



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 8 September 2015

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Alexander Horsburgh, minister of Dalkeith St Nicholas Buccleuch parish church, moderator of the presbytery of Lothian and secretary of the council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in Europe.

The Rev Alexander Horsburgh (St Nicholas Buccleuch Parish Church): Presiding Officer, thank you for your invitation and for the honour of addressing Parliament.

The story that I want to tell is a difficult one. It concerns a middle eastern mother. She is utterly desperate. She has no power and no one to help her. Her daughter is in grave danger. She will do anything to rescue her child from the torment that she is suffering. She hears of someone, recently arrived, who is said to have helped others in similar circumstances. She finds the house in which he is staying, forces her way in and demands the help that she and her daughter so desperately need. The man turns on her, calls her a dog and says that what he does is not for the likes of her.

If you think that I have been telling a contemporary story, that is good, but I have not been. It is a story from the earliest of the gospels, Mark. The woman's name is not known, but the man's name is: Jesus of Nazareth.

Christians do not readily acknowledge that Jesus could be cruel, but on this occasion he was. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs," he said, meaning that what he was saying and doing was for the Jews, not others. The woman, whose only power lay in her quick wit and eloquence, replied, "I may be no more than a dog to you, but even dogs get scraps. I'm not asking for much—just a scrap."

If you now think I that have been telling an ancient story, that would be only partly true. It is a contemporary story too. Desperate people from the middle east are demanding help from those they know can help. Those who are drowning in the Mediterranean are not tasting even a scrap.

The woman's words changed Jesus. He healed her daughter and, in the next story, restored a man's hearing, saying the Aramaic word

"ephphatha", which means "be opened". Jesus' own heart was opened by the electrifying words of that desperate, suffering woman.

This woman calls us all, not just Jesus, to recognise the humanity in every other person. That Aramaic word should ring in the ears of all of us. Every day, we should tell ourselves, be open—open to our minds being changed, open to those in need, open to our wealth being shared. A closed heart is a cruel heart, but from an open heart flow love and compassion and care.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Mental Health Services (Access for Children and Young People)

1. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for reversing the order of questions. That was extremely helpful.

To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that children and young people have access to mental health services, in light of reports of over 16,000 rejected referrals in the last three years. (S4T-01104)

The Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health (Jamie Hepburn): We are committed to ensuring that children and young people of any age get access to high-quality mental health services. All children who are referred to specialist child and adolescent mental health services will be assessed individually. Where a request is not deemed suitable for intervention, we would expect clinicians to refer the child to an appropriate service. Children accessing mental health services will have their needs assessed by a multidisciplinary team, which may include psychiatrists, psychologists, occupational therapists and specialist nursing staff.

We are seeing a rise in demand. The past year has seen a 30 per cent increase in the number of people being seen in child and adolescent mental health services. Our response has been to invest an additional £100 million in mental health over the next five years. The funding will be invested in improving mental health services and will partly be used to further improve child and adolescent mental health services and to bring down waiting times.

Dr Simpson: I fully accept that this is a challenging area. I welcome the Government's introduction of the 26-week target and, more recently, the 18-week target. However, the three health boards in my constituency—Fife, Forth Valley and Tayside—are all still failing to meet the 26-week target. The number of people not being seen within 18 weeks in Tayside has risen from 46 per cent in July 2014 to 65 per cent in July 2015. What is the minister doing to ensure that Scotland catches up with the proportion of funding England spends on mental health services? Scotland spends 0.4 per cent of its budget while England spends 0.7 per cent of its budget on those services. The Scottish children's services coalition has said that that is "wholly inadequate".

Jamie Hepburn: I recognise the need for continued investment in mental health services and CAMHS in particular. Since 2009, we have made available to NHS boards £16.9 million to increase the number of psychologists working in specialist CAMHS, and this year we have committed another £3.5 million. As a result of our additional investment, between October 2009 and December 2014 we have seen a 70 per cent growth in child psychology posts. We continue to invest £2 million a year in tiers 3 and 4 intensive community CAMHS. That investment is allowing NHS boards to grow intensive outreach services.

We have set that waiting time target and I want to reach it. I am in constant contact with the boards that are not meeting it. We continue to work with them to do what we can in that regard. However, we must place the matter in context and recognise the increased demand. We must also recognise that more children and young people are being seen throughout the services. We will continue to do what we can to deliver for children and young people. That is why, for example, we have invested the £100 million that I have mentioned.

Dr Simpson: The general increase in child and adolescent mental health service staff is extremely welcome, but there has not been one additional child psychiatrist appointed since 2008. Therefore, the size of one of the leading groups in the multidisciplinary team is not being increased in line with the increasing child population.

My big concern is about the rejections. The referrals have been made by various health professionals, along with educational psychologists. However, last year, 953 referrals were rejected in Tayside and 164 in Forth Valley and, over the past three years, 650 have been rejected in Fife. I ask the minister to look into what the outcomes are for those individuals whom health professionals have regarded as appropriate for referral and yet whose referrals are being rejected. That means either that the protocols are not working or that something is happening with service capacity. In both cases surely it is the outcomes for the children that are important. Will he investigate that issue now?

Jamie Hepburn: I reiterate my initial response. Where a request is made but on further assessment is not deemed suitable for a CAMHS referral, we would expect clinicians to refer the child to an appropriate service. I have mentioned the additional £100 million. Some of that funding will go to primary care, which has a big role in helping those who may have had a referral to CAMHS rejected, so that we do more in the community. Dr Simpson and this chamber can be assured of the Government's determination to do

all that we can to support the children and adolescents who are going through the system.

Refugee Task Force

2. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the Scottish Government's refugee task force. (S4T-01101)

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Humza Yousaf): Later today, I will chair the first meeting of the refugee operational task force to provide a co-ordinated Scottish response to the global refugee crisis. It will focus on the practical issues in the areas of housing, health services, language support, transport, social services and many other issues, and look at ensuring a positive and welcoming environment for the refugees arriving in Scotland. The task force will also look to harness the overwhelming public engagement in response to the refugee crisis.

The task force will include in its membership refugees, representatives from local government and refugee organisations, and many other stakeholders. The task force's immediate priority will be to ensure that suitable accommodation and support are available for the people who arrive, noting in particular that some people, such as unaccompanied children, will have specific needs.

The task force meeting is being held further to the refugee summit that the First Minister chaired last Friday, which was attended by party leaders from the Parliament, and further to my meeting yesterday with the Scottish Refugee Council.

Sandra White: I thank the minister for his comprehensive response, and I thank him on behalf of the many people and groups in my constituency who attended the meeting last Friday and who were full of praise for everyone who attended.

The minister talked about a co-ordinated approach when people arrive. Does he think that David Cameron's offer to take 20,000 refugees over five years is adequate? Is he aware of a timescale for refugees arriving in Scotland?

Humza Yousaf: When any country is willing to accept refugees, we should welcome that. This morning I spoke to the United Kingdom Government minister for immigration, James Brokenshire, and I put on record that I think that the move is an important first step. I reassure the member that I think that 20,000 should be not a cap or upper limit but the absolute bare minimum. In the same way, the figure of 1,000 refugees that Scotland is willing to take immediately should be regarded not as a cap or upper limit but as the number that we are prepared to take immediately.

On the offer to take 20,000 refugees over five years, I hope that the majority of the arrivals will be front loaded. Many refugee organisations have asked for that, because the crisis is immediate; it is now. Therefore, it would be wise for the UK—and Scotland, in playing its part—to take in as many refugees now as we can do.

On the point about a co-ordinated response, we will try to ensure that there is a central focal point by the end of the task force meeting, through which we can harness all the public engagement. I know that many efforts are being made up and down our country, and we will see how we can co-ordinate those efforts through a central focal point. I will be able to say more about that after the task force's meeting later today.

Sandra White: It would be helpful for everyone in and outside the Parliament if we could have an update on the timescale for arrivals in Scotland.

The minister talked about updating us on the task force and the need for co-ordination. He is aware that many groups have been set up and I know that all members of the Scottish Parliament have received representations on the issue. When he considers a co-ordinated approach, will he consider setting up a one-stop shop, website and telephone number? Many people have contacted me because they are desperate to help refugees. They are talking about having somewhere to store goods and about transporting goods to Calais and elsewhere. It would be in everyone's interests if we could have an update on whether there will be a central website or telephone number through which people can get information as quickly as possible, so that donated goods can reach the refugees in the way that is intended.

Humza Yousaf: We will continue to push the UK Government to go as quickly as possible, while acknowledging the complexities of what it is trying to do, particularly through the vulnerable persons relocation scheme. Criteria are attached to the scheme, which the UK Government must, quite rightly, ensure are met. The member should be in no doubt that we are working at a pace and trying to push things along as swiftly as possible.

On the member's latter point, I will consider ideas, including some of the ideas that she mentioned, such as a website. Such matters are on the agenda for and will be discussed by the operational task force, and I will be able to update Sandra White—and the Parliament, if it so wishes—after the task force's meeting.

I echo what Sandra White said about how people up and down the country are showing overwhelming compassion and humanity in their desire to help their fellow human beings. I commend the many organisations that have been set up, including Scotland supporting refugees and

the Glasgow campaign to welcome refugees, for their work and efforts to help the most vulnerable people in the world.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I welcome the actions that the minister described in his response to Ms White. I also welcome the U-turn that the Prime Minister has performed, but the Prime Minister's decision to accept 20,000 people over five years from the vulnerable persons relocation scheme does nothing to help people in immediate danger, whose situation in Syria is so bad that they are trying to escape in overcrowded and inadequate boats.

Local authorities such as Glasgow City Council are to be congratulated on volunteering to accommodate more of those very vulnerable people, but they will need Government support if they are to do so. By definition, the vulnerable persons relocation scheme deals with the elderly, the disabled and the victims of torture and sexual violence. Such people have particular support needs. Is the minister confident that the required funding will be available to enable the support that such vulnerable people need to be in place when the refugees begin to arrive in our towns and cities?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Patricia Ferguson for raising some important points. I agree with her entirely on the first issue. Our preference is for the UK Government to take in addition a number of refugees from the southern European coastline in Italy and Greece—indeed, many are coming through Hungary, too—and we will continue to urge it to do so. The European Union must look at providing better legal safe passage for refugees to come to Europe, and we will be pushing very hard on that.

Patricia Ferguson's second point is well made. I join her in commending Glasgow City Council for taking a lead not only in this refugee crisis but in assisting refugees for a number of years.

Much of the task force's discussion will inevitably concern the financial packages that are available, on the understanding that local authorities will often be the ones that provide the majority of services. I am confident that the noises from the UK Government on financial packages are positive.

I do not have the detail yet—I spoke to the minister who is responsible this morning, but we did not get into that level of detail—but I assure members that the Scottish Government, local government and the UK Government are working closely to ensure that there are no gaps in service provision.

At the weekend the First Minister announced that the Scottish Government will put forward £1

million initially to plug any gaps in service provision. I will have more details with which to update Patricia Ferguson after the task force meets.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the task force work with local authorities in rural areas, given that they may face greater challenges in helping refugees due to their peripheral nature and distance from major population centres? What assessment has the task force made of Scotland's preparedness in terms of having an adequate number of Arabic translators to support Syrian refugees who may be without English?

Humza Yousaf: Jamie McGrigor raises another important point. What has been overwhelming has been not only the public support but the number of local authorities that have said that they are prepared to be involved.

After the task force has met, I will be able to provide an update from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which will be represented at the meeting, on the number of local authorities that have expressed an interest. My understanding is that more than half of local authorities in Scotland have expressed some sort of interest in being involved in resettling refugees. I imagine that a number of those local authority areas include rural communities, and that will be part of the discussion.

There is also a more academic debate to be had around how widely we disperse refugee populations, and that too will be part of the task force's discussion.

Jamie McGrigor's second point is valid. The reason why Glasgow City Council is attending the task force meeting in its own capacity is that it has a huge amount of expertise and infrastructure, having taken in refugees and asylum seekers since 1999. Its expertise will be vital in informing other local authorities about the infrastructure—including interpreters—that they will need to have in place to ensure that refugees, when they are resettled, are able to access all the services that they need.

