs of those who live in our country. That would enable policy to be informed, services to be

planned and resources to be distributed according to need.

In 1991, a question on ethnic grouping was included in the census for the first time. The data that were provided on ethnic groups have enabled public authorities to take account of the needs of different ethnic groups in service planning and delivery. In our evolving society, enhanced categorisation—as detailed today—is welcome.

To the benefit of our society, Scotland has, through the years, become home to various ethnic groups. Imminent changes to immigration and asylum legislation mean that Scotland is likely to welcome more new residents—an estimated 6,000 before the census data are taken. According to current figures, the majority of those people will become bona fide residents. It is important that support agencies and public services have adequate information to service the needs of those residents.

The ability to communicate is a basic necessity. Consider the case of asylum seekers. They are not only socially excluded by the stigma of using vouchers for food until a decision is made on their cases, there is also the possibility that they will be unable to communicate if no translator can be supplied. Agencies have already expressed concerns about the difficulties of support services when translation services are limited, for example for speakers of Turkish Kurdish, Maghrebi Arabic and Pushtun.

The census should be forward looking. With rises in the general population, the role of language as an identifying factor is likely to increase over the next 10 years. Challenging social exclusion must involve uncovering issues that interested agencies do not yet fully understand. In terms of information gathering, why not use the most comprehensive survey—the census for 2001—as the baseline and then build upon the information given? Output from census information would inform a national strategy on interpreting and translating.

No effective equivalent is available from survey information, as any survey is, by definition, undertaken on the basis of a sample and therefore can provide only supplemental information. It cannot replace the value of the census. That applies also to any proposed household survey question on language spoken in the home, whatever size the sample. The census is one of the main ways of ensuring that fundamental human rights are protected, by ensuring that the rights of minorities are strengthened and that there is proper legal, social and cultural integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities.

I must mention the Scots language, which my colleagues have discussed already. Of course

Scots should be included as a defined language in the census. After all, as Irene McGugan said, Scots is recognised by the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages as one of Europe's minority languages, and it would be ridiculous if Scotland's own Parliament did not recognise it as such.

Surely Scotland would benefit from a national strategy on monitoring that addresses the historic lack of data on ethnic minority communities and that, at last, defines Scots as a significant language of Scotland. I ask the minister to reconsider his position on a question on language spoken in the home, and I ask members to support the SNP motion.

16:02

Mr Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): The importance of the national census for 2001 cannot be understated. The results will ensure that our decision makers and service providers have the tools they need to develop new strategies and, in some cases, to assess the impact of existing policies well into the new century.

The reason for a regular census is to reflect the changing status of the population and to update the statistical record on which the Government, the business community and others rely heavily. If we accept that census data must be updated regularly to provide a dynamic view of society, we must consider the nature of the information gathered by it.

On 10 January, the Deputy First Minister said:

"This will be a landmark census - the first to be carried out under the Scottish Parliament and the first in the new millennium. We have taken decisions on which questions to include and which questions to leave out following extensive consultation."

That, he might have thought, was that.

However, in this new form of government, which we now embrace and which continues to develop, it is possible, through our committee structures, to expand the debate and to include new material for consideration by ministers. I am pleased that ministers have shown strength not only by listening to the Equal Opportunities Committee but by adopting a number of the committee's views and recommendations—however late they came to that position. The term "listening government" may be scoffed at by cynics and opponents, but I am grateful for that example of what a listening Executive can bring to this chamber and to the legislation that we will develop on behalf of the people of Scotland.

I believe that it is the wish of the majority of MSPs to include in the census additional questions on religion and ethnic group, which I am

pleased have been accepted. Today, given the time constraints, it is not possible to make detailed, individual arguments for all the additional questions that were, I believe, dealt with adequately by the Equal Opportunities Committee during its recent meeting with the Deputy First Minister.

It is clear to me and, indeed, a large number of leading academics, that information gained from the questions on religion and ethnic background could provide the basis for accurate research into religious bigotry and racism in Scottish society. On the labour market, for example, the public could be reassured that we are indeed a tolerant society, depending on the census findings. However, if it is shown that discrimination does exist, policies can be targeted specifically at the areas identified.

I make no apologies for asking that those questions be included in the draft order, as I believe that we must confront the truth, whether good or bad, and provide each of our citizens with confidence, in the knowledge that we will tackle the difficult issues, that we care and that we listen to them.

I welcome the decision of the minister and the Executive. More particularly, I welcome the creation of a more dynamic census, in which the information gathered will be of greater benefit than ever before. I remain committed to having all the additional questions that we have heard discussed today included in the census at some point in the future, although I am pragmatic enough to recognise that the concessions that the Executive has made represent real progress for all concerned. I commend the Executive and my colleagues on the Equal Opportunities Committee on playing their part in arriving at this sensible conclusion.

16:06

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Like many members, I welcome the Equal Opportunities Committee's input into today's debate.

I would like to talk about the additional question on income. The issue has not yet been resolved. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities briefing paper was most useful in identifying key issues, as was the Scottish Parliament information centre paper. Stirling Council also sent in information that has been useful when considering the income data question. In its letter, Stirling Council said:

"We depend on Census data to provide detailed social, economic and demographic data for small areas, which is not available from other sources. Census information currently informs the planning and delivery of many of our local services and policies."

The COSLA briefing outlined a number of

questions and gave some answers to why a question on income should be included. First, it highlighted the uses the data on income would be put to. They include informing work on social inclusion, more accurate targeting of resources to areas of poverty and need, providing a direct measure of deprivation, and providing a direct measure of poverty. Stirling Council's list is very similar and provides an interesting account of how the inclusion of an income question would affect different projects in the area.

Secondly, the data would be useful for informing a range of policy and planning issues that deal with the resource allocation of social inclusion. The social inclusion agenda is at the heart of our programme for government and we hold it dear. For that reason, I support what Des McNulty said: we should not lose track of these data. I know that Jim Wallace has already given us an indication of how he may collect the data. I would like to be kept informed of what is happening, as Stirling Council is very concerned about this issue.

Another reason that has been given for the inclusion of an income question in the census is that there is no other source of income data at the small area level. The SPICe document notes that there are serious drawbacks in using the Department of Social Security material. It states:

"Most significantly, benefit receipt is not related precisely to income—not all of those whose income entitles them to a benefit actually claim it, and some people on low incomes are disqualified from benefit because of their savings. Moreover, benefit data does not allow the cross-tabulation with other social, demographic and social variables which the census provides."

Des McNulty also raised that last point.

Quite a few arguments have been made against the inclusion of an income question. I take on board the fact that it would lengthen the questionnaire and have a negative impact on the response rate. Tommy Sheridan has already mentioned the 3 per cent fall in the response rate that results from there being such a question, but there is a feeling that the advantages of including the question—or getting the data via some other measure—would outweigh the disadvantages. It seems that there are good arguments for having a question on income, although I accept that there are real fears about the response rate if it is included and about getting back unreliable evidence.

We need to address the issue of income data. As Tommy Sheridan said, we should look to the USA and to our European partners. Social inclusion is at the heart of our agenda and must not be left out. This is the first census that the Scottish Parliament has been involved in drawing up, which—as Jim Wallace said—is a landmark event. There has been healthy discussion of the

issues. I hope that the issue of income data will be taken forward.

16:10

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Fit is so wrang wi wantin to speir as part o the census aboot foo much money we mak and fit wye we speak at hame. I cannae see oniethin wrang wi that. I havenae heard onie argument today that persuades me itherwise.

I am quite happy to speak in Scots, but I know that the Presiding Officer will rule me oot o order if I do much mair.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Not in the least.

Brian Adam: I have not heard any argument whatever to suggest that Scots is not a language that is used. It is the wye I wid speak at hame. I am quite happy to dae that. It is how I relate. There is nothing wrong with putting a question on it in the census.

The minister's arguments were rather spurious. He says that it is okay to ask aboot language in the household survey, but it is nae okay to ask about it in the census. I would have thought that the problems that are associated with asking a question about income and speech in the census would almost certainly be the same for the household survey.

The argument about the famous 3 per cent attrition rate is also rather spurious. When the figure is as small as that, how confident can we be about the statistics? As I have a small amount of scientific training, I know that we should not look at the bald figure. The figure is not 3 per cent, but 3 cent plus or minus something.

Aw o us who are politicians—hopefully there are one or two of us in the chamber—will be well aware of the margins for error in polls. For survey samples, the figure is plus or minus 3 per cent. The only evidence we have is that we might lose 3 per cent of respondents as a consequence of including the question. I am concerned about the accuracy of that figure. How accurate is it? I hae grave doots about it.

If it is okay to make concessions on religion—to say that the question will not be compulsory and that people will not be fined if they do not fill it in—why can we not do the same for the income question? At the end of the day, whatever people put on that piece of paper—whether it is four, five or 20 pages long—we hope that they will put the true answers. If people will be discouraged from completing the census because they do not want others to know their income, we should make the same concession as was made on the religion question.

If we are to have a question on religion—I am delighted that we are—extensive consultation with all religious groups is essential. In particular, we must be careful to find out how many people regard themselves as active practitioners of the religion with which they associate themselves, and how many are more loose adherents to the various faiths.

I am delighted to support Irene McGugan's motion and Tommy Sheridan's amendment. I am disappointed that, although he has moved some way towards consensus, the minister has not felt it possible to move all the way. I hope that we may persuade him to do so later in the afternoon.

16:15

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I would like to point out that there are concerns in the Equal Opportunities Committee about language in the home, and I hope that we will receive assurances on that issue. It is not necessarily helpful to collapse together our commitment to the Scots language and our commitment to Scotland and to the census. People are coming to a balanced judgment on those issues.

I welcome the shift that the Executive has made, although I have some concerns about the fact that this could not be done in a more straightforward way, by informing the committee at a stage when it would not have created the difficulties that it did for the SNP. A recognition by the minister that he has got it wrong is a sign of strength, not an admission of weakness.

I want to put on record my thanks to all those in the Equal Opportunities Committee who worked together, not on the basis of party interests but genuinely to co-operate when they could make a difference. We must recognise, on today's evidence, that our committee structure can enhance the work of the Parliament. Committees are not a threat; equally, they are not an opportunity, in macho parlance, to square up to the Executive or take the Executive on. They are a means for us to make better policy, as they allow back benchers—and, more important, groups from outside Parliament, using the committees as a vehicle—to influence policy. Committees are not, therefore, an opposing power in the Parliament; they have a key enabling role. I would rather have less discussion in the language of victory, defeat and entrenched positions, and more of the listening that we have had in this debate on the census.

There have clearly been difficulties with procedure. It is important that we do not dwell on them, but learn from them. The first problem

seems to be that the census was perceived as something neutral—a practical issue, rather than a political one. However, in reality, very few decisions—as any excluded group would tell us—are neutral. Organisations that have appeared before the Equal Opportunities Committee have, time and again, stressed the importance of compiling data that will improve services.

The main defence against including the questions on religion and ethnicity is that no one asked for it, but that is self-evidently not the case. It depends on who is asked and what is asked. If we had asked policy makers, 15 years ago, how best to reduce unemployment, how many would have suggested extending child care? Very few, as they would all have been men. We must think about who we are talking to. As the Commission for Racial Equality says, we need to understand that

“Challenging exclusion must involve uncovering issues that agencies do not yet fully understand.”

The argument is, of course, circular. Groups are colour-blind and do not seek information on ethnicity, so information on ethnicity is not required. Mainstreaming breaks that circle.

The religious question plays an important part in defining one's identity, which is significant in itself. I recall, as a school teacher a few years ago, asking a child to fill in a form in which they had to describe their religion. I asked the child whether to put down Christian. “No,” they answered, “I am a Protestant.” That says something about identity, if not about that child's grasp of religious denominations.

In the black and ethnic minority community in particular, religious observations have service implications. I know a young woman whose parents would regard themselves as being of ethnic Asian origin—from Pakistan. She would describe herself as Scottish, but also as a Muslim. That has an impact on service provision in schools.

The census offers an opportunity that is too important to miss. We must grasp the lessons on mainstreaming that the debate has exposed and seek assurances on the important role of the equality unit. For example, did the equality unit discuss the emerging differences of opinion on the census? Was it asked for its view? We need to be reassured about the perspective of individual departments. It is deeply ironic that the census—which seeks to give a picture of our whole society—should expose the possible weaknesses in our departments' procedure for equality proofing. We must emphasise the importance of maximising effective consultation with outside groups. Equality issues must be addressed in all our mainstreaming.

We must resist the temptation to divide the world into areas in which equality matters or does not matter. Equality matters in everything we discuss and it should be at the front of our minds. We must remember the powerful messages of inclusiveness that have emerged during the census debate. We must recognise that we are a white legislature and that we have a chance to take the first step to challenge that. The first step is to listen to what the black and ethnic minority communities and groups are saying. In the shift that we have seen today in the Executive, and in making the decision to include the questions on religion and ethnicity, we have given ourselves the opportunity to understand our multi-ethnic and multicultural society better. We should, therefore, be better able to serve its needs.

16:20

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): I will discuss two of the issues that have been spoken about a lot today. First, the Scots language and, secondly, income brackets.

During the early days of this Parliament, many of us who were relatively new to the world of representative politics were carried away with the enthusiasm that was engendered and the desire to be involved in anything and everything that came our way. There was no end of invitations to join this society or that association. I found that it took a great deal of willpower to reject the many while prioritising the few that would be most pertinent or relevant to my own position.

It was with some trepidation that I put my name forward, in those early days, to take part in the Holyrood poetry link scheme, whereby MSPs would be linked to a local poet. It was some time before I looked up my contact, who turned out to be the official writer in residence in Dumfries and Galloway, one Liz Niven. I can say that I am extremely glad that I took that step. Although I have lived in the south-west of Scotland all my life, Liz has given me her view on more than one issue, not least of which is the importance of the Scots language and the frequency of its everyday use among people in Dumfries and Galloway. Liz Niven's first poem since our linkage is a work entitled "Tis The Saddest Thing", which is a poem in the memory of the crew of the Solway Harvester, so recently returned for burial to their home villages.

Members will not be surprised to know that I am neither a poet nor a critic, but I know something good when I hear it. This poem is a moving, apt and permanent part of what will be the legacy of that terrible tragedy. It is all the more poignant in that it is written in the Scots tongue, which is the principal reason why I am not going to recite it, but it gives a powerful indication of the importance of

the regional dialects that are spoken throughout Scotland.

I am persuaded by that contact with Liz, and by many other representations that I have received, that recognition of the prevalence of these dialects would be helpful and, in the wake of the establishment of our new Parliament, would enrich and underpin our cultural roots and our linguistic heritage.

A question on incomes is an altogether different problem, although I understand some of the arguments of those who feel that it should be included. Again I refer to Dumfries and Galloway, which was neglected in the recent £21.5 million handout for areas of special deprivation. If previous allocation criteria had been adhered to, some £600,000 would have been granted to the region. I must say that Dumfries and Galloway Council is keen that a question of this sort should be included in the census.

Rural areas, no matter how idyllic, also have areas of intense deprivation. Some of the lowest wage earning statistics and some of the travel-to-work areas with the highest unemployment are to be found, regrettably, in the south-west of Scotland. Although a question on income might help to highlight that, I am persuaded by other arguments. First, people are more inclined to exaggerate their answers, both upwards and downwards, to questions of this type. Secondly, many people are reluctant to fill in this type of question, which leads to a higher rate of non-return. Thirdly, and possibly most important, the income of an individual is a matter for them and them alone, and not for any further state interference.

Tommy Sheridan: Will Alex Fergusson respond to the question that is often raised with me by the low-income groups in society, particularly those applying for income support. Why do they have to subject themselves to a sometimes very degrading means test? He seems to be arguing that those with higher incomes should not be encouraged to answer such questions.