Borders Railway (Benefits)

3. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what benefits it considers there will be for Midlothian and the Borders from the Borders railway. (S4T-01103)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Keith Brown): We believe that the Borders railway will assist in preventing a decline in the Midlothian and Borders populations and act as a catalyst for encouraging approximately £33 million of benefits at 2012

prices for the wider Scottish economy. It will increase business development, housing opportunities and inward investment, and potentially public sector relocation opportunities, for the local community.

The route has connected the people of Midlothian and the Scottish Borders to the national rail network, and it will connect communities, encourage more affordable housing, and reduce carbon emissions and reliance on the car.

Christine Grahame: I am thrilled, after campaigning for 16 years for a Borders railway and as a founder member of the cross-party group, to be on that train tomorrow. I have selected my hat—it is understated, as members would expect it to be.

However, there are still opportunities to increase tourist footfall that people have raised with me. For example, the signage at Tweedbank could be improved to direct travellers to Abbotsford house, as could the signage at Newtongrange for the national mining museum. I ask the cabinet secretary—or his colleague the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism—to undertake to ensure that the most is made of that journey for tourists and the stops en route.

Keith Brown: I always expect understatement from the member.

It is worth pointing out that Christine Grahame and you, Presiding Officer, along with people such as Madge Elliot, who has campaigned for the reopening of the Borders railway for 50 years, and Petra Biberbach have all played a part in the success. It is often said that success has many fathers, but it is interesting that, in this case, quite a few mothers deserve to be paid tribute to for the success of the line.

I advise Christine Grahame that we have taken a number of measures to ensure that we properly exploit the benefits of the line for tourism. A marketing campaign will promote the Borders railway both nationally and internationally, which is intended to boost tourism, investment and associated regeneration in areas along the entire length of the route. We are also taking a number of other tourism initiatives in relation to the line because we want to properly exploit it.

We are willing to consider any further suggestions. The minister who led today's time for reflection used the Aramaic word ephphatha—be opened—and we are certainly open to any suggestions from the member or any other member who wants to put forward proposals that will help us to fully exploit the benefits of the line.

Christine Grahame: It would be remiss of me not to mention the Public Petitions Committee, which stimulated this development. The committee

has taken a bit of a kicking recently, which it does not deserve, but it was the pathway to the reopening of the railway.

The cabinet secretary says that he wants to hear about other things. There are some teething issues at the Galashiels transport interchange, where the electronic information boards have teeny-weeny print. Also, the automatic ticket dispensers at Newtongrange need to be recalibrated, because passengers need to have very swift reflexes to work the things.

Addressing such issues will make the journey smoother and allow people to enjoy it more. They are minor issues, but we could address them quite easily. I therefore ask the cabinet secretary to get in touch with the relevant authorities to make them aware of those things. If I have any more little issues, I will raise them with him at another time.

Keith Brown: I am grateful to the member for her feedback. ScotRail staff are aware of the issue with the automatic ticket dispensers. There is a huge amount of new plant as well as the line itself, and there will inevitably be some snagging issues. However, they are being dealt with.

We all hope for the best possible day tomorrow, as it will be a fantastic day for the Borders. From the various events that I have been involved with over the past week or so, I know that there is real excitement and pride around Scotland in the new Borders railway.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's remark about openness, which builds on the past cross-party work on the issue. I also welcome the thrilling sight of trains full of passengers going to Tweedbank and back.

I recognise the work of the Scottish Government and other agencies as well as that of the Campaign for Borders Rail. Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge the contribution that has been made by Scottish Labour in the development and vision of the process over the years? Now that we have, together, secured steam trains and some cycle space for tourism, will he commit to—I am chancing my arm in saying that—or comment on the future of rail freight for the Borders and Scotland, and possibly even the extension of the line to Carlisle?

Keith Brown: I know that the member made representations, along with others such as Christine Grahame, on the issue of tourist trains, and we were able to accommodate them. I recognise her efforts and those of her colleagues.

In relation to a possible extension of the line, we have said that we will have to see how the line works. We are confident that it will be a success, but we will have to see how it works. We have

gone beyond that and have said that, if the local council—as it has said—or the local transport partnership is looking to undertake a feasibility study for a potential future extension, we will help out with that. By that, I mean that Transport Scotland and Government agencies will provide any support that is necessary to carry out that feasibility study.

Another campaigner made the point that any study should also take into account the potential for freight, as it may not be possible to make a sufficiently strong case on the basis of passenger numbers. That will be in the hands of those who undertake a feasibility study; however, as I have said, we are committed to the idea that Transport Scotland will help out in that process.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I, too, look forward to the train journey tomorrow, although I will probably not be wearing such a fancy hat as Christine Grahame. Perhaps she will let me borrow hers.

The former First Minister said that the Borders rail link would serve as a catalyst for the restoration of the historic route right through to Carlisle. It would be interesting to hear from the cabinet secretary today at what stage the Government would consider it appropriate to step in and look at a timetable for a feasibility study to see what the economic benefits would be, to underline what has been suggested not just by the former First Minister but by the leaders of Scottish Borders Council and Carlisle City Council.

Keith Brown: The member's question prompts me to say that we also owe some thanks to the councils, especially Scottish Borders Council, with which we have had a very co-operative relationship in relation to not just the new line but the events leading up to tomorrow's formal opening of it by the Queen. I recognise the efforts that they have made. We have had a particularly good relationship with David Parker of Scottish Borders Council.

In relation to the possible extension of the line, I have laid out the Scottish Government's position. The council and the transport partnership might well come forward with a proposal for a feasibility study—they said that they are interested in doing that. Building on the comments of the former First Minister, I said that we will provide every assistance with that.

I repeat the point that I made to Claudia Beamish: as well as looking at increasing passenger numbers, which is a challenge because of the nature of the terrain that the line goes through, consideration should also be given to the use of the line for freight, as others have suggested.

The important thing is that we get the line off to a good start. Tomorrow, we will be using a very old steam engine, the Union of South Africa. All our efforts are focused on ensuring that it makes the journey, which is very important, given some of the passengers it will be carrying, who will include my boss. We also need to concentrate on making sure that the line is a success. The bread and butter of the line will be the provision of reliable and efficient services between Edinburgh and Tweedbank. We must concentrate on providing such services and on maximising the use of the line.

Scottish Economy (Progress)

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-14156, in the name of John Swinney, on progress in the Scottish economy. I point out to members that time is extremely tight and that the last few speakers in the open debate might end up having their time slightly reduced.

14:26

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Today's debate provides an opportunity to reflect on the current strength of Scotland's economy. I would also like to use the debate to outline the approach that the Scottish Government and the wider public sector are taking to building a Scottish economy that is characterised by inclusive growth and the creation of opportunities for everyone in Scotland to realise their full potential.

The debate takes place against a backdrop of strong economic performance in Scotland. That is confirmed in the latest "State of the Economy" report from the Scottish Government's chief economist, which highlights that the Scottish economy has now experienced 11 consecutive quarters of growth. That is our economy's longest period of uninterrupted economic growth since 2001. It also demonstrates the underlying resilience of the Scottish economy in the context of the difficult external and domestic challenges that have continued to be experienced during the recent period.

The latest data for the first quarter of this year recorded growth across each of the main sectors of the economy. There has been particularly strong performance in the construction sector, which has been underpinned by our programme of continuing infrastructure investment. The fact that there has been an expansion of 21 per cent in the sector's activities is a measure of the significance of the capital works that are under way in Scotland, an example of which—the Borders railway—has just been referred to.

At the same time, consumption has been buoyed by factors such as high employment and low inflation. Gross domestic product per capita is a key measure of our economic strength, and by the first quarter of this year, Scottish GDP per head had recovered to just 0.2 per cent below pre-recession levels, whereas in the same quarter GDP per head for the United Kingdom as a whole remained 0.6 per cent below its pre-recession peak.

On employment, the picture is also encouraging. Our employment rate is above that of the UK,

while youth unemployment is at its lowest level in six years. Our performance also ranks favourably in a European context—we have the second-highest female employment rate and the third-highest youth employment rate in the European Union.

Our strong economic performance is expected to continue, with the consensus being that growth of around 2.4 per cent is forecast in Scotland this year. That recent trend picks up on a longer-term story of improvement. For example, the value of our international exports increased by around 40 per cent between 2007 and 2013. In recent years, we have consolidated our position as the UK's most successful area outside London in attracting inward investment. As a result, over the past 10 years Scotland has secured more than 37,000 jobs from foreign direct investment.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Does the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy agree that, with Scotland being one of the most successful exporting nations, it would be absolutely catastrophic to build barriers between ourselves and the rest of Europe?

John Swinney: Mr Stevenson will be familiar with the Scottish Government's commitment to continued membership of the European Union, which we believe is an essential part of Scotland's economic prospects. There will be a period of significant uncertainty with which the business community will have to wrestle in the course of the next few months as we await news of the timing of the EU referendum.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Given all the good news that the cabinet secretary has referred to, why does he believe that such a large gap has opened up over the past year, with business confidence in Scotland lagging far behind that in the rest of the UK?

John Swinney: There is a range of surveys on business confidence. One of the surveys that I look at most closely is the Bank of Scotland purchasing managers index, which has shown a sustained level of growing confidence in the Scottish economy among the business community. I look so closely at the Bank of Scotland PMI because, in my experience, it has come closest to predicting some of the economic challenges and difficulties that we have had to experience. I therefore think that what the pattern of the index reflects in terms of economic confidence is worth listening to.

The foundations around foreign direct investment have been well expressed, but we have also seen business research and development spending in Scotland increase in real terms by 29 per cent over the past six years. Our

business base is also growing, with the number of registered businesses in Scotland growing by 10 per cent since 2007 to an all-time record level. However, we know that there are areas in which we can do better and improve performance. In particular, we need to address structural challenges around productivity in order to ensure that skilled and well-paid job opportunities continue to be created within Scotland.

Productivity has been a consistent theme in our approach to the economy since this Government came to office and it is an area in which we have enjoyed some success and made significant progress. Since 2007, the productivity gap between Scotland and the United Kingdom has been significantly reduced, but we still lag well behind countries such as Sweden, Germany and France. At the same time, many economically successful nations of similar size to Scotland have achieved greater levels of equality and better social outcomes.

Although income inequality in Scotland, as measured by the Gini coefficient, is lower than that in the UK as a whole, it remains higher than that in many strong-performing northern European countries. We must do more to increase competitiveness and ensure that we also achieve a fairer society in which the proceeds of growth are more evenly distributed. Those mutually reinforcing priorities are central to our updated economic strategy, which reaffirms our commitment to boosting productivity through investment, innovation and internationalisation.

Our strategy also sets out an approach to the economy that is based on partnership and on a commitment to tackling inequality, not just as an important priority in itself but as a means of boosting productivity in the economy. There is a growing evidence base that delivering sustainable growth and addressing long-standing inequalities are objectives that reinforce, rather than compete with, each other. That has been supported by recent work by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. For example, OECD analysis found that rising income inequality in the UK reduced GDP per capita growth by 9 percentage points between 1990 and 2010.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am grateful to the Deputy First Minister for giving way on that point about income inequality. He represents a rural constituency, as I do, and he will understand the difficulties that the agricultural sector has faced this summer in particular. In that context, and in the context of his point about inequalities, will he undertake to look at some of the issues around the transportation of fodder to areas in outlying parts of Scotland that are facing

particular pressures because of the summer that we have just had?

John Swinney: Mr Scott makes a very substantial point. I have visited Orkney and I was in the Western Isles just this weekend, and I have received representations about the difficulty caused by the inclement weather in growing enough feed for livestock, which are of course central in Mr Scott's constituency, Orkney, the Western Isles and all our island communities to individuals' livelihoods.

As Mr Scott will know, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment was in Brussels yesterday discussing those very issues with his European counterparts. As part of that analysis, we will, of course, consider the substantial issue that Mr Scott has raised.

Tackling income inequality has been central to the Government's economic strategy. One of the members of the First Minister's Council of Economic Advisers, Professor Stiglitz, recently commented:

"Tackling inequality is the foremost challenge that many governments face. Scotland's Economic Strategy leads the way in identifying the challenges and provides a strong vision for change."