Alex Fergusson: That is not what I am suggesting. I am suggesting that all people have difficulty filling in responses to these questions accurately. The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice showed us evidence to that effect, so including the question would not do the census any favours.

Although I have great sympathy with many of the aspirations of Irene McGugan's motion, in common with many other members who have spoken today I cannot vote for any motion that would—in effect—temporarily annul the census order and delay it unduly. However, I am sorry that the Executive could not take a broader view on

some of the issues that the Equal Opportunities Committee has raised—particularly dialect. I hope that it will do so for a future census.

16:24

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Like other members, I am pleased to be taking part in this debate. I am delighted that the Equal Opportunities Committee, of which I am a member, has made a significant impact on the information that will be requested by the census next year. By its action, the Executive has shown that the Parliament and its committees have a significant role in shaping its decision making.

I am grateful if the Executive has listened—even if it has been at the 11th hour—to the concerns of the Equal Opportunities Committee and others on the need for information on religion and for expanded information on ethnicity.

There have been requests for the inclusion of additional questions on other topics, particularly income, language spoken at home and the Scots language. It has not been possible to meet those requests this time. I, like others, hope that some of those matters can be addressed by the Executive by other means. I ask the Deputy Minister for Communities, in her summing-up, to comment on those matters, and on the language question in particular.

There is no doubt that the information gathered from the census will be used to shape the future of all aspects of Scottish life, most importantly in the provision of public services. It is in that context that the Equal Opportunities Committee pursued an approach of mainstreaming equalities for the census content. How can we expect service providers to take account of minority needs in their forward planning if we are unable to provide them with the information that highlights the necessity to do so?

As much as the debate surrounding the inclusion of a question about language remains, there is also a technical debate surrounding the ability of some of our people to understand and complete the census form, for language and other reasons. That is an issue that I would wish the Executive to address from a practical perspective. There could be a helpline, for example, or the assistance of voluntary groups could be enlisted. I would expect such action to help increase census return rates.

I hope that all members agree that the changes in the census content that have been agreed will give a broader picture of Scotland's needs and the needs of its people in the 21st century. I hope that we, as Scotland's representatives, can effectively target resources to meet needs and to help ensure equality for all.

16:27

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I recognise that we are moving close to the winding-up speeches, so I will try to be brief.

I, like many other members, welcome the concession being made by the Labour-Liberal Executive on religion and ethnicity questions. Those are important for recognising our changing society, and the move will be widely welcomed.

I want to concentrate on amendment S1M-459.1, on income. People often wonder whether a question on income is a real intrusion into liberty. I regard it as an important aspect of planning in this new century.

It may come as a surprise to many people in the chamber that the "New Earnings Survey 1998" showed that the average gross weekly earnings in Moray are the lowest in the whole of Scotland. People do not associate rural areas with such poverty and tend to think that we are dealing with an issue that relates solely to conurbations. Information such as this has huge implications for social inclusion, community planning, community safety and resource allocation—all words that trip so easily off the lips of ministers. We are not, however, to give our local authorities, who need much support, the information they need to ensure that they can deliver the services our people deserve.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the Scots language and the motion Irene McGugan moved so effectively, which has been ably supported by my colleagues in the SNP. I remember reading English language and literature at the University of Glasgow as a very young student in the 1960s—perhaps further back than I care to remember. Elements of philology and the development of language were included in our courses.

In a class of approximately 100 students, I seemed to be the only person who understood any Scots words. I do not know whether my fellow students were overcome with shyness, but I understood automatically such phrases as sneck the yett, and could answer all the questions put by the smartypants young lecturer. At the end of the lecture, he asked me, "Where do you come from?" I found that a strange question.

The fact that the lecturer asked me that question because I could understand lots of words in the Scots language indicated that he thought of the language as being compartmentalised, I mean compartmentalised—I could probably say it better in Scots—into certain parts of the country. It is not. The language translates itself throughout the length and breadth of the land. I heard Cathy Peattie saying that someone at the University of Aberdeen had said that, in the Grampian region,

naeboddy spicks that language. Nora Radcliffe, Winnie and I could take her to Keith to hear how that language is translated.

It is important, as Brian Adam so adequately showed, to give a message to the people of Scotland that the Scots language is not an entertainment. It is not something for Hogmanay, "Scotland the What?" or "Rab C Nesbitt"; it is a vibrant part of our society and we will do everything to support it. Over many years in politics, I have heard endless promises about surveys, which seem to come to naught. I have heard endless commitments about money being given to the language. Our real commitment could be given by including a question on Scots language in the 2001 census form.

16:32

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): This has been an interesting debate. There is a clear need for a census. To base public policy on information that is 10 years old is to risk that policy's irrelevance, or even worse. A local example that comes to mind is the problems of the Scottish Borders economy. Some of the figures that we were consulting on, to cast policy for the future to get ourselves out of difficulties, were so out of date that we wondered about their validity.

We heard John Rickman's argument that

"The intimate knowledge of any country must form the rational basis of legislation and diplomacy."

How true that is. Another of his propositions is perhaps more questionable today than it was in 1841—his view that

"A government anxious to increase total 'felicity' needs to know the number of marriages and the factors affecting them."

Perhaps that is not a convincing argument for a new census today.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the Executive's change of view. We believe that it is correct to include a question on religion and to expand the ethnicity question. We are pleased by the minister's concession and we accept his good faith. If the Executive changes its mind, we should not castigate it for doing so; by doing that, we might risk its not doing so in future on other matters.

It would be good to include a question on Scots language, but the effect of the SNP motion would be to annul the census. We cannot vote for an annulment of the census, as that would hold up the whole process. The registrar general would not be able to recruit enumerators and we would delay the vital census for a considerable time. However, there is clearly considerable interest in the Scots language on all sides of the Parliament. I agree

with Ian Jenkins that a census question is not the only way in which we can promote the Scots language. I hope that, despite the absence of a question in the census, there will be work to promote the language in schools and universities.

What causes us most concern is the absence of a question on income. It is said that including such a question would have an adverse response on the response rate, but Mr Wallace mentioned that there would be no penalties for not answering the religious question that is to be incorporated and the same ruling could apply to the question on income. If there were no penalties for not answering the income question, the response rate would be higher.

We are told that the inclusion of a question on income has cost implications. That might be so, but that cost must be balanced against the costs of the wrong policy being adopted because of a lack of information. We must ensure that the information that the census delivers can be used by local authorities, a necessity to which Margaret Ewing gave eloquent testimony.

Councils in rural areas, and the Scottish Executive rural affairs department, say quite clearly that objective measures to define rural deprivation do not exist. If we have the opportunity to address that deficiency by including a question on income in the census, I cannot see why we would not do so. There is an important implication for public policy: the information will greatly assist us in deciding on grant distribution to local authorities.

I note Des McNulty's view that there might be other ways of collecting the information, but if the information has not been collected by those methods in the past, what confidence can we have that it will be collected in the future?

We give a general welcome to the census and accept the concessions that the Executive has made. It is a pity that the question on the Scots language will not be included, but we are not prepared to delay the census process on that basis. We are concerned about the absence of the income question from the census and are particularly keen to hear from the minister what is intended to compensate for its absence.

16:37

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am happy to be speaking on fishing once again—the census is simply a huge exercise in fishing for information.

A great deal of money has already been spent. The estimated cost of the Scottish census is £23.2 million by 2002. Since the exercise is so expensive, it is vital that we get it right and include

questions that will provide valuable information on the whereabouts and needs of our population for the next 10 years.

Like Trish Marwick, I was amused by the comments of John Rickman, the clerk to the House of Commons at the end of the 18th century. Outlining 12 arguments in favour of a census, he said:

"In a time when many fear the disaffection of the people, doing a census would improve the Government's image as setting out to promote the public good".

That was more than 200 years ago. Nothing much changes, does it? To judge by the low turnouts in recent elections—most notably the most recent European election—people are more disaffected than ever. An improvement of the Government's image would be more welcome than ever. Our message to the Government is, "Stop spinning and have a good census."

Mr Rickman also said that the life insurance industry would be stimulated by the results. I bet that today's life insurance companies would love to get their hands on the results of the census. Luckily, however, confidentiality is assured: the census forms are withheld from the public for 100 years.

As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I am glad that Mr Wallace has seen fit to agree to a question on religion. Scotland's reputation as a tolerant nation would have been at risk if we were the only country not to have a census question on religion.

We should be grateful to the Commission for Racial Equality for its work towards that goal, to Brian Monteith for his earlier motion on the subject and to members of parties other than my own—Irene McGugan, Donald Gorrie, Dennis Canavan and others—who signed that motion and showed undoubted cross-party support for the inclusion of a question on religion.

I am glad that the ethnicity question is being revised and that the Executive proposes to consult bodies, including the Equal Opportunities Committee, on the precise formulation of a new question. I hope that the Executive will give thought to the inclusion of a category for travelling people of different ethnic origins, such as those identified as gypsies and Romanies. They can certainly lay claim to having one of the oldest histories of any group in the UK. It is to be hoped that increased recognition would lessen the prejudice and persecution that they have suffered in the past and unfortunately still suffer today. When we formulate the question on ethnicity, we should achieve the aims set out by the CRE. We welcome the Executive's change of heart on the issue.

Although I take Tommy Sheridan's point and the

spirit with which it was put, a question on income would throw the entire validity of the census into question. Previous census tests show that people are very sensitive when asked about such matters, which leads to unanswered questions and inaccurate results. Other methods exist for obtaining that information and I would hate to jeopardise the outcome of such an important document when those alternatives are to hand.

I am a firm advocate of the protection of the Scots language. Like Gaelic, its history is timeless and is surrounded by romance. I love the poetry of Burns and MacDiarmid and never go anywhere without my nickie-tams. However, although I would like the question to be put to the Scottish people, I see no straightforward way of doing so. We can go round in circles debating what exactly constitutes a language or a dialect, argue about its origins and where it is spoken, and lately most of us have been doing so. If we cannot agree on what exactly the Scots language is, how can we expect the Scottish public collectively to comprehend any question on the subject? Although the eight-volume Scots language dictionary and the Scots edition of the James VI bible prove the validity of the argument for what I consider to be Scots, a true definition of Scots does not yet exist. We can only hope that such a definition has been established when the next census comes around.

I am encouraged by the news that the boosted household survey will include a question on Scots. From the point of view of the Equal Opportunities Committee, we now have a question on religion and a question on ethnicity, and, in the words of the song, two out of three ain't bad.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry to tell members that no provision was made in the order of speakers for Tommy Sheridan to sum up. If the minister and the SNP make the generous gesture of giving up a minute and a half of their summing-up time, I could squeeze him in for up to three minutes. Is that acceptable?

Members indicated agreement.

16:43

Tommy Sheridan: I thank both the minister and the SNP.

I have found the discussion so far a bit frustrating. Conservative members have argued against including a question on income in the census, but Labour and Liberal Democrat speakers have all argued that a question on income is not only desirable, but required. Indeed, one of the best speeches was the Liberal Democrat summing-up. My difficulty with the idea of accepting a recommendation to consider the question in the future is that the next census is in 10 years' time. If we want the most reliable piece

of data that includes a question on income, we must grasp the opportunity now.

I therefore appeal to the Labour and Liberal Democrat members who believe in their heart of hearts that the census should include a question on income to suspend the idea that we have to vote along party lines. I hope that there is not a whip on this vote, and I appeal to those members' independent spirit.

In a letter to Kate MacLean, the convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee, Jim Wallace said that a question on income

“would lead to a significant non-return rate, distorting the data on income”

as well as other aspects of the census. I hope that, when the next System 3/Herald poll shows a more than 3 per cent fall in Liberal Democrat support, Jim Wallace will accept that that is a significant fall in support. This is the first time that a fall of less than 3 per cent has been described as significant, and that position must be questioned.

I remind the chamber that Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden all ask a question on income, as do the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. In America, the census return rate is 98.4 per cent and in Australia, the rate is 91 per cent. It is clear that a question on income does not lead to a significant non-return of forms.

Finally, I remind the chamber that the census test—which has been cited as evidence that there would be significant non-return—was a voluntary survey, but the census has legal backing. If social policy is to be properly targeted, it is necessary that we have reliable, detailed information on income. I ask members to support my amendment.

16:46

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):

As has been said, the strength of the Equal Opportunities Committee's motion was that it was agreed on an all-encompassing, all-party basis. It was based on principle and covered the three interrelated elements of ethnicity, religion and language, including the Scots language. As the committee's convener said recently, this is the first census that the Scottish Parliament has had to deal with, and we should do so in a cross-party way, taking on board what others feel is important. It is a pity that the Executive has not seen fit to follow suit by accepting all aspects of the motion, including the question on language spoken in the home and on Scots language.

The Executive's position is all the more remarkable when we consider that the Deputy First Minister has a track record of supporting a Scots language question in the census. He says

that he has since seen the light and is now better informed; although the minister can be accused of many things, consistency is not one of them. It is a pity that he has left the chamber—[*Interruption.*] I see that, in fact, he has returned just in time.

I want to speak about the chain of events that led to this debate.

Mr Jim Wallace: Will the member give way?

Shona Robison: Yes.

Mr Wallace: I was listening to Shona Robison. If she expects ministers to listen, she must accept that sometimes we will listen and come to conclusions that she does not like.

Shona Robison: I hope that he will listen more often, and that he will sometimes do so at an earlier stage. There are lessons to be learned from how this episode was handled. Since 10 January, the Executive has refused consistently to include any of the additional questions. When the Equal Opportunities Committee made its position clear, there were jitters all round about a possible defeat, so the Executive embarked on a process of delaying the debate until 16 February to try, I think, to persuade the Equal Opportunities Committee to change its mind. The Deputy First Minister attempted to do that last week with a performance that made people more determined to stick to their guns. However, after press coverage at the weekend there was a series of U-turns.

We do not want hastily drawn-up letters to appear on desks the night before debates, such as the one that left the Equal Opportunities Committee in the difficult position today of having to decide whether to withdraw its motion. That is not how this Parliament should do business, and I hope that we will learn lessons for the future. The power and influence of the Equal Opportunities Committee in this matter should be welcomed.

It has been said that if the SNP's motion were accepted, the process of passing the order would be delayed. That is a spurious argument, as we have all agreed to facilitate the passage of legislation. I am sure that an amended order could be passed quickly. It is important to get Scotland's first census right; it is important that we get all the questions right and do not miss this opportunity.

We are disappointed that the Executive has not seen fit to accept the question on languages spoken in the home, and on the Scots language. The Commission for Racial Equality argued vociferously for a question on languages spoken in the home, because the answers would indicate change over time and assist in the planning of bilingual education.

As Linda Fabiani said, the question would also inform a national strategy on interpreting and

translating. That is an under-resourced area, which Jim Wallace has still to address in the light of the Macpherson report. I hope that he will come forward with new resources for that service as quickly as possible. No equivalent data are available from survey information and much service delivery is hampered by the lack of that information.

The other omission—surprise, surprise—is the Scots language. As I have said before, Scots used to be supported by the Deputy First Minister. Perhaps one reason why the Executive does not want to find out how many people speak, read or write Scots is that it is estimated that 1.5 million do, yet Scots receives only £112,000 a year in funding. That amounts to less than 10p per person. Scots is clearly the worst-funded indigenous minority language in Europe.

People have suggested that the question on Scots may not be understood. It might be difficult to phrase such a question clearly, but it would not be impossible. It is important that we get the census right, rather than embark on a census that is lacking.

Members from all parties have given their support to the inclusion of a census question on Scots. They have supported such a question in the past and I hope that they will support such a question today, unlike the Deputy First Minister. Other members whom I did not know supported the Scots language have spoken in favour of the question and that is encouraging.