In practice, implementing the strategy will mean that we will focus on boosting competitiveness and tackling inequality through four key priorities: long-term sustainable investment in people, infrastructure and assets; growth that is based on innovation and openness to new ways of undertaking business activity; promoting inclusive growth and creating opportunity through a fair and inclusive jobs market and regional cohesion; and creating a country with an international outlook that is open to trade, migration and new ideas. All those elements are essential to the process of wealth creation, which the Government believes to be important in this exercise.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the fact that John Swinney has acknowledged the disparity in productivity.

Will the first priority in the investment strategy—the long-term investment in people—involve a look at the drastic fall in opportunities at further education colleges? There are 150,000 fewer part-time places. Probably equally as important, will the opportunities at schools to do science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—STEM—subjects and, indeed, information and communication technology subjects be looked at? They have also been cut drastically.

John Swinney: There are two points in Mrs Scanlon's intervention. The first relates to college places. The Government has taken a conscious decision to deepen the skills that individuals acquire when they go to college. Our commitment

was to maintain the full-time equivalent numbers at around 116,000 in further education colleges. We have exceeded that—the number is around 119,000. The purpose of that was to concentrate deliberately on entrenching the skills base to ensure that the productivity gains that I am talking about could be achieved because of a more deeply skilled workforce.

The second point that Mrs Scanlon raised related to STEM and digital skills. She will be aware that, in partnership with the industry, we recently established the new digital skills academy, CodeClan, which is designed specifically to address the issue that Mrs Scanlon raised. I cannot have a conversation with the business community without digital skills and their availability being raised. We realise that the issue is central to the development of the economy, and measures are in place to try to address it. The Government will, of course, continue to reflect on how effectively the issue can be taken forward to ensure that we achieve the objectives.

The strategy that the Government has set out makes it clear that our ambition is to reach the top quartile of OECD countries for productivity, sustainability, inequality and wellbeing. Those are the aims of the Government's economic strategy.

Our priority with regard to business is to build the conditions for businesses to grow both at home and overseas, and to ensure that Scotland remains a highly attractive location for international investment. One of the first acts of the Scottish Government in 2007 was to establish the most competitive business rates regime in the United Kingdom. We have also supported business by directly maintaining support for our enterprise bodies and, as I have just relayed to Mrs Scanlon, investing in the physical and digital infrastructure and in the skills of our workforce to support that activity. Of course, that work has taken place against the backdrop of the public expenditure challenge that we have faced.

Building on the measures that have been taken over recent years, we announced further measures in our programme for government to update our activities and to reflect changing economic conditions both at home and internationally. Many of those measures were set out in the programme for government debate that has taken place over the past week.

A strong business sector is vital to the creation of a fairer society. The reverse is also true: a fairer society can benefit business into the bargain. That is one of the reasons why we will continue to place a strong emphasis on promoting fair work.

We will promote the real living wage, which makes work pay and reduces poverty. It can also help businesses to increase productivity, reduce

absenteeism and improve staff retention. Last year we set a target of 150 living wage accredited companies in Scotland. There are already more than 300 and we are now working on reaching a target of 500 by the dissolution of Parliament.

During the next six months, the fair work convention will create a new framework for the relationship between employers, employees, trade unions, public bodies and the Government. In particular, it will propose and promote employment practices at both the aggregate economy level and within individual businesses, to maximise productivity, including in relation to skills, workplace innovation and job security.

The business pledge is central to our vision of fair work that is founded on a partnership between employers, employees and the Government. The business pledge is a shared mission between the Government and business that has the goal of boosting productivity, competitiveness, fair employment and fair work. By making the pledge, companies demonstrate their commitment to sharing values and to delivering through their actions and future plans. We are making strong progress, with the announcement today of the 100th adopter of the business pledge, Edinburgh-based games development company Blazing Griffin.

Fair work is one strand of our approach to inclusive growth. Raising attainment and eliminating gaps in attainment, the expansion of childcare provision and the wider provision of quality and affordable housing are other key measures in advancing our efforts to tackle inequality in our society.

The Government's economic strategy has at its heart the determination to create a prosperous economy and an economy that is fair to the individuals in our society. At the heart of our approach is a focus on partnership and shared endeavour. We want to work with businesses and all our partners in the Scottish economy to ensure that our economy continues to grow and, most importantly, creates opportunities for all to flourish.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the news that the Scottish economy has experienced its longest period of uninterrupted economic growth since 2001 and has a higher employment rate than the UK as a whole and further welcomes independent forecasts predicting growth of around 2.4% in 2015; endorses the refreshed Scottish Economic Strategy launched earlier this year, which sets out the approach taken by the Scottish Government and wider public sector to achieve a Scottish economy that is characterised by inclusive growth and opportunities for all, and supports the *Programme for Government 2015-16*, published on 1 September 2015, which sets out the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to foster a supportive business environment, invest in infrastructure and skills and support entrepreneurship, innovation and internationalisation while promoting and expanding fair

work and the living wage and raising attainment.

14:42

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): When we debated the Scottish Government's economic strategy in March, I described it as a glossy and colourful publication that had lots of pictures but was light on detail. We expected to hear today about an action plan with timescales and targets but, unfortunately, not much has changed.

There is no room for complacency. We have fewer businesses in Scotland per head of the population than is the case anywhere else in the UK. The number of businesses in Scotland has fallen. Our start-ups are fewer in number; business research and development spend is lower than the UK average; and, although our GDP is 2 per cent higher than the pre-recession peak, the rest of the UK's is 5 per cent higher. We could trade stats all afternoon, but the truth is that the picture is very mixed.

Members should not just listen to me. The Federation of Small Businesses has reported a drop in business confidence, which is now at zero as revenues and profits fall. Importantly, the FSB highlighted skill shortages as a problem that hampers business growth. The Scottish Retail Consortium has also reported that retail sales are down on the previous year, and food sales are down, too.

Few people would fundamentally disagree with the aims of the Scottish Government's strategy. Growing the Scottish economy and reducing inequality are sound ambitions that we share. The problem is that we do not know how the Scottish Government will do that, and we certainly do not know how success will be measured.

In her programme for government speech, the First Minister made a plethora of announcements, although I am not sure how many of them were all that new. If my memory is correct, this is the sixth time that the Scottish business development bank has been announced; I look forward to it appearing soon. However, what matters is the difference that the actions will make to outcomes. With no measurements or targets, we have few means of judging whether the strategy is working.

The Scottish Parliament information centre briefing on the Scottish National Party economic strategy is well worth a read. It notes the lack of any specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely targets. If there are no targets, it is not possible to assess the success of the new strategy. Professor Ronnie MacDonald summed it up beautifully when he said that the strategy is

"really quite bizarre. If you don't have targets, it doesn't take you anywhere."

We therefore lament the lack of targets and measurements as a sign that the SNP is not really serious about making the strategy work.

I turn to taxation. The SNP's previous economic strategy had an overreliance on oil and a belief that, if we cut corporation tax, that would in and of itself promote growth. I am pleased that the SNP has moved away from that belief and that it recognises now what we have been saying all along—that cutting corporation tax would simply mean a race to the bottom.

As for oil, the SNP overestimated the revenue that would be achieved from oil and gas taxation. Stats tell us that oil revenues for the most recent quarter were £168 million; for the same quarter last year, they were £969 million.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Does Jackie Baillie agree with me and with Sir Ian Wood—a friend of the union—who said in his report on oil and gas that the fiscal regime and the regulatory regime had been extremely damaging for Scotland's oil and gas sector?

Jackie Baillie: I always pay careful attention to what Sir Ian Wood says. The Scottish Government and the UK Government should pay attention to some of his recommendations and his recent comments, because he is saying that oil production is unsustainable below \$50 a barrel.

I remind Mike MacKenzie that the SNP told us that the economic projections for oil were for \$110 a barrel. That figure has recently been revised down to \$70 a barrel. The truth is that Brent crude fell to \$42 a barrel last week. I worry about the sustainability of our oil economy. This is not some debating point about the SNP's desire for full fiscal autonomy; this has real consequences. There have been more than 5,000 job losses, and 35,000 job losses are predicted over the next three years. This touches every constituency in Scotland but, in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, the impact has been severe. The unemployment rate is going up; the youth unemployment rate is going up; business starts are falling by a fifth; and 91 per cent of businesses say that they have been adversely affected.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: Not at the moment. Aside from the consequences of the fall in price, oil is in decline and the cost of extraction is increasing. However much we might not want to talk about this, we need to start thinking now about a post-oil economy.

What do we do about decommissioning? Let us have a clear strategy from the SNP Government to bring investment to carry that out here. How do we make sure that the skills, the talents and the jobs

in the oil industry transfer into the new industries of the future? There is little in the strategy about that.

Members may recall that, back in March, the SNP Government published two economic analysis papers within a week of each other. They set out the benefits of improved economic performance and were the SNP's demonstration of how it would improve onshore revenue receipts and close the gap in the nation's finances.

Aside from wrongly including the benefits of the Barnett formula in their calculations about full fiscal autonomy, the papers made a number of sweeping assumptions. We would see a growth in productivity—there was no underlying policy analysis for achieving that. We would see a narrowing of the gap between Scotland and our international peers on business investment—there was no underlying policy analysis for achieving that. We would see a 50 per cent growth in exports, which would be a growth rate higher than China's in its heyday—again, there was no underlying policy analysis for achieving that.

Let me go on with the sweeping assumptions for just a minute. All that would apparently generate £3 billion more in tax revenues. That is the SNP's best-case scenario. Far be it from me to point out to the cabinet secretary that, with a gap of at least £7 billion, he was a little way short—some £4 billion short. That would mean a cut in services such as schools and hospitals and reducing the numbers of teachers and nurses, or it would mean higher taxes. We have yet to hear which it will be, and the SNP is still committed to pursuing a policy of full fiscal autonomy that would cost Scotland's economy dear.

Our focus for the economy must be forward looking. We know that the Scotland of tomorrow will not be like the Scotland of today. Our greatest future asset is our people, because it is human capital that can drive economic success. That means that we need to invest in people's potential. We need to give them the very best start in life, the best opportunities in school and access to further and higher education and to lifelong learning. Education is an economic issue.

My leader, Kezia Dugdale, visited Selex ES yesterday to talk about the engineering jobs of the future. EngineeringUK estimates that Scotland will need nearly 150,000 new engineers by 2022. That is great, and it could result in a £1.7 billion bonus to our economy. Why is it, then, that a pathway to engineering course that is being offered at Dumbarton academy, in my constituency, is being cancelled by West College Scotland? I hope that the cabinet secretary will agree that that is short-sighted and is perhaps driven by financial considerations more than by the local economy's needs.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I hope that the member agrees that there should be a broader range of possibilities for the future for students at her local school than to work in the arms industry—a business that has a track record of dealing with some of the most brutal regimes on the planet.

Jackie Baillie: Patrick Harvie will recognise that I was illustrating the point that there are future jobs in engineering, which was once considered to be an industry in decline, and we should encourage those jobs. I hope that, as a former pupil of Dumbarton academy, he would want to join me in seeking a reversal of West College's short-sighted decision to cancel a pathway to engineering course.

Employers complain about the lack of a pipeline of skilled people. That is borne out by the FSB survey. The jobs of the future need investment now, particularly in the STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We also need to invest in basic literacy and numeracy in the classroom. There is little to celebrate when the attainment gap is 12 per cent in reading, 21 per cent in writing and 24 per cent in maths. That fundamentally harms our economy.

The attainment fund that the SNP has announced is therefore welcome, but the issue needs to be made a budget priority as well as a political priority. Contrast the SNP's approach when it says that it will cancel £250 million of air passenger duty in a year while investing just £25 million in closing the attainment gap. That is 10 times more on cutting taxes than on investing in our children and the future.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Will Jackie Baillie take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The member is in her last 30 seconds.

Jackie Baillie: Our approach to the economy is about investing in skills; it is not about cutting taxes. I look forward to taking Scotland forward in the future.