The argument for the inclusion of a question on income has been made vociferously by Tommy Sheridan, Des McNulty and others. I hope that the Parliament will agree to that—the SNP would support that.

I urge members to support the motion in the name of Irene McGugan. The Scots language deserves to be treated with more respect and including it in the census would be a good start.

16:52

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): I am familiar with the concerns that have been raised about the draft census order because of my equal opportunities responsibilities. It is evident to everyone that the Executive has listened carefully to what the Equal Opportunities Committee has had to say. We are grateful to the committee for stressing the contribution that the census can make to equality proofing and social inclusion policies.

Although the debate has tended to concentrate on three or four particular census questions—and I shall come back to specific points made on those—we must not lose sight of the whole census

package. The census is probably the most important source of social and socio-economic statistics. Its special value lies in producing data for small areas; that helps those who have to plan and deliver local services, such as health, education, housing, transport, social services and community care.

We have taken account of the Equal Opportunities Committee's view that census users will need to make fuller use of information about ethnic and religious groups in future. To include a question on religion, we will need to pass primary legislation to amend the Census Act 1920. To enable us to achieve that without putting severe strain on the census timetable, I hope that members will accommodate the fast-tracking of that legislation, allowing the draft amendment order to be laid at the earliest date.

The census is feasible only if we use self-completion forms; interviewer completion would not be practical. Someone needs to view the operation from the form-filler's point of view, remembering that completion is compulsory. In reply to Elaine Smith's point, I must tell members that we intend to provide assistance in the form of a helpline and a minicom number for the hard of hearing. We will liaise with the voluntary sector to ensure that we promote the census properly.

A form that is longer than three pages per person will affect response rates. The changes that we have announced today on religion and ethnic group will need to be accommodated within that constraint.

Des McNulty, Tommy Sheridan and others argued for a question on income. While we recognise the strength of the case that such a question would allow for useful cross-referencing, there was clear evidence from tests carried out by the registrar general that inclusion of such a question risked alienating the public, lowering response and so reducing the effectiveness of the whole census.

Mr Sheridan is not entirely correct in his assertions. I agree with the need for improved data for social inclusion purposes, but there are alternative sources that can give that information: the DSS small area income data; Inland Revenue data; the Scottish household survey, which asks specific questions on income that are then cross-referenced to information on health, education and so on; and new modelling techniques. I give an assurance that we intend to pursue the objective of producing and disseminating data by the time those census outputs are available in 2002 and 2003. I hope that that gives the assurance wanted by Des McNulty, Sylvia Jackson and others.

Kate MacLean and the Equal Opportunities Committee argued for a question on language

spoken in the home, but the real need is to identify a lack of ability in English where that may affect the delivery of services. Tests have shown that a question on language spoken in the home does not work as a proxy for that information, since many fluent English speakers use a different language in the home. I give my guarantee to Kate MacLean that the household survey, boosted to examine ethnic minorities in Scotland, will cover that specific point. The Commission for Racial Equality, the race equality advisory forum and others will be involved in pulling that together. I am also happy to guarantee that the Equal Opportunities Committee will be consulted on that.

I emphasise that the Executive provides support for the Scots language and recognises the role of Scots in our cultural life. This issue is not about recognition of the Scots language or—I say to Brian Adam—about understanding the Scots language. The term Scots means different things to different people. The sampling that was undertaken underlined that and showed that the data we would get would be unreliable and could not be used with accuracy for planning purposes.

I should clarify the issue raised by Malcolm Chisholm and Brian Adam. I guarantee the inclusion of a question on language spoken in the home in the ethnic minority boost of the Scottish household survey. However, Scots are not an ethnic minority.

I would like to reassure the public about how we collect, store and use all the information collected in the census. Census information is used only for statistical purposes. The Census Act 1920 makes it a criminal offence for census office staff, or agents providing services to the registrar general, to pass on information to anyone other than people employed by, or providing services to, the registrar general for purposes covered by the act. The forms will be kept secure for 100 years. There are no security concerns.

If the census is to proceed as planned, it is important that we do not annul the draft order today. If the order were annulled, which is what Irene McGugan's motion would do, we would have to recommence the whole procedure and it is not clear that we could hold the census on the planned date.

The census will provide vital information for the work of this Parliament as well as the wider community. The draft order fixes the date of the census and the basic data to be collected. We have said how we plan to accommodate members' concerns. We will lay an amendment order to include a question on religion when the necessary change in primary legislation has been made. We will also expand the ethnic group question on the basis of the consultation that I outlined earlier.

I am unclear about the SNP's position. When the Executive listens to the Equal Opportunities Committee and reviews the matter, are we to be condemned or congratulated? We have listened and where a case has been made we have acted.

I move,

That the Parliament approves the draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000 to the extent that it relates to the following particulars in Schedule 2—

(a) in item 1, the words "indicating whether an individual form is being completed by that member";

in item 2, the words "and relationship to the first person mentioned in the return, and, as the case may be, where there are 5 or less persons in the household, the relationship of each of the previous persons mentioned in the return and where there are 6 or more persons in the household, the relationship of the sixth and subsequent persons to the two previously mentioned persons in the return";

in item 6, the words "and if married whether first or subsequent subsisting marriage";

items 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17;

in item 18, the words "or was on a Government sponsored training scheme";

items 19, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32;

and items 1, 2 and 3 of Schedule 3 to the draft Order.

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):
Before we come to decision time, I wish to make the observation that, as a matter of common courtesy, those who take part in debates ought to be here to listen to the winding-up speeches.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We now come to the three questions that are to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S1M-554, in the name of Irene McGugan, on the draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There is disagreement, so there will be a division. Members who wish to support Irene McGugan's motion should press yes.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)

Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 75, Abstentions 1.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is,

that amendment S1M-459.1, in the name of Tommy Sheridan, which seeks to amend motion S1M-459, in the name of Mr Jim Wallace, on the draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Those who wish to support Mr Sheridan's amendment should press yes.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny ((Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael ((Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)

Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Monteith, Mr Brian ((Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 75, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S1M-459, in the name of Mr Jim Wallace, on the draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament approves the draft Census

(Scotland) Order 2000 to the extent that it relates to the following particulars in Schedule 2—

(a) in item 1, the words “indicating whether an individual form is being completed by that member”;

in item 2, the words “and relationship to the first person mentioned in the return, and, as the case may be, where there are 5 or less persons in the household, the relationship of each of the previous persons mentioned in the return and where there are 6 or more persons in the household, the relationship of the sixth and subsequent persons to the two previously mentioned persons in the return”;

in item 6, the words “and if married whether first or subsequent subsisting marriage”;

items 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17;

in item 18, the words “or was on a Government sponsored training scheme”;

items 19, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32;

and items 1, 2 and 3 of Schedule 3 to the draft Order.

British Sign Language

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We move to the members’ business debate on sign language. On this occasion in particular, I ask members who are leaving to do so quickly and quietly, because it should be noted that for this debate I have agreed that signers for the deaf should be situated in the public galleries and on the floor of the chamber. We may wish to welcome those who are assisting in our debate. [*Applause.*]

I must remind visitors to the public gallery that they are not allowed to applaud. Even in sign language, they must be silent. The signers are in place, and I have much pleasure in asking Dr Ewing to open the debate.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that the British Sign Language is used as an essential communication tool by a substantial number of people in Scotland and has a strong historic tradition; recognises the pressure on interpreters who are in constant demand particularly in rural areas; notes that the British Deaf Association is seeking review of the recognition, rights and support applied to the language; expresses the hope that the Scottish Executive will assist the process by taking actions to implement the European Parliament’s recognition of Sign Language as an official language in each of the member states, and recognises the importance and necessity of British Sign Language by integrating signing into the plenary sessions of the Parliament.

17:03

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank all concerned for the opportunity to have the debate, and members for their cross-party support for the motion, which is now my motion conjoined with Cathie Craigie’s. I also thank these brilliant signers, who are rare birds—there are only 32 in Scotland.

Today, we in this Parliament are brought face to face with hundreds of visitors from our deaf community, with the clamant needs of the deaf—the Cinderella of the disabled. Many children are born deaf, and 90 per cent of them are born to hearing parents. This statistic is not clear, because we take it as a proportion of the UK figure, but in Scotland we have between 5,000 and 7,000 people who were born profoundly deaf. They have never heard a human voice. They have never heard a note of music. They have never heard the birds singing.

The British Deaf Association has a just aim. It wants access on equal terms to all walks of life: health, education, culture and social activity. Those people want the right to achieve their full potential, the right to self-esteem, and the right to dignity for their deaf identity. I submit that that is a

fundamental human right.

My motion, as I said, is conjoined, and it calls for the recognition of British Sign Language—BSL—which is the natural first language of the deaf in this country. BSL is an ancient and indigenous language. It is centuries old, and dates back to the Venerable Bede. In the United Kingdom, the number of people who use BSL is higher than the numbers who speak Welsh and Gaelic added together. It is a living, evolving language, with its own grammar and its own humour. It is capable of expressing the full range of philosophical thought. It is as complex and sophisticated as any spoken language.

To sign is natural for deaf children. It should be their first language, with English their second. Sign language was banned in Italy in 1880, with enormous effects internationally for the concept of signing. Oral speech for the deaf was encouraged. That is achievable, but not for all. Sign language, however, is natural to all.

If the learning of signing is followed by the learning of the spoken language, the deaf are helped to become literate and to develop their full potential. We must have a bilingual and bicultural approach. The deaf live in a hearing world, and they walk on hearing streets.

We are now beginning actively to encourage mainstream education for deaf children, but that can cause isolation for a deaf child if back-up is not available in their classrooms every day.

Yesterday, the parents of a deaf child who is sitting standard grade wrote to me. I believe that they are in the gallery. They wrote that the Scottish Qualifications Authority refuses to let their daughter sign her answers, so she may fail, not for a lack of knowledge, but because of her poor written skills, which are in a state of evolution.

Today, I received a letter from Highland Council that pointed out how many deaf children from the Highlands, because of a lack of special services there, have to leave home at a very early age to go to residential schools.

My friend Jack Ashley, who went deaf overnight, explained to me that if he had been born deaf, he would not have had the skills necessary to become an MP, but because he went deaf as an adult, he had the extensive vocabulary that deaf people all want to acquire. When conversing with me, Jack used to complain that my Scottish accent made it difficult for him to lip-read.

Teachers of the deaf require no qualifications in signing. The minister should address that, because it seems quite extraordinary to all the deaf people I have spoken to.

The deaf are just as interested in politics, current affairs and literature as any hearing people. When

I was MP for Hamilton, I visited the deaf school, and the children then paid a visit to the House of Commons. I toured the palace with them, pointing out any famous faces that I saw. Jim Wallace was not there at that time, I think.

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace): I was still at school.

Dr Ewing: I pointed out one face. "That's Enoch Powell," said I. A teacher asked the deaf children, "What's Enoch Powell famous for?" A teenage girl immediately replied, "He doesn't like black people." The child was totally up to the minute.

There is some recognition in legislation of deaf people's needs. The Broadcasting Act 1996 provides for signing for a percentage—a very small percentage—of certain programmes. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which does not cover education, covers access enablement, but much more has to be done. Deaf people have explained to me that there are many grey areas in legislation.

The Welsh Assembly has already called for BSL to receive official recognition. In the European Parliament, when I chaired the culture and education committee, we initiated a resolution that called for member states to recognise sign language in each state. Of course, the sign languages are all different. It was passed, almost unanimously, in 1988, but only four European Union states have given that recognition—Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Portugal. Thirteen other countries, including Uganda, have given that recognition. Surely if Uganda can do it, the Scottish Parliament could fight to ensure that we do it.

Under the umbrella of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which obliges a state to protect such languages and to ensure access, the route to recognition would be simple. Scandinavia is miles ahead; in her speech, Cathie Craigie intends to give some examples of that.

Let all of us ensure that, in our new democracy, no deaf or hearing person is ever left behind and that no deaf person is ever the subject of social exclusion.

17:11

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion. However, I ask that, in view of the large number of members and—more important—the many members of the public who have shown an interest, the Presiding Officer considers extending the time allocated to tonight's debate, to allow those members who wish to contribute to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): I will come back to the member on that at the end of her speech.

Cathie Craigie: Thank you.

The interest from across Scotland and the number of people in the public gallery today demonstrate the need for elected representatives and communities to work together. I think that the fact that the Parliament is debating a joint motion from Dr Ewing and me highlights the need for co-operation on this issue.

The Scottish Parliament should lead by example; I am extremely pleased that today's debate is being signed. In a small way, it shows, to more than 100,000 users, our commitment to the use and to the future of BSL. I strongly believe that we have an opportunity here, not only through today's debate. With Scotland watching what we do next, the debate will be crucial to the cause of raising deaf awareness.

The Scottish Parliament, as a new body, has a superb opportunity to increase its own accessibility to the deaf community. It is hoped that training—for members and staff who wish to take that opportunity—will be provided soon. Regular signing in the chamber would be a public recognition of BSL. There is a real need to promote BSL and to increase the public's awareness of its existence and its importance to so many people. The Scottish Parliament should lead the way on that.

As Winnie Ewing has said, many people have misconceptions about BSL; they see it as a kind of gesture translation of English and not as a different language. It is commonly thought that sign language is international—some sort of Esperanto. We know that that is not true, but our job is to increase the public's understanding.

For those who support BSL—as we can see today, there are many of them—there are numerous barriers to complete inclusion into hearing society. The problem of misconception, due partly to BSL's lack of recognition, is only one such barrier to inclusion and access, which leads to many other barriers.

Recognition of BSL as an official language would be a big first step to increasing access for our deaf community. The use of BSL has proliferated; more than 100,000 people in Scotland use it, which is a third more than the number of people who speak Gaelic. I agree with the recognition given to Gaelic and the resources targeted at Gaelic speakers, but I think that the same recognition should be given to BSL users.

Other things are needed. There are around 6,000 people in Scotland whose first language is BSL. Although the language is not derived from

English, the vast majority of information and communication methods are, so much of what hearing people take for granted is severely restricted for BSL users. In fact, accessing everything, including—as Winnie pointed out—politics, is much harder for the deaf community and is often a struggle.

We need to examine ways of improving access for BSL users. I agree with the "Sensing Progress" report that new technology needs to be fully exploited to support BSL users as well as deaf people who use other forms of communication such as lip-reading and lip-speaking.

The Scottish Parliament can set an example in terms of the availability and accessibility of information. Publications and consultation documents could be made available in BSL. The Parliament should be proud of the website. It is a resource that could be exploited further by doing small things such as using more moving pictures and having videos of signed debates.

Private companies, public organisations and the Scottish Executive also need to address communication problems and I encourage them to do so. Access for the deaf community at all levels—especially on television—must be improved. For example, many of our news and current affairs programmes are broadcast without signing or subtitles. Why? I recognise that the scope of the matter is wide, in terms not only of BSL and the rights of the deaf community, but of those people in Scotland who are deaf-blind and who find themselves caught between two stools. Unfortunately, there are many issues that will not be properly addressed in the short time that we have today.

I would like to suggest a way in which we in Scotland can take those issues forward. There is a massive shortage of BSL interpreters in Scotland and throughout the UK. SENSE Scotland says that there are only 32 such interpreters in Scotland, as Winnie Ewing mentioned. Demand completely outstrips supply. That is understandable when one thinks that 6,000 people use BSL as their daily language. We are in dire need of more qualified interpreters. The time is right to address that need.

Finland is one of only four European Union member states that recognise their native sign languages. That country was in a similar situation to the one that Scotland is in—there was a similar number of users of sign language and a similar population. Finland now has a properly constructed training programme, which is funded by the state-controlled lottery, and there are 1,500 fully trained interpreters. Finland was able to achieve that in five to seven years.