I move amendment S4M-14156.3, to leave out from first "welcomes" to end and insert:

"recognises that the Scottish Government must ensure that the benefits of economic growth improve the lives of working people and address increasing inequalities; believes that the Scottish Government must be more ambitious to improve economic performance, noting that GDP stands at 4.5% above the pre-recession peak for the UK as a whole, compared to only 2.9% in Scotland; notes criticism from leading economists of the Scottish Government's two economic publications, *Benefits of Improved Economic Performance*, for incorrectly assuming that Scotland will continue to receive the block grant while retaining all taxes raised in Scotland; notes that these two economic publications have based their economic analysis on growth assumptions that are not supported by any policy

analysis or an assessment of the likelihood of achieving such growth; further notes with concern that Scotland's Economic Strategy provides no targets to measure success; welcomes progress in promoting the living wage in the private sector, but believes that the full weight of the Scottish Government should be behind this effort, including through procurement; notes the recent fall in confidence among Scotland's small business community, and believes that the foundation of Scotland's economic strategy must be a successful education policy and that therefore tackling educational inequality must not only be a political priority but also a spending priority."

14:52

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the scheduling of the debate and the recognition in the Scottish Government's motion that we are seeing steady and sustained economic growth. Over the past year, the UK economy grew faster than any other advanced economy in the world, and Scotland is very much part of that. So too for employment, where we have seen unprecedented increases. This has been an employment-heavy economic recovery, and that has been central to the Conservative Party's ambition.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's narrative of all the economic successes. Of course, he failed to attribute them to their real architect—the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne. It is as a result of the chancellor's difficult decisions, which were taken in the teeth of opposition from other parties that are represented in this chamber, that we have delivered the economic success.

Let us remind ourselves what we heard from those other parties. We were told that economic growth would not come. When employment levels were growing, we were told that those increases were illusory. Instead, the facts speak for themselves. In the past five years, more than 2 million new jobs have been created across the UK, three quarters of which have been in full-time positions. For those in work, wages have risen. In the past year, wages have increased by an average of 2.8 per cent, while inflation has been flat. UK Government policy now exceeds the pre-election pledges of the SNP and the Labour Party, in that we are working towards an enforceable £9 per hour national living wage by 2020.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: I am sure that Mr McDonald would like to join me in celebrating success, so I will give way.

Mark McDonald: I ask the member to advise me on two things. First, why are anti-poverty groups saying that in-work poverty has increased? Secondly, would the living wage as set by the Scottish Government be above £9 by the time that the Conservative minimum wage reaches £9?

Murdo Fraser: On the second point, the living wage that the Scottish Government proposes would not be legally enforceable—that is the difference. The national living wage that we will introduce will be legally enforceable for all over-25s. Everyone will get the benefit of that and the scheme will not be voluntary.

I am glad that the member raised the issue of poverty. Earlier this year, the Scottish Government's annual report on poverty and income acknowledged that we have some of the lowest levels of poverty since records began in the first half of the 1990s. According to the Scottish Government—which Mr McDonald should pay attention to—there are 140,000 fewer individuals and 60,000 fewer children in poverty since 2010.

As the Scottish Government acknowledges in its report,

"This reflects more people moving into employment, and increases in hours worked. In particular there was a shift from part-time employment to full-time employment for those on the lowest incomes."

The record is encouraging, but there is more work to do.

It is unfortunate that, in areas that it controls, the Scottish Government has sent a number of negative signals during its time in office. We are pleased that a number of those measures have been reversed. One example is the so-called public health levy—possibly the most thinly veiled cash grab on the retail sector that was ever conceived—which ended just this year. If it really was about public health, why did it come to an end?

The same cash grab instincts arise in the Scottish Government's treatment of shooting and deer forests in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is before the Parliament. Only yesterday, I spoke to a gamekeeper who is concerned about the prospects for his job as a result of that ill-conceived measure, which gives little consideration to how business will be affected and how sectors of our economy will suffer as a result of the targeted attempts to raise revenue. That is regrettable.

Patrick Harvie: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: No—I need to make progress.

One year on from the referendum, the Government continues to agitate over the constitution.

As Jackie Baillie reminded us, the Federation of Small Businesses has charted business confidence in Scotland in relation to that in the rest of the UK over the past few years, with the odd exception. The latest figures make for grim reading: confidence has fallen in Scotland to a mere 1.7 points while, UK-wide, it stands at 20.3.

Over the past year, the gap between the two figures has widened. When I intervened on him, the cabinet secretary was too quick to dismiss those figures. He should ask why the gap exists and why it has been widening. That should be a concern.

If the Scottish Government sincerely intends to make Scotland a competitive business environment, it must follow its ambition with actions. That is why we call for a root-and-branch review of the business rates system. It is perhaps surprising that that has not yet happened. The Scottish Government has established a commission on local government finance but excluded from its remit any examination of business rates, which are the single largest local tax in Scotland. I encourage the establishment of such a review, which I hope will be as open as possible and will consider the fundamentals of local business taxation.

There are a number of specific problems in the administration of the current rates system that could be addressed. For example, the rise in rates for empty properties has created a large additional expense for properties that are vacant because they are undergoing refits or refurbishments, which are already a considerable cost on business. There is a single assessor for business rates valuations for the whole of England and Wales. What case can realistically be made for Scotland retaining 14 assessors? Why is there no single mechanism for payment, rather than separate mechanisms for each of our 32 local authorities? Many issues need to be considered and I urge the Scottish Government to address business rates.

I do not have time to address the Scottish rate of income tax. I simply remind the Parliament that business needs clarity on that so that it knows that Scotland will indeed be competitive.

The Scottish Government will get our support and that of the business community if it does the right thing to create a more competitive environment in Scotland.

I move amendment S4M-14156.2, to leave out from “endorses” to end and insert:

“welcomes the positive action of the UK Government to build sustainable economic growth across the UK; shares the Scottish Government’s stated ambition to create a competitive business environment in Scotland; proposes that a full review be conducted into the application of non-domestic rates with a view to improving their competitiveness and efficiency; regrets proposals in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill to alter the treatment of shootings and deer forests for valuation purposes, and urges clarity on the proposed use of the Scottish rate of income tax, which is being devolved in the next year.”

14:58

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I will touch on a couple of topics from earlier speeches that need to be addressed.

I thought that we had—Patrick Harvie excluded; I know that his view is different view from mine—come to a degree of consensus on the benefits that reductions in air passenger duty would provide for airports and economic activity in Scotland. I also thought that the Labour Party was signed up to that, but from Jackie Baillie’s speech, I heard what seemed to be a rowing back from the Labour front bench and a suggestion that Labour does not favour taking those steps to boost economic activity and support Scotland’s airports. That will be interesting news for Scotland’s airports—in particular, Aberdeen airport in my constituency, at which a number of routes would potentially benefit significantly were the decision to be taken to reduce air passenger duty. Perhaps Labour front-bench members will clarify that later on.

On the second point that Jackie Baillie spoke about, I realise that Labour faces a difficult balancing act in trying, on the one hand, to appear to be concerned by the situation that affects the oil and gas sector, while trying on the other hand not to act as though it is pleased by the situation that arises. That is a balancing act that the previous leader of Scottish Labour, Jim Murphy, spectacularly failed to carry off. However, the point is that the situation demonstrates the folly of the UK Government’s decision to implement the supplementary charge when the oil price was high, because that had a detrimental impact on exploration activity when the opportunity existed for that activity to take place. It meant that when the oil price lowered, the industry was not in as advantageous a position as it would have been had the exploration activity been stimulated and encouraged.

It would, during the period of the offshore Europe conference, which takes place in my constituency, be remiss of me not to focus on the positive developments and opportunities in the sector. I note that Lloyd’s Register Energy yesterday announced that it will develop a headquarters building in the Prime Four business park in Kingswells in my constituency. In its press release, it says that

“The complex will be the largest LR office worldwide in terms of headcount.”

That is an important statement of confidence in the north-east’s economy and in the energy sector.

I was also drawn to an article by Brian Wilson on the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce’s blog. It is not often that Brian Wilson

is quoted by SNP members, but it was one of his more temperate interventions. He points out that

“Azerbaijan alone, according to UKTI, is offering £11 billion worth of export opportunities for British companies over the next few years, as production of both oil and gas continue to expand.”

One of the benefits that we have in Scotland—in the north-east in particular—is an expertise base that has been built up over many decades that can be exported to other countries in a way that is beneficial to those areas and which can bring benefits back to Scotland as a result of internationalisation and the export of talent, hardware and kit.

On the living wage, there is a fallacy in the position of Murdo Fraser and the Conservative Party. Retitling of the minimum wage as the living wage does not make it a living wage. What makes a wage a living wage is that it meets the standard that is applied. Any increase in wages is welcome, but because the Conservatives did not increase the minimum wage to the level of the living wage as applied by the Scottish Government, it cannot be called a living wage. A wage that does not meet the criteria of a living wage cannot be called a living wage.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Does Mark McDonald at least acknowledge that the living wage that was set by the Conservative Party is higher than the manifesto commitment of his party in the general election?

Mark McDonald: If all that we are going to get from Mr Brown is that semantic argument rather than an examination of the reality of a living wage and what that actually means, we are not going to get very far at all.

I welcome the fact that, in Scotland, nearly 135,000 people are now employed by living-wage accredited employers, and that the target for the number of living-wage accredited companies has been not just exceeded but smashed. As a result of that, we are now looking at having 500 of them by the dissolution of Parliament.

The living wage is important for more than just the fact that it boosts incomes, because a workforce that is well paid and properly paid is a more productive workforce. That links to the Deputy First Minister's point about productivity. A workforce that is enthused by the fact that its members are receiving proper pay for a proper day's work is more likely to be a productive workforce, which will also bring economic benefits.

There are positive stories to tell about the offshore sector and the wider Scottish economy. I support the Government's economic strategy.

15:04

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): As the motion notes, economic growth was stronger and more sustained in 2001, in Labour's second term of office. Famously, when talking about his economic strategy, Gordon Brown referred to post-neoclassical endogenous growth theory. That may be a mouthful, but it is not just meaningless jargon. Underpinning it is the idea that, by investing in education and skills, in tandem with support for scientific and technological development, we can make better use of scarce resources and can perhaps even achieve economists' holy grail of sustainable growth in a virtuous cycle in which success breeds further success.

Although only time will tell whether that is possible, most economists would agree that high-quality training, skills and education, coupled with support for innovation, are essential to maximising growth. When we are discussing the economy and the economic levers that are in the hands of the Scottish Government, we cannot overemphasise the importance of education and training. The more we invest in education, the better. Employers look for a highly-skilled workforce, and a reputation for skills and technological advances attracts businesses. We need a coherent strategy to maximise our potential throughout schools, colleges, universities and employment-based training.

How will the cabinet secretary ensure that everyone can access the educational opportunities that they need to build their careers? Kezia Dugdale said yesterday that cutting the attainment gap begins in the classroom, with basics such as literacy and numeracy. She said that the gap between rich and poor is “immoral” and is holding our whole country back. That gap needs to be cut. We need to get more young people from deprived areas, such as Motherwell and Wishaw, into high-quality apprenticeships, college and university courses and good jobs. Unfortunately, too many people are still left out in the cold, with poor prospects, which gives the perception that the Scottish Government talks the talk but does not walk the walk. The cabinet secretary is failing my constituency and others. When will he fix that?

As well as quality, we need to ensure that we develop the right mix of skills. That takes vision and long-term planning, but when we look at the shortages of teachers, medical professionals, scientists and engineers, we see only a failure of foresight and planning. In 2001, Nicola Sturgeon said that

“a party that is now in its second term of office cannot avoid taking responsibility for its own failings”—[*Official Report*, 12 December 2001; c 4711.]

As Jackie Baillie said, Scotland will need nearly 150,000 new engineers by 2022. Failure to deliver engineering skills will cost Scotland £1.7 billion a year. Why do women constitute just 3 per cent of civil engineers and 10 per cent of senior managers in science and technology in Scotland? What is the Scottish Government doing to attract more women into science and engineering? We need a firm foundation in science at primary school, but how many primary teachers have science degrees or have even studied science to higher level? Done properly, studying science can enhance literacy and numeracy. Surely that would be more useful than reintroducing national testing.

Why did numbers sitting higher level science, technology, engineering and maths subjects fall 4.2 per cent this year? Colleges are crucial to lifelong learning, and to tackling the attainment gap by widening access to education for disadvantaged areas, yet we have seen a three-pronged attack, with cuts to staff and courses, and 140,000 fewer college students.

When it comes to apprenticeships, it should not just be about quantity. We need high-quality apprenticeships and a range of skills. Of course we need retail, hospitality and the service sector, but should there not be a higher proportion in science, information technology, engineering, technology, manufacturing and construction—industries that are the powerhouses of wealth creation? We need to ensure that apprenticeships are good quality and meet the needs of young people and the economy.

In summary, we have a lack of science in primary school, low take-up in secondary school, courses cut in further education, too few graduates from universities and too few STEM apprenticeships. The Government report card says, “Must do better” at every level. If we want to build a fairer Scotland and a stronger economy, we have to concentrate on addressing those issues. That is what I want and it is what Scottish Labour wants, but is it what the Scottish Government wants, or does it still have other things on its mind?

15:10

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I support the motion on support for business, infrastructure investment, innovation and internationalisation, and on promoting and expanding fair work.

In my constituency we see major developments in renewable energy—for example, at Wick harbour, which the Beatrice offshore wind project is going to use for its base, where it will develop major infrastructure and jobs. Offshore wind is

only partly consented by the UK Government and could be so much bigger than it is.

Our energy minister, Fergus Ewing, visited MeyGen Ltd, in my constituency and said:

“The eyes of the global marine industry are on this project.”

It is the first major tidal project in the world and people are looking to it to see how to develop more tidal energy in the world.

We also have Scots who are at the present time internationalising by making sure that they gain contracts in other places to use our technology. Take, for example, Stirling-based Natural Power, which has a job with EDF to oversee the health and social environment and marine operations at the Paimpol-Bréhat tidal farm in Brittany on the Côtes-d’Armor—as well as, I hope, the new one at Île de Groix and certainly at Saint-Nazaire offshore wind farm. I visit those areas in the summer; they welcome Scottish technology to help them to prosper.

At the same time, we are faced with a UK policy that has the UK energy minister, Amber Rudd, making a big difference in the way in which Britain is going about energy policy compared to us, Germany or anyone else. Amber Rudd has arguably the most expensive single infrastructure project in British history—the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. That is the UK Government’s choice, while it sabotages the potential for thousands of jobs and billions of pounds of investment in our renewable industries in Scotland.

I am surprised that in its talk about the post-oil economy, the Labour Party did not notice that the programme for government says that we have invested £200 million during 2014-15 and 2015-16, which includes the national renewables infrastructure fund and the new community and renewable energy scheme local energy challenge fund to support the roll-out of low-carbon energy and so on.

Those investments are part of the post-oil economy, as is the report that was given to us very recently by David Sigsworth, the chair of the Scottish fuel poverty forum. Here is where building infrastructure comes in. He says:

“Scottish and UK government policies, surrounding fuel poverty, now contain significant differences of approach. Given that Scotland is still tied to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) schemes, designed and implemented by the Department of Energy and Climate Change, this has hampered the development of a uniquely Scottish solution.”

The vast bulk of homes in my constituency—between 60 and 85 per cent—are in need of measures to tackle fuel poverty, as is the case in much of rural Scotland. Where are we going to get the money for those things?

The difficulties of the reserved powers are such that we suffer other problems into the bargain. I refer to today's report by Citizens Advice Scotland about the postcode penalty, distance travelled and the cost of delivering parcels to our rural areas. Can we do something about that? We can protest, but our economy can take off if we get a proper system of delivering parcels to our rural areas. We need those powers, which we do not have at the present time.

I suggest that it is important to look not only at the drawbacks but at the successes. We have had record exports of farmed salmon production this year. We could be taxing whisky at source if we had the power over the whisky industry here, instead of international companies being allowed to pay some taxes elsewhere.

We would also be able to secure the fair jobs that this Government is famous for trying to promote. I was delighted that Annabelle Ewing, the minister who has responsibility for fair work, recently visited the Gordonbush wind farm in my constituency, and that she highlighted the fact that women are employed by Scottish and Southern Energy in many such developments. However, Scottish and Southern Energy is held back by the UK's economic policies.

I want to stop for a minute to think about one of the issues in the Tory amendment—the one about shooting rates and removal of the dispensation to pay them. If that is the height—about £4 million a year—of the Tories' ambition for rural policy, I think that we are seeing them raising a white flag. The late Dick Balharry, the conservationist, said that traditional shooting estates embody

“the selfish greed of a Victorian era”,

and that most private landowners in Scotland are “outdated and ludicrous”—as are the arguments of Murdo Fraser. Perhaps we should consider how we could give a bonus to estates that meet the targets for culling deer and charge those that do not meet those targets much higher rates than they pay at present.

There is much to be said in the debate, but my constituents and those across Scotland are being wounded in our energy policies by the uncertainties of investment by the UK Government. The SNP's programme for government shows the way ahead.

15:16

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Scottish Labour recognises the need for growth in Scotland. Jackie Baillie's amendment

“recognises that the Scottish Government must ensure that the benefits of economic growth improve the lives of working people and address increasing inequalities”.

In my brief, I am committed to facing the future, and I want to step back and take this opportunity to discuss less conventional measurement opportunities for our economy. I would like to highlight the framework for measuring economic activity, and promote alternative measurements.

As one of the members contributing to the cabinet secretary's national performance framework discussion, I am clear that the significance of the framework, and of the Scottish Government being measured against those criteria, is fundamental. To know Scotland's success, we need to ensure prosperity beyond economic terms, and also in social and environmental terms. I am certain that factors such as quality and security of employment, mental and physical health, time with family and friends, and access to nature, to name but some, are equally important in understanding the prosperity and progress of our nation. In his closing remarks, will the cabinet secretary update the chamber on the scope, range and timescale of the review for the national performance framework?

Although the GDP framework has limitations of specificity, innovative methods can far better reflect quality of life and sustainability, as well as unpaid and public services and negative externalities. As politicians, surely we should strongly consider adapting to a system of measurement that better explores our modern economy. Deeper understanding means better quality decision making, leading on to public policy. I recognise the analysis by Professor Stiglitz and I will look carefully at the four points that the cabinet secretary has raised today. We must seize the opportunities that the future holds and prepare for it today.

The Government owes our communities a just transition, and central to that is the development of transferable skills. The recent announcement of the closure of the Longannet plant was a devastating blow to local communities and those who are impacted by the knock-on and supply-chain effects. As we shift to a low-carbon economy, there must be measures ready and in place for those who are affected in that way. I mentioned earlier the importance of quality and security of employment, so I was disappointed to learn that no real strategy appears to have been outlined by the Scottish Government for a just transition.

A low-carbon economy is an inclusive economy, and although the shift is positive, provisions must be made for workers and communities incrementally to reach where we have to go due to the climate change imperative.

A true example of a forward-thinking, prospect-creating system is the circular economy. A circular economy, for those members who are not up to

speed on the topic—I was not, a year ago—is one whereby waste is practically eliminated by reusing, repairing and remanufacturing materials and energy. That could strengthen Scotland's economy through advancements in education, employment and the environment. I am encouraged by the Scottish Government's consultation on the circular economy, and the acknowledgement of the breadth of opportunities that it could make available to Scottish industries and communities. I would ask all MSPs, even those who are not in the chamber at the moment, to highlight the consultation to their constituents.

It is clear that co-operative models will make a far more significant contribution to Scotland's economic development—urban and rural—in all sectors, from finance to energy, but is Co-operative Development Scotland adequately supported by the Scottish Government to mainstream that inclusive economic way of working?

On the rural economy, I must address the sector-wide crisis that is hitting our farmers. Yesterday, 5,000 farmers joined a demonstration in Brussels. I am convinced that the dairy action plan is not moving as speedily as farmers deserve, as they struggle with desperately low prices, market volatility and poor weather conditions. We must support the farming industry. I urge the Scottish Government to take quick action on the new common agricultural policy delivery arrangements, as well as to develop long-term plans for investment and research to best help our farmers.

Many rural communities in my South Scotland region and beyond are economically marginalised. I am confident that the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, as part of the programme for government, holds significant opportunity for change and offers rural communities empowered and democratic input into their own economic future. The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has received a vast number of submissions on the bill, which clearly demonstrates the significance of the potential changes. The cabinet secretary's motion looks to achieve

“inclusive growth and opportunities for all”,

and I would encourage the Government to retain that ethos in the heart of the bill.

This week has seen the opening of the new Borders rail line. I congratulate the Campaign for Borders Rail, as well as the Government and other parties, on that success. The development will benefit the Borders wage economy, tourism and connectivity for residents, while reducing carbon emissions. It is a huge boost for my region. I agree with the Campaign for Borders Rail—the matter

was raised with the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities during topical questions—that we should consider carefully the extension of the line to Carlisle.

On sustainable transport, combined with real broadband access, we still have a long way to go. The Scottish Government needs to get a better handle on both issues. Scottish Labour demands more for rural Scotland. I support Jackie Baillie's amendment.

15:23

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I am very pleased to speak in the debate. Continuous growth over the past three years, despite challenging conditions, not only highlights our economy's resilience but underlines and embeds trends in the labour market, such as record employment levels and signs that wages are increasing.

Like many across civic Scotland, I welcome the programme for government that was set out last week by the First Minister. It shows a Government that is not only working hard to create a strong and competitive economy underpinned by social justice, but is bold in its ambition to make Scotland the best place in the UK to do business through a focus on skills, productivity, innovation and, crucially, fair work.

I will focus on the last of those issues. As well as equal access to skilled employment, people's experience of work must be fair, and opportunity, fulfilment, security and respect must be promoted. The importance that is placed on that by the Scottish Government is demonstrated by the creation of a cabinet-level post with responsibility for its promotion. As part of that, the fair work convention was established in April this year. The convention will be a focal point to develop, promote and sustain a fair work framework for Scotland.

Largely due to the efforts of the Poverty Alliance and the Living Wage Foundation, the Scottish Government target to achieve 150 living-wage accredited employers by the end of 2015 has been met eight months ahead of schedule. The revised target of 500 Scots-based living-wage accredited employers by the end of March 2016 is well on the way to being achieved; the Scottish Government itself became accredited in June.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Joan McAlpine: No thanks. I do not have much time.

The UK Government recently announced an enhancement to the national minimum wage, and it is more important than ever that the Scottish

Government continue to champion a true living wage, the level of which is calculated according to the basic cost of living, with account taken of the income that households receive via the welfare system. The new national minimum wage that the chancellor announced is restricted to over-25s and is coupled with significant reductions to working-age benefits.

The programme for government outlines Scotland's considerable track record as a world leader in social enterprise and the social economy. That is being modest. The results of Scotland's first-ever survey of the shape, size and impact of social enterprise reveal that business is burgeoning: there are more than 5,200 firms, which provide 112,000 jobs and have assets of some £3.86 billion. That truly is world leading—not to mention that the social enterprise sector contributes £1.15 billion to the economy, as well as playing a pivotal role in tackling social issues. The gross value added figure is roughly £1.7 billion.

The research, which was commissioned by a wide range of public and third-sector groups, including the Scottish Government, Social Enterprise Scotland and Glasgow Caledonian University, confirms that Scotland is a trailblazer when it comes to nurturing social enterprise and validates the Scottish Government's decision to protect and work alongside the social enterprise sector—a sector that the UK government has yet to grasp.

There is a good spread of social enterprises across urban and rural Scotland. I always take the opportunity to highlight a success story in my constituency. The Usual Place community cafe in Dumfries was set up by two fantastic and innovative women, Linda Whitelaw and Heather Hall, who saw a gap in the market in the training of young people who have additional support needs. The cafe will work with the local college to train such youngsters for a career in the hospitality industry.

Such an approach is indicative of the progressive nature of social enterprises, many of which work with the people who are furthest away from the labour market. Social enterprises demonstrate a fairer and more inclusive way of doing business. On gender equality, not only do 60 per cent of social enterprises have a woman as their most senior employee but the sector is achieving a 50:50 board membership target. A notable 68 per cent of social enterprises pay at least the recognised living wage.

It is clear that the social enterprise sector is playing an increasingly important part in Scotland's economy. Given its inclusive business practices, the sector will be important in the development of the fair work agenda. I am pleased

that the Scottish Government is investing £5.4 million in social enterprise development and will strengthen the support that is available, as part of the 10-year social enterprise strategy, which will be published next year. I very much look forward to the strategy's publication. I am optimistic that, given the Government's commitment, the sector will go from strength to strength and contribute to the overall success of the Scottish economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for your brevity.

15:28

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): In this week, of all weeks—the offshore Europe 2015 conference and exhibition starts today in Aberdeen—rather than talking down the oil industry we should be considering what it needs, given its importance to the economies of not just Aberdeen but Scotland and the UK.

In an energy supplement the other day in the *Press and Journal*, Andy Samuel, the chief executive of the Oil and Gas Authority, which is the new regulator, said:

“the risk”

that is involved in

“low or negative profitability in producing fields could lead to the permanent decommissioning of critical infrastructure, with the potential to shut down whole areas of the UKCS,—

that is, the UK continental shelf—

“stranding valuable resources.”

That is a very in-oil way of saying that if price falls, oil rigs will stop producing and infrastructure, pipelines and processing facilities across Scotland and the UK will be under severe pressure, with some rigs potentially closing.

Andy Samuel went on to describe in a diagram the facilities—many of which are by definition in Scotland, although some are down on the east coast of England—that face that kind of pressure. One such facility is Sullom Voe oil and gas terminal, which has been at the centre of the North Sea industry for longer than I have been involved in many aspects of public life—indeed, it dates back to when I was growing up in Shetland. Given that oil prices—as some members have mentioned—are for the first time consistently running below \$50 a barrel, there can be no doubt that the dangers are real and significant. The question is what needs to be done to tackle them.

The solution is not, as some keep saying, a matter of tax. If the companies were making money, they would be paying tax, but at present—as far as I am aware—none of the oil industry is making any money. As Ian Wood said just the

other day, the best way that the UK Government can assist at this time is with bigger capital allowances that fluctuate according to the price of oil. He has argued that the OGA, the UK Government and the industry must recognise that a mechanism that fluctuates does, while it is to some degree imprecise, at least allow for the investment that must take place—as members have described today—to continue rather than stalling absolutely as is happening right now.

The Maersk Oil development that was announced last week came about because of the tax regime that was introduced in the previous budget, but that was then. We are where we are today, and oil prices are lower than they were at that time. Sir Ian Wood's proposal for some kind of graduated capital tax allowance to assist where price is low should be supported by the Scottish Government, and introduced by the UK Government at the first possible opportunity in the autumn statement this year. Otherwise, I fear strongly for much of the infrastructure, and therefore for many of the jobs in many different parts of Scotland, not least at the Sullom Voe terminal in Shetland.

Just yesterday, Nexen, which is owned by the Chinese state oil company, announced that it will continue with decommissioning the Ettrick and Blackbird gas fields in the upper Moray Firth. It is as simple as this: if the trend continues and more fields are decommissioned, which appears to be happening remorselessly at present, the price per barrel produced and the overall productivity will fall on fewer fields and therefore on the infrastructure that is left. That brings into question the productivity and the cost basis for those facilities, and therefore their continued existence in their current form.

We are at a sharp moment now in this area. The protestations by Andy Samuel and the OGA to the industry—and therefore to the Government and to others who can play a role—to take the situation incredibly seriously are right, and that must now happen.

There are two other aspects of the oil industry that are worthy of mention. The first, which other members have mentioned, is decommissioning. The issue is that, if tax relief—which has become available through Government—is going to be applied to decommissioning, the jobs that go with the decommissioning work must to a great extent be created either in Scotland or throughout the UK. That is happening at present in one field that I know of, but it is not happening overall.

The decommissioning project as a whole is going to Norway, and there will be no UK jobs created in Aberdeen or anywhere else. That is wrong, given that UK taxpayers' money is being used. If Conservative colleagues in the chamber

have any influence with their UK counterparts, they should press very hard for the system to be made much tighter indeed.

My final point—it was mentioned by the Deputy First Minister; Jackie Baillie also spoke about engineers—is that the developing Scotland's young workforce programme is one of the best things that has come from Government in recent times. It is a very important initiative, and I was honoured that Roseanna Cunningham came to Shetland in the summer to talk about it with local businesses and with young engineers at the NAFC marine centre in Scalloway.

It is about the way in which we excite young people—boys and girls—and take them out of the academic route that we still push too hard in our schools, enabling them to recognise that the vocational route into work is every bit as valuable as the academic route. We certainly need more engineers, as Jackie Baillie said; I note in passing that we also need more construction workers and care workers, certainly in my part of the world. In the context of the oil and gas industry, we need some more investment in young engineers, and giving them a future means talking up the industry rather than the reverse.

15:34

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome today's debate.

Before I get into the meat of my speech, I will address the commentary that appeared this weekend in the business news section of the *Sunday Herald*, which reflected on the briefing paper that was produced by the Scottish Parliament information centre's financial scrutiny unit. The briefing paper was described by the article as

"the first in-depth analysis of Scotland's Economic Strategy, published by the Government in March."

The SPICe paper criticises the Government's lack of economic targets and states:

"Given the lack of SMART targets, and with many targets to be developed at a later date, it is not possible to assess whether the National Performance Framework will be able to measure the success of the new strategy."

The *Sunday Herald* article calls on such a luminary as Professor Ronald MacDonald, the professor of macroeconomics at the University of Glasgow, and quotes him as saying that

"an economic strategy that omitted measurable targets was 'really quite bizarre. If you don't have targets, it doesn't take you anywhere.'"

What does not take us anywhere in the economy, as in other areas of public policy, is an obsession—such as we see even in the Labour Party's amendment—with targets that are right

only at any one moment in time. Had the SPICE report and Ronald MacDonald focused on outcomes and continuous improvement measurements, they might have borne some credibility, and they might have acknowledged the substantial economic growth that we have seen under this Government. However, they did not, and to those who have experience in the real economy that lack of credibility adds nothing to our pursuit of growth in the real economy. Reductions in inequality, increased economic growth and improved productivity will reflect real outcomes.

I can invoke no greater advocate of those laudable outcomes than Jackie Baillie. In a Labour Party debate, she said:

“things have improved. I am thankful that the economy is growing. Employment is increasing and confidence is starting to improve.”—[*Official Report*, 8 January 2015; c 56.]

She was right.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Chic Brodie: No, I am sorry but I cannot take an intervention just now.

The Bank of Scotland purchasing managers index report of three weeks ago stated:

“Scottish private sector companies reported further growth of output and new orders at the start of the third quarter.”

It also noted that the combined manufacturing and services index was at 52.2—up from 51.2 since June, and a marked rise since last December. Against a furiously challenging international market and an equally challenging and fluctuating currency market, the overall picture of input and output prices and of backlog and employment, particularly in manufacturing, indicates underlying strong resilience in the Scottish economy.

What cannot be challenged is the outcome of the continued expansion of Scotland's economy since the early 2000s. The “Quarterly National Accounts Scotland” report showed that the nominal cash value of Scottish GDP in the onshore economy has increased from around £74 billion in 1998 and that, by 2014, even after the global recession of 2008-09, it was estimated to be £140 billion. GDP has now returned to its pre-recession level. Not only that, but by the start of 2015, we had 11 consecutive quarterly expansions in the economy. The productivity rate has also increased from 92.7 per cent of the UK level in 2007 to 97.7 per cent in 2013. Perhaps the Conservatives will accept, when they cite those figures, that there is a major London effect in the UK numbers. Furthermore, exports have grown by 40 per cent since 2007, and gross value added in the services sector alone amounted to £53 billion in 2013. I could go on.

The critical small and medium-sized enterprise sector still needs some promotion and support but it has benefited from the removal or reduction of taxation through the small business bonus scheme. This year alone, some 96,000 premises will benefit from that. In addition, the new £40 million SME holding fund will offer microcredit, equity opportunities and loan facilities to accelerate SME growth. From recent personal engagement with foreign investors who have substantial funds available, running into hundreds of millions of pounds, for the onshore fish processing industry, renewables or social housing—the information has all been passed to the agencies—I know that the attraction of Scotland is in the skills of its people and its willingness to encourage inward investors and grow an outward-looking economy. Those things cannot be underestimated.

However, that approach is being achieved not through spurious target setting, but by establishing outcomes that are based on continuous improvement, by developing the skills of our people, by investing in productive infrastructure, by eliminating inequality of treatment—whether in employment conditions or remuneration—by creating more democracy in the workplace and by establishing fast and clear communication mechanisms such as broadband. All those measures and more will underpin the growth of key sectors of focus such as food and drink, tourism and manufacturing.

We continue to have economic growth that is predicated on continuous improvement in outcomes. The measurement that we need to make is whether we are performing better than we were last year, and the key indicators suggest that we are improving year on year. The current indications underpin that.

15:40

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): There is no doubt that we are now seeing growth and recovery in the Scottish economy, but we must put the welcome signs of progress that are referenced in the Government's motion into context.

As my colleague Jackie Baillie mentioned, yesterday the Federation of Small Businesses revealed that confidence in the Scottish economy among its members is faltering. A fall in business revenues and profits has, as the FSB put it, served as a

“timely reminder that a sustained recovery is far from guaranteed.”

Meanwhile, forecasts for manufacturing growth across the UK have been downgraded. The manufacturers' organisation EEF warned that the

economy faces a “rollercoaster of risks”, and it is right. Many businesses and investors are still reeling from last month’s volatility of the Asian markets and fears of a slow-down in China, and even now uncertainty remains over the future of Greece in the eurozone.

Much like the Scottish Government, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been trumpeting his successes but he, too, would do well to put the UK’s economic performance into context. We all know about the importance of boosting productivity to people’s wages and conditions, yet productivity has not returned to pre-recession levels and the Office for Budget Responsibility has reduced its forecasts for productivity growth for the rest of the decade. The Scottish Government must also be concerned about stagnant productivity growth and what that means for its productivity target of ranking in the top quartile of key trading partners in the OECD by 2017.

I am not alone in saying that the Government must be far more explicit about how the strategies and policies that it is pursuing link to its economic objectives. Indeed, we as a Parliament must do more to interrogate the link between the Government’s economic strategy and productivity growth, but today I want to focus on local economies, Scotland’s towns and town centres, their place in our national economy and how we can support enterprise and regeneration in our communities.

Just as city centres can drive growth in city regions, town centres can contribute to growth in our towns. We do not want to lose the economies of scale that make our cities so important, but we do want to maximise the contribution of our towns and help local economies to reach their potential.

Scottish Labour welcomed the publication of the Government’s town centre action plan, which was not just a response to the Fraser review of town centres but a clear, concise set of proposals to help communities to realise the potential of their town centre. Central to the action plan was the town centre first principle, which involves prioritising investment in town centres in support of healthy, vibrant local economies. For example, when Falkirk Council was considering where to build its new head office, it decided to remain in the town centre, because that is where the transport hubs and infrastructure are, and that is where the footfall that large employers generate makes the biggest difference on the high street. That is the town centre first principle in practice.

However, it is unclear how that principle applies to the roll-out of superfast broadband and the digital towns agenda. The action plan makes specific reference to a future-proofed fibre network in our towns, but it seems that we are connecting up entire neighbourhoods without identifying

where the business needs for superfast broadband are greatest. I encourage the Government to look into that matter urgently.

I also want to raise the issue of business rates and the need for more flexibility in the system. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 gave councils the power to introduce local, targeted rates relief. Taken together with the Fraser review’s recommendation that the business rates incentivisation scheme should be expanded, those changes could add a new dimension to economic regeneration in Scotland and promote genuine localism.

The Government has already introduced two forms of rates relief, specifically mentioned in the town centre action plan, to help businesses into vacant units. The new start scheme provides relief on vacant new builds, and the fresh start scheme applies to businesses that take on existing vacant properties. I had to use a freedom of information request to learn that, of Scotland’s 32 councils, only six had granted an application under the new start scheme; there were more applications under the fresh start scheme, but they tended to be concentrated in specific local authority areas. Clearly, that is not what the Government hoped for when the new relief schemes were introduced. As councils gain new powers to direct discretionary reliefs of their own, we need to have a better understanding of why some relief schemes work while others fail, and we absolutely need to do something about the cumbersome, time-consuming, costly appeals process that is clogging up local valuation boards and holding back small businesses.

The progress that we have seen in recent months is welcome but it is fragile and there are significant challenges ahead, with uncertainties in the global economy, the productivity gap and the uneven recovery. It falls to all of us in the Parliament to do what we can to help our workers and businesses build a stronger economy on firmer foundations: prosperity and opportunity, not just for some but for all.

15:46

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I support the motion in John Swinney’s name and I welcome the debate. It is clear that the SNP Government has a strong economic track record and that it is working hard to create a stable and balanced economy that is outward looking and supported by huge levels of investment. Scottish GDP is above pre-recession levels and the economic outlook is the strongest that it has been for many years.

Scotland’s economy has emerged strongly from the global recession and we now have lower

unemployment and higher employment levels than the UK average. The Scottish Government fundamentally believes that decisions that affect Scotland should be made by the people of Scotland who live and work here. Even though independence is our goal for the country, we will do what we can within the current constitutional arrangements to achieve the best outcome for the people of Scotland. I am sure that any SNP-led Scottish Government will use any additional powers that come to the Scottish Parliament to make the best of the situation.

We have already achieved much in delivering a positive vision for Scotland through, for example, the commitment to fair work and the living wage; mitigating the worst effects of UK Government welfare cuts; focusing our efforts on tackling poverty; improving employment opportunities for women and young people; and expanding the provision of better housing.

A more inclusive economy is critical to boosting productivity. It underpins all our actions and activities, such as those on the living wage and addressing the educational attainment gap. The UK Government's austerity policies caused the recession to be longer and deeper than necessary. As a result, many individuals and companies in Scotland have suffered greater hardship than they should have. However, with the powers that are available to us, the Scottish Government has worked hard to ease the impacts of recession and austerity on the country.

As we know, Scotland has seen 11 consecutive quarters of growth—the longest such period since 2001—and output is now above pre-recession levels, while record numbers of people are in employment. That is in large part due to the hard work, talent and entrepreneurial spirit that we see in businesses across Scotland. I am sure that all members want Scotland to be the most competitive of all the nations of the UK in which to do business and invest.

I am sure that all members will welcome the introduction of the new £40 million fund to provide investment to small and medium-sized enterprises. Marine tourism, which members will have heard me talk about more than once in the past, is a growing part of our economy. Many small businesses participate and lead in that sector. With the marine tourism strategy, which was published earlier this year, and the ambitious targets to grow the sector, I hope that many of the sector's small businesses will find that fund to be an opportunity to grow their business and create more training opportunities and more jobs.

Boosting productivity through the new manufacturing action plan is another successful element from the Scottish Government. Its aim is to develop leadership and skills and to stimulate

innovation and investment in Scottish manufacturing. The Government will continue to support the creation of skilled and well-paid job opportunities, particularly for young people, to ensure that everyone shares the benefits of economic success.

The Scottish Government's plans continue. They include investing in the skills base; expanding opportunities for young people; preparing people for work through developing the young workforce; the youth employment strategy; and continuing to support the hugely successful modern apprenticeship programme. The target of 25,000 apprenticeships each year has been exceeded, and the target will be increased to 30,000 by 2020.

The plans include expanding coverage of the Scottish business pledge—almost 100 companies have already signed up to that and have committed to improving productivity, innovation and fair work—and continuing to encourage employers in all sectors to embrace the value of fair work by paying the living wage and promoting an engaged, motivated and well-rewarded workforce. Only a few weeks ago, in the summer recess, I visited Kilpatrick Blane Services, which is a small business that is based in Inverkip. It deals with the construction sector and was recently accredited as a living-wage employer.

My colleague Joan McAlpine touched on gender stereotypes and working to support more women into the workplace across all sectors.

Last week, we heard the fabulous news about Ferguson Marine Engineering being the preferred bidder for the two new ferries for Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd and about the £97 million. That announcement is brilliant news for Inverclyde and the west of Scotland and is a vote of confidence in the area. I hope that, when more employment is created, many more local individuals will get the opportunity to work in the yard and will contribute to the building of those ships and to Ferguson's success.

The wider economic context certainly presents opportunities for Inverclyde to develop a thriving and competitive economy and for helping to improve sustainable local economies.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close, please.

Stuart McMillan: I could go on, Presiding Officer, but I know that I am short of time. I warmly welcome the cabinet secretary's motion.

15:52

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I notify members that something very unusual—if

not rare—occurred this afternoon: I agreed with Joan McAlpine.

Members: Oh!

Mary Scanlon: There we are. I agreed with only one small part of Joan McAlpine's speech. I do not often agree with her, but I think that she will find that not a single Conservative MSP would disagree with supporting social enterprise. Apart from the economic point of view, I am particularly attracted to social enterprise because it brings back into the world of work people with mental health issues and people who have drug and alcohol issues—we should not forget that the activity is not all about enterprise. I have been delighted by, for example, the Shetland Community Bike Project, the Shetland Soap Company and Rag Tag and Textile. I can see the cabinet secretary nodding; I am sure that he is familiar with that work. The point is about how social enterprise transforms people's lives. There we are. I thought that I would take up a minute of my speech to mention that, as that was such a rare occasion.

I ask the cabinet secretary to look again at what Highlands and Islands Enterprise is doing about investing in Lerwick, because I know that, when a £34 billion price tag was put on decommissioning a few years ago, it said that it was looking at investing there. Having listened to Tavish Scott, I am concerned that we are missing the opportunity and that the decommissioning work is going to Norway and elsewhere.

We are very positive about the recent growth in the Scottish economy, and predictions of further growth are welcome. We acknowledge that the encouraging figures undoubtedly reflect the UK Government's long-term plan for economic growth. With 174,000 more people in work in Scotland since the Conservatives came to power in 2010, there is an average of 100 more jobs every day in Scotland. More than 38,000 long-term unemployed Scots, who are often described as the hard to reach, have found a long-term job through the work programme and the two years of support that come along with it.

No one has mentioned the personal allowance. As we are looking at inequality, we must acknowledge that the personal allowance for paying tax has been raised to £10,600 and that next year it will go up to £11,000. There is no doubt that, in relative terms, that benefits the lower paid considerably more, and it has taken 261,000 Scots out of paying tax altogether.

Various speakers have mentioned boosting productivity, which is key to our nation's competitiveness, and have shown that Scotland suffers from a persistent productivity gap between it and the rest of the UK. There was not much last

week on the Government's economic strategy, but I listened to what the cabinet secretary said. I always think that the first part of addressing a problem is acknowledging that there is a problem, so I am taking it on trust that he will come forward with action to address that productivity gap.

The Scottish Government is now championing growth that it claimed could not happen under UK Government policies. As Murdo Fraser said, any proposals to foster a more competitive economy will receive our whole-hearted support.

I notice that the motion claims that the Government is investing in skills and raising attainment, but its decision to drastically cut the funding for further education and for science and technology courses seriously undermines that claim. I have consistently criticised the Government's record on further education. Almost 150,000 part-time college places have been lost and there are 74,000 fewer learners aged over 25. The idea that anyone who is over 25 is less in need of further education opportunities is a total misunderstanding of today's job market. To assume that part-time courses are all hobby courses is also a failure in understanding. There has been a fall of more than 9 per cent in the number of college staff and a 12 per cent cut in the college budget, which means that we are not equipping people of all ages with the skills that they need to compete in our economy.

I am not surprised that the business community is talking to John Swinney about skills. The 2014 teacher census showed that, in the STEM subjects, there are 383 fewer maths teachers; the number of biology, chemistry and physics teachers has been cut by more than 4 per cent; and the number of computing science teachers has been cut by more than 6 per cent. With the pass mark for higher maths at 34 per cent, there is no doubt that serious challenges are being faced. The Science Council has predicted that there will be more than 7 million jobs in science and technology across the UK, so unless we in Scotland change and provide people with the skills, we will be left behind.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should draw to a close.

Mary Scanlon: I am running out of time, so I will just mention Ian Wood's workforce commission, which we fully support.

Finally, some of us were at the Confederation of British Industry dinner last week and I do not mind repeating Sir Tom Hunter's advice to John Swinney, which was that the Government should get on with using the powers that it has and stop moaning about the powers that it does not have. That was good advice.

15:59

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): I open my remarks by saying loudly and clearly that the SNP Government has a strong record on the economy and that it is doing everything that it can to work hard to create a strong and competitive economy for Scotland. The strategy looks outward, is underpinned by the values of social justice and fairness and is supported by investment, examples of which can be seen in my region; I look forward to sharing those with members later in my speech.

It is important to highlight some key facts about where we are in Scotland. Our gross domestic product is above pre-recession levels and the economic outlook is the strongest that it has been for many years. That is because the Scottish Government is working to take forward our nation.

The Government is working hard to ensure that our economy is resilient and I am sure that it recognises that a pivotal aspect of ensuring that we can build a strong economy and a fairer society is our children and young people. They are often called the future, but I believe that they are the here and now. That is why, in the First Minister's programme for government, education is at the heart of our efforts, not only so that we have children and young people who have the best possible start in life—and the support that they need to grow and make a difference to life here in Scotland—but because, crucially, they will be essential in building the strong economy that we all want.

I will highlight an excellent example of how the Scottish Government is playing its part in supporting not only industries but our economy. Through support and recognition, it is enabling employment opportunities and development. BioCity, which is based in Newhouse and is just off the M8 motorway in my region, is a prime example of where the Scottish Government is offering its support to ensure the continued success and growth of ambitious life sciences businesses in Scotland.

I have visited BioCity, which encompasses 130,000 square feet of state-of-the-art laboratories with access to shared services, business support and investment. In its own words, it is

“a hot house for growing Life Science Talent”

in Scotland. I am therefore particularly delighted by the SNP Scottish Government's recent announcement that the BioCity site will be awarded enterprise status, which will continue to support and develop a site that is delivering opportunities not just for the local area but for Scotland as a whole. I thank ministers for that.

I also highlight the Government's support for the industry. I hope that members will welcome the announcement of an additional £1.84 million of funding through the city deal for a new medical technical facility called MediCity at the BioCity site in Newhouse.

Through that investment and through the recognition of BioCity as an enterprise site, the Scottish Government is putting its money where its mouth is and is investing in people. Its contribution will ensure investment and, I hope, deliver long-term employment opportunities for people in my area and across the country.

Under the SNP, Scotland has the most competitive business tax environment in the UK, with a package of reliefs that are worth £618 million in 2015-16. The Government is working hard to ensure a supportive business environment by retaining Scotland's enterprise bodies, in contrast to the actions of the UK Government, which abolished regional development agencies in 2012.

A pillar of our efforts that can be seen in communities across Scotland is the introduction of the small business bonus scheme. The scheme has removed or reduced taxation for more than 96,000 premises this year alone, as was mentioned; 96,000 is a huge number of businesses that are benefiting from actions by the Government. I am sure that the Government will continue to do more to protect small businesses, as they add great value to Scotland's economy and to our communities.

I highlight the fact that the Scottish Government has shown its commitment to creating a greener Scotland and growing a low-carbon economy. According to a Scottish Renewables report, there is already support in the renewables sector for more than 11,000 jobs here in Scotland, and we must continue to champion growth in that sector.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lyle: No—I do not have much time.

I highlight a recent planning decision that the Scottish ministers made in my region about a site that is close to BioCity. The decision has the potential not only to reduce carbon emissions through a modal shift from road to rail but—significantly and importantly, on even the most conservative of estimates—to contribute at least 1,000 extra transport jobs to the local economy. Forecasts for job creation are set at around 3,000 new jobs.

Not only does that truly deliver employment opportunities for local people—North Lanarkshire has an above-average level of unemployment and of youth unemployment—but it is an important

step in ensuring that people have access to jobs. In turn, that will create and contribute to economic growth.

I am nearing the end of my reflections, but I want to highlight some other incredible work. The food and drink industry is valued at £5.1 billion and, as was discussed a couple of weeks ago, we have the film production industry, which had a value of £45.2 million last year. We also have the enterprise areas and the living wage recognition scheme. The Government has done so much.

I conclude by highlighting again that the Government has a commitment to ensuring that we have a sustainable and growing economy that delivers on the opportunities for investment and development, and one which serves the people of Scotland and offers them opportunities to shape a better future for us all.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Before I call Mark Griffin, I remind back-bench members that speeches are now of five minutes.

16:05

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The key to continued progress in the Scottish economy is addressing the attainment gap and equipping those in the future workforce with the skills that they need to succeed in the global economy. We see report after report being published pointing to a shortage of STEM skills and the huge opportunities that there will be in those fields.

The most recent one, “Engineering UK 2015—The state of engineering”, which other members have touched on, highlighted that, by 2022, there will be an additional 150,000 engineering jobs in Scotland and that, if filled, those jobs have the potential to generate an additional £1.7 billion per year for the Scottish economy. Scottish engineers are world class and world renowned, and engineering makes a vital and valued contribution to the economy. Engineers will be at the forefront of developing solutions to the big global challenges of climate change, ageing populations and the supply of food, clean water and energy.

That all sounds good, but the report states that we are falling well short of the numbers of people with the right education and training who are needed to fill those highly skilled roles. Those are exactly the types of jobs that we should be giving our young people the skills to do. We need to aim for highly skilled and highly paid jobs, because we know that we cannot compete with emerging economies for low-paid and low-skill jobs.

A similar report that was published by the learned societies group, and which Mary Scanlon touched on, also makes stark reading. One of the key points in it is the expectation that, by 2030,

more than 7 million jobs in the UK will depend on science skills. Those STEM jobs are exactly the kind of jobs that we need. They are high-quality, highly skilled and highly paid jobs, for which emerging economies will struggle to compete with us.

However, here, where we have that competitive advantage, we are choosing to throw it away. By 2030, the four and five-year-olds who start primary school this summer will already be in work or possibly in the final years of study at university and about to enter the job market. However, pupils with the same academic ability and the same aptitude for science in England will have enjoyed more than ten years of state education with 80 per cent more per head spent on science in primary school and 27 per cent more per head spent on science in secondary school, if current spending levels continue. That is a massive head start in building the necessary skills to compete for those 7 million jobs in science.

Two issues need to be addressed to give young people, or adult learners who want to retrain, the skills that they need to compete for those engineering roles. Those issues fit within the four priorities that the Government set out in its paper “Scotland’s Economic Strategy”. Investment in education, skills and health needs to be focused on the areas with the biggest potential for growth, and inclusive growth cannot just be an aspiration. We have to direct funding towards supporting key STEM skills in our schools, colleges and universities, and the attainment gap must be addressed. In purely economic terms, the attainment gap is holding this country back, we are wasting the best natural resource that we have, failing the country and failing families from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We have debated those issues countless times. We have debated the shortfall in funding for science equipment in Scotland’s schools, where spending is lower than elsewhere, and the fact that 98 per cent of schools rely on external funding for practical science education. We have debated the reductions in the number of science technicians—the staff who maintain and repair the equipment that is actually left in schools. We have debated the reductions in computer science teachers and the fact that many high schools do not even have one. We have debated the reductions in teacher numbers and support staff. We have also debated the issues around educational inequality.

While the debates have been running, however, what has been done about the issues? The skill shortages for the high-quality science and engineering jobs of the future have not been addressed and the attainment gap stubbornly persists. Until those issues are tackled, we will

miss massive economic opportunities and any economic growth will fail a basic fairness test.

The Presiding Officer: I remind all members that, after they make a speech, they are supposed to be in the chamber for at least the two speeches that come after theirs and to be here for all of the closing speeches. I notice that Mr Lyle made his speech and left immediately.

16:10

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I found some of the speeches quite depressing in that we seem to be saying, in some areas, “We must do better” or “We don’t have.” We have a vibrant community in Scotland. We have demonstrated that Scotland is on the move in many industries. We have a can-do attitude. The cabinet secretary launched the can do innovation forum for the entrepreneurs of the future and has invested £3 million in the can do project.

I did not recognise some of what Jackie Baillie said about north-east areas such as my constituency. Yes, there has been a downturn in some of the employment, but that is not only due to the fall in the oil price. Many months ago—in fact, about two years ago—the industry decided that there was a need to look inwardly at how to be more cost efficient. The oil price is a factor in that efficiency and in the downturn, but the infrastructure programmes in the north-east—certainly, in my constituency—are creating jobs. The works on the A96 at the Inveramsay bridge are on time, on budget and will be completed next year.

Jackie Baillie: Will Dennis Robertson give way?

Dennis Robertson: Not at the moment.

The rail infrastructure project between Aberdeen and Inverness is certainly on track. We will have the Kintore station by 2019. There are jobs in that industry. We have a new campus at Alford, which is in my constituency. Again, jobs are being created in the construction industry.

In my constituency, the food and drink sector is also booming. With the increase in the sector, we are looking at increasing tourism in the Aberdeen to Deeside area. We look forward to the continuation and completion of the Aberdeen airport development.

There are positive things happening in the north-east. One of the most positive was the acknowledgement that the schools, North East Scotland College, the universities and business needed to work together because, in the past, they have worked in isolation. The universities and colleges turned out people with degrees who asked, “What do we do? Are we going into the oil

industry or into food and drink?” Now, they are thinking about what we need in the north-east and beyond.

I say to Mark Griffin that we can work together, are working together and are creating the people for the future. Engineers—and women in engineering—are the backbone of what has been happening in the north-east. We need to work together instead of in isolation. Instead of complaining and moaning about things not happening, we must think about what we can do, look at what is happening and think about how we develop people. The negativity of saying that it is not happening is putting our young people off. We need to encourage our young people back into the engineering industry, not put them off.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are extremely important in my constituency. John Swinney has recognised that SMEs are the backbone of continued development and growth in Scotland. Money has been put aside to try to ensure that SMEs have a way forward, because they have struggled to get money from the banks. A £40 million loan fund has been created. Creatively, through the Scottish business development bank, that money will be available for SMEs.

There is a good story to tell and we should be telling that good story. We should not be talking the Government down in terms of its work, its progress and its commitment to the people of Scotland. We are on the right track. We are developing. We are taking the country forward. We are creating a future for young people.

Last week, at a meeting of Oil and Gas UK, Gordon McInnes of Skills Development Scotland asked why I had not brought up the gender question. That was the first meeting of Oil and Gas UK that I had attended where I had not brought up the gender question. The reason why I did not do so was that I had heard of the magnificent progress that is happening in the oil and gas industry, with Nexen and the developments in the fields.

The Presiding Officer: You must close, Mr Robertson.

Dennis Robertson: Progress is happening. I will close with that.

16:16

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): One of the little quirks of parliamentary arithmetic in the current session is that, even on those occasions when my amendment is not selected for debate, it is still no less likely to be agreed at decision time than it would be if it were in the *Business Bulletin*.

The cabinet secretary talked about strong economic performance. If he read my amendment, he will not have been surprised to learn that Greens still regard his concept as being based on too narrow a metric of growth and of employment. He also talked about recovery, and he knows well that, since the economic crash and the financial crisis that precipitated the events of the past few years and finally made it impossible to ignore the inevitable failure of the neoliberal economic model, I have argued that economic recovery cannot simply mean the re-floating of a failed model; it has to mean addressing the underlying diseases.

I do not think that this debate should be an opportunity either to crow about a Government that can do no wrong or to condemn a Government for unmitigated failure. Neither would be an honest position. We should reflect carefully on the scale of the challenges that face us, if we are serious about having an economy that can meet the real needs of people, while still respecting the limits that the planet sets down for us on a non-negotiable basis.

On social impact, there is good stuff to talk about in the Scottish Government's agenda, including promoting the living wage and some aspects of the business pledge. Those demonstrate good intentions. In my view, both could go further, but let us recognise the scale of the problem. Even the Government's 2015 economic strategy document, at figure 1.3, shows the scale of increased economic inequality since 1997, with the wealthiest 17 per cent being the only people whose wealth has increased as a share of the overall national wealth—the top 1 or 2 per cent have got the lion's share of that. At present, there might be limits to what we can do to reverse that growth in inequality, but those limits will reduce in the next parliamentary session, when we will have more levers at our disposal. It is important that we use them.

On workplace exploitation, Grahame Smith of the Scottish Trades Union Congress noted the massive 19 per cent increase in the past year alone in the number of people who are employed on a zero-hours contract. He said:

"It really is time for politicians at all levels to quit trumpeting 'record employment levels' and actually start interrogating what is happening in the labour market."

As we all know far too well, there is evident inequality in health and education.

Murdo Fraser condemned the cash-grab instincts of the Scottish Government. I hope that he will equally condemn the cash-grab instincts of the high-street restaurant chains that are happily grabbing as much of their underpaid employees' tips as they can manage to get. That is the reality that far too many people face in the economy at present.

Mark McDonald: Does the member recall—because I do not—Murdo Fraser condemning the cash-grab instincts of the Conservatives when they hiked VAT to 20 per cent, which squeezed the margins for many small enterprises in our communities?

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that we will both search in vain for those quotes.

As for the ecological impact—the environmental impact—again, the Scottish Government is due points for good intentions. It certainly contrasts with the UK Government's attitude, for example on renewable electricity. However, there is still a gap between intention and action. We hear about progress on CO₂ emissions but the legislation requires us to recognise consumption-based emissions and that is where we are still failing.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: I am afraid that I do not have time.

We are running an economy that is not living within ecological limits. As the fact that earth overshoot day gets earlier and earlier every year shows, we are still living as though we have another planet to move to.

The Scottish Government's strategy talks about a fundamental transition of all sectors of the economy. I agree. I only wish that that was happening but I am afraid that the failure to recognise the need for divestment from the fossil fuel industry belies that.

On wider economic factors, other things are not being addressed: the level of debt, specifically private debt; the structure of ownership in our economy; and, fundamentally, an assumption that still holds that a deregulated free-market model is capable of meeting the needs of our society or the planet. It was never true and it will not be true.

16:21

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Whenever Jackie Baillie lodges an amendment to a Government motion it is interesting to look at what she wants to delete. The first thing that she wants to delete is that we are in the

"longest period of ... economic growth".

Obviously, the Labour Party does not want to celebrate that. I diverge dramatically from Jackie Baillie's position in that regard. However, I agree with her that it is important that we look at educational inequality. It is a proper moral and practical thing for us to invest in people who are not performing so well and who have unrealised potential. Educating people who need additional help will create additional jobs—that is good. It will

bring those people to the job market and make them more effective contributors to our economy and society. That is good, too. What it will not do in the short term is improve productivity in our economy. However, it is something that we most certainly should do.

We have to think about what kind of jobs there will be in the future and how our economy, and employment in it, will look—not just this year, next year or in five years, but in 20 years.

A range of issues have not yet come up in the debate. There are inhibitors in the way that public policy works that will, if they are allowed to continue unchecked, make things more difficult. For example, many businesses in my part of Scotland find it difficult to get deliveries via parcel services and so on because there is no adequate universal service provision. I heard of someone who could not get something delivered by Amazon to Aberdeen. The material concerned was potentially flammable and Amazon said that it would have to cross water to get to Aberdeen. Delivery services can inhibit receipt of goods and services in many areas of Scotland. It is a significant issue. In the opposite direction, companies' being unable to have their goods collected from their premises inhibits economic growth and development.

We might think about some good and underexploited issues. I have a Betamax tape. It is only 25 years old and I can no longer watch it, but I have a piece of family paperwork from more than 200 years ago that I can read. The National Library of Scotland is taking a leading role in protecting the records of our country from obsolescence through technological change. It is developing ways in which electronic databases can be migrated over time. Paper has historically looked after itself, but in the modern world, with our storage of information being largely electronic, there is a huge risk that we will lose lots of that information. The Government should be encouraged to support the National Library of Scotland. That work will create a specialist skill in Scotland that will be of great benefit all over the country and all over the world, and will create commercial opportunities.

We have to improve delivery of electronic services to everyone in our country. We have to come up with technological solutions and investment to support the 5 per cent of us, in which I include myself—and I speak with a heartfelt plea—who are on exchange-only lines that cannot be connected to fibre optic cable. I see that Alex Johnstone is in similar difficulty.

Yesterday I had lunch at Hergés on the Loch in Tweedbank, for which I say thank you to Borders rail. I now want to move to our building the case for Buchan rail, because Fraserburgh, with a

population of 15,000, is 37 miles from the nearest railway station, and Peterhead, with a population of 19,000, is 32 miles from the nearest railway station. That is the next big rail project: I hope that the Government looks at it in early course.

16:26

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): As ever in economy debates, members from all round the chamber trade statistics in order to try to back up their cases, which is understandable. I point out to Chic Brodie that we need to look at the data in order to monitor how the economy is growing—or not growing, as the case may be.

However, I also think that it is interesting to reflect on the conversations that we have locally in our constituencies. Murdo Fraser told us that he was speaking to a gamekeeper yesterday