In Scotland, what little structure there is for interpreting courses is ad hoc. The only course

that I know of is a part-time one that is run at weekends by Heriot-Watt University. The course fees are £3,000. We should look at evaluating that course and giving it professional standing. The establishment of a well-structured, properly funded training programme for signers and interpreters and increased recognition of the problems would go a long way towards meeting the demand for more trained and qualified interpreters.

If a company promised to create 1,500 jobs over five years, there would be a media event and the company would rightly be welcomed with open arms. The jobs are out there—the work needs to be done. We need the vision to recognise that and to create a proper, full-time professional structure that will motivate and encourage people to take that opportunity, which will be of great benefit to the attempt to achieve a more inclusive Scotland.

I have chopped out half of what I wanted to say, Presiding Officer, so, to conclude, I would like to say that in a perfect world I would call for all parliamentary business—plenary and committee meetings—to be signed. I recognise, however, that that would add to the burden on signers, as there are currently not enough of them.

A massive boost to BSL and its users would be gained if important debates and debates of special interest to BSL users and the deaf community were signed. The status of BSL would be boosted if question time—the most high-profile part of Parliament's business and the most accessible through television—was signed. I ask that the parties' business managers and the Parliamentary Bureau take that suggestion on board. The time is right and we should grasp the opportunity to raise deaf awareness, to create jobs and greater job opportunities and to make the everyday things that hearing people take for granted an easier experience for those who are deaf.

I look forward to hearing what Jackie Baillie has to say in reply to the debate. I call on the Executive to establish a working group, similar to the one that was so successful in Finland, to take the issue forward and to examine how access and opportunity for all those in the deaf community can be widened. I hope that this debate is the start of a long-standing commitment to our deaf community by the Scottish Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cathie Craigie asked that the debate be extended. I am minded to accept a motion along such lines, if a member will move one. Before any member does so, and so that we do not completely exhaust our signers, I will say that the motion should be to extend the debate for no more than 10 minutes.

Motion moved,

That the debate be extended by 10 minutes.—[*Dr Winnie Ewing.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:20

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Dr Winnie Ewing is to be strongly congratulated on raising this extremely important issue, on which she has the support of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, the British Deaf Association and the Edinburgh and East of Scotland Deaf Society.

As Dr Ewing and Cathie Craigie said, there is only a small number—some 32—of registered sign language interpreters in Scotland. They have to provide services for about 7,000 deaf sign language users. That is roughly one sign language interpreter for far more than 200 people—quite clearly, that is not enough. We are a modern, inclusive Parliament and it is right that we should invite the Scottish Executive and Her Majesty's Government to support two calls.

First, we should recognise BSL under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, so as to ensure equal access to public services and information for BSL users. Everyone knows that the recognition of BSL as an official language in Scotland would encourage the training of more sign language interpreters and thereby help the Scottish deaf community.

Secondly, it is reasonable for us to call on the Government and the Scottish Executive to establish a BSL task force to review policy and legislation, with a view to identifying new proposals for legislation to ensure linguistic rights and access to all aspects of life for deaf people.

Our countrymen and countrywomen who are deaf should be given every opportunity to realise their full potential. Fuller access to BSL will help to achieve that extremely worthy aspiration.

I am glad to support Dr Winnie Ewing tonight.

17:22

Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I wish to reiterate earlier comments by welcoming our guests. I am delighted at the number of MSPs who have waited behind to hear the debate—that shows that they still have a lot of compassion and interest in our deaf community.

As I knew nothing about the deaf community's difficulties and problems, I went to speak to a group from the British Deaf Association in Inverness some months ago. Although I was apprehensive about going, it was one of the most enlightening events that I have ever attended.

I quickly became aware of the problems that deaf people daily encounter in situations that we take for granted. For example, one can go to the

doctor, the solicitor, the Benefits Agency or the local authority's offices and understand what is being said and what the response is. However, if one is a member of the profoundly deaf community, it is not quite so easy. Many people visit agencies and offices not knowing if they are being understood or even if they are getting a fair hearing. They come away disappointed. Much has to be done to address that.

Another, simple problem was pointed out to me. If one is a member of the travelling public and hears a Tannoy announcement at the airport, the bus station or the railway station that the train, bus or flight is delayed, one understands the position. Members of the deaf community do not have that facility and that creates anxiety and stress for them when they are about their business.

Some months ago, I asked a parliamentary question about support for BSL. I discovered that not much had been done and that not much financial support was being given. This Parliament should consider that issue seriously, because much has to be done.

The BSL struggle echoes the struggles facing tutors of lip-reading when they try to secure funding, albeit in rather different circumstances.

It is surprising that the Welsh Assembly, which debated this matter back in September, is ahead of the Scottish Parliament. Incidentally, I believe that the signer for the Welsh Assembly stood on the floor of that chamber, as is happening here today—although, even this morning, that arrangement was not going to be approved. I am glad that sense has prevailed. The Welsh Assembly decided that it might incorporate some sort of videoconferencing to make communication with the deaf community a bit easier.

A report that has been produced this very day by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People indicates some of the problems that are associated with the lack of support for the deaf community. More than a fifth of deaf patients leave their doctor unsure of what is wrong with them, which is a cause for concern. Twelve per cent of deaf people avoid going to the doctor because they are not confident enough to do so.

Official recognition of BSL will not solve the problem, but it will refocus the issue and put pressure on people in all sorts of ways to provide adequate facilities for profoundly deaf people. The most basic of human rights is the right to communicate in one's own language.

I was interested to find out that there are 17 countries in the world where the national sign language has official recognition. The European Union first passed a resolution 12 years ago requesting that sign language be recognised. Only four countries have complied with that resolution:

Denmark, Portugal, Finland and Sweden. The second resolution requesting that countries recognise sign language was passed in 1998. What are we waiting for? Let this Scottish Parliament lead the way. Deaf issues are a fundamental part of the Parliament's equal opportunities agenda, and I hope that we can secure all-party support for the recognition of BSL as an official language in the United Kingdom, in support of those who live and work in our profoundly deaf community.

17:27

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I take this opportunity to thank Winnie Ewing for raising this issue. As far back as August and September last year, she spoke about lodging a motion such as this one, and I am pleased that it is being debated and has all-party support.

Last November I attended an all-party meeting in Glasgow—I believe that Robert Brown was also there—at which more than 70 members of the public were present. I took along the text of the motion that Winnie had lodged, which was very warmly received. I found the meeting a complete eye-opener, as I had not had much experience of deaf people and the problems that they face. The meeting was very vibrant, very noisy and very informative. I thank Tony Forry for organising it.

I want to give the Parliament a flavour of the meeting and of the interesting and searching questions that were put to the panel, of which I was a member. We were asked whether we thought that the Scottish Parliament should recognise BSL as a language in its own right and whether we believed that a law should be made to protect BSL. It was also made clear to us that there was growing discontent in the deaf community about the services that are available to deaf people—a point that previous speakers have touched on.

It is becoming clear not only to me but to other members of the public that the sign language interpreting service that is provided by social work departments varies according to where people live. The people who attended the meeting asked me what I, as a member of the Scottish Parliament, could do to address such problems. By having this debate today, we are addressing them. I am sure that, with all-party support, they can be overcome.

Earlier, we had a debate on the draft Census (Scotland) Order 2000 and whether it should include a question on the Scots language. During the debate, a number of interesting facts emerged. I will cite two points that I picked up on: the recognition by Europe of Scots as a language; and the lack of translators to enable a wider audience

to participate. Are those facts not relevant to the debate that we are having now, and are not deaf people asking for many of the same things? People who are deaf do not want to be treated any differently; they do not want preferential treatment. What they want is recognition of themselves and their language.

17:30

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): It was a humbling experience to sit at the back of the chamber during this afternoon's debate on the Scots language, in which a number of references were made to equal opportunities. As many people will know, I am a bit of a communications freak—I like to have my pager, my mobile phone and e-mail. If I sit quietly at the back of the chamber, with my phone in silent mode, I can even send messages back to my office, as long as I am not caught out. However, in a face-to-face encounter with many of the people in the public gallery today, I would be struggling. As MSPs, all of us must take that on board.

One of my constituents—Mrs Barton in Mauchline—brought this matter to my attention just after the election. She wrote to me, urging me to lodge a motion in Parliament to raise awareness of the problems that people with hearing impairments face and to get the Parliament to do something about it. I lodged a motion that sought to get the Parliament to examine the provision of deaf awareness classes to people in local communities at no cost. One of my concerns, as a representative of a community that suffers a great deal of deprivation, is that although many people would be willing to go along to a class to find out more and would even take on learning sign language, the option is not available to them because of cost.

When I worked in social work, I was aware of the difficulties caused by the lack of people who are able to interpret. I worked with a family in which both parents suffered from hearing impairments and used sign language, but whose child was not deaf. The child was used as an interpreter, sometimes on inappropriate occasions, to deal with family business with which a young child, frankly, should not have to deal.

There are a number of issues. The Parliament, I hope, wants—or should want—to have more opportunity to provide signing so that more people can participate fully. Unless we are able to do that, the Parliament cannot claim genuinely to be taking equal opportunities on board.

Finally, people must follow my Ayrshire accent and the speed at which I speak. We all ought to be aware that when we are ranting on in the

Parliament, people who use lip-reading techniques are watching us on television and will have difficulty following us. Some of us need to take that on board.

I thank Cathie Craigie and Winnie Ewing for securing this debate. It has been a privilege to speak this afternoon. I hope that now we will take some action.

17:33

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I add my welcome to the visitors in the gallery. My comments will echo the experiences of a number of people. I have had a little contact with this issue, as I have a friend in Glasgow who runs the society for the deaf in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, which is now called Deaf Connections. He has given me some insight into the problems. I confess, however, that I find it difficult to put myself in the position of a profoundly deaf person. The nearest I can get is by attending a disco or an event with loud music. As I begin to lose my hearing, what is going on around me becomes a bit of a mystery. Most of us would find it difficult to imagine having that difficulty permanently.

The key issues and themes are empowerment, communication and human rights. It is a matter of human rights that people should be able to communicate with other people, play their part in society and, as John Munro mentioned, be able to go about their normal business—go to the doctor, the social work department, or travel on the bus or train. Communication is key to that human right.

The other point I want to make is about the profusion—if I may put it like that—of deaf communities. There is not one deaf community. There are people with different sorts of problems. There are those who are born profoundly deaf, for whom the debate on BSL is most an issue, but there are those who lose their hearing through accident or the advance of age.

I would like to touch on the issue of lip-reading. Although it is a different issue from sign language, it is equally relevant to this debate that tutors of lip-reading struggle to find funding for their work.

The support that is given to the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters has been mentioned. I worked out that the grants for training and core funding total around £45,000. An additional £28,000 was granted last year—£8,000 this year—to SENSE and the Royal National Institute for Deaf People towards training people in British Sign Language. That does not seem a great deal of money even in these cash-strapped days. The Scottish Parliament should address that.

My final point is that recognition of the language

as an official language in Scotland and throughout Europe is not itself a solution to the problems, but it is a beginning. As John Farquhar Munro said, it focuses our attention on the issue and will lead to greater pressure on the authorities to produce the additional funding and support. The wider recognition of the language among the general public is necessary to make progress on this issue. Winnie Ewing and Cathy Craigie are to be congratulated on bringing this debate to the Parliament today.

17:36

The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie): I echo the comments that have already been made and commend Winnie Ewing and Cathy Craigie for bringing this matter to the Scottish Parliament for consideration.

The Executive recognises the depth of feeling that surrounds the status of BSL among its users. We are committed to supporting comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people. I understand that David Blunkett referred to BSL in his recent letter to the Disability Rights Commission concerning its remit and priorities. I also understand that Margaret Hodge, the minister with responsibility for disabled people, will contact the commission to examine the status of BSL.

As many people here will be aware, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires employers and service providers to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged at work or elsewhere. The provision of interpreters is an example, according to the act, of such an adjustment.

The final report of the disability rights task force was published in December. It recognised specifically the needs of deaf people who communicate through BSL, and the need for BSL users to be supported by suitably qualified interpreters. The report contains recommendations in devolved areas. We will look to involve all sectors of society—but disabled people in particular—in our consideration of the report as it affects Scottish interests. We are keen to hear from all those who have an interest in equality for disabled people, particularly regarding the recommendations in devolved areas. The Executive will discuss, with disability groups, the best way in which to facilitate that process.

The Scottish Executive is keeping in touch with the Department for Education and Employment, to ensure that its consideration of the issues is informed by concerns that are aired in Scotland, and that it takes account of distinct Scottish circumstances.

So, what is currently happening? The Scottish

Executive provides grant aid of more than £100,000 per year to several organisations that represent deaf people. Additionally, there is approximately £32,000 for training and development of BSL interpreters. Over and above that, the social work services inspectorate report, "Sensing Progress", which was published in 1998, recommended ways to improve communication with deaf people and those who are hard of hearing.

Following on from that, the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters has been commissioned to develop a training strategy—initially for social work staff—in BSL and in other forms of communication.

Dr Winnie Ewing: Is the problem not partly that the present course for the intensive degree of skill is part-time and therefore does not attract statutory funding, so it is too expensive for the average person? Local authorities, big banks and building societies do not seem to be pulling their weight on this issue. I do not think that what Jackie Baillie has said so far will solve the problem, unless there is a full-time university course.

Jackie Baillie: A piece of work is currently being undertaken by the Department for Education and Employment—with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People—on proposals to address the shortage of interpreters. That goes directly to the valid point Dr Ewing made. We await that information, to establish what can most usefully be done to move forward on some of these issues. Research has also been commissioned to identify the distribution and level of demand and the specialist skills of interpreters in England, Scotland and Wales. The draft report is expected in the spring and will highlight variations in the number of interpreters available in different areas.

We are aware of—and commend—the work of the many voluntary organisations, including the British Deaf Association, which works to promote deaf people as equal partners in society and campaigns for official recognition of BSL.

The European Parliament passed a resolution on sign languages for deaf people at the end of last year. It—and an earlier resolution—calls on the European Commission to make a proposal to the Council of Ministers on official recognition of sign language used by deaf people in member states. That is an issue of interest to many member states, including ours. The Commission is still to make a response, which we await with considerable interest and impatience.

I welcome the presence of BSL interpreters today. I understand that they are provided by the Edinburgh and East of Scotland Deaf Society. I

am sure that deaf and hearing-impaired people will also appreciate it.

We should also be aware of other provisions made in the Parliament for people who are hard of hearing, including the T-loop system in the chamber and infrared systems in some of the committee rooms.

Ultimately, it is a matter not for the Executive but for the Parliament to consider how best to take forward its provision for deaf people and whether signing should be integrated into meetings of the Parliament.

I am sure that the Deputy Presiding Officer will take this matter forward. From an equality perspective and the perspective of the Executive, I would encourage the Parliament seriously to consider this issue. The Scottish Executive is committed to equality of opportunity for all and that, of course, includes equality for people with disabilities.

We are in the process of consulting on the development of an equality strategy for the Executive. I encourage people to respond. In support of our commitment to equality for those who are deaf and hard of hearing we will continue to review and develop services, such as training and provision for BSL interpreters in Scotland.

Mr McGrigor: Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Jackie Baillie: I am winding up now.

We all want a just and inclusive society in Scotland, which—as Winnie Ewing said earlier—enables all our citizens to achieve their full potential. The Executive recognises that lack of access to information and services that hearing people take for granted contributes to a feeling of isolation and social exclusion. I give an undertaking that we will examine the issues that have been raised today, particularly interpreting, which makes a practical difference to people's lives and is fundamental in terms of the Executive's commitment to social inclusion and equality.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In closing this meeting, I would like to say thank you to all members of the public who stayed for this debate and to the MSPs, and a particular thank you to our interpreters. [*Applause.*]

Meeting closed at 17:45.

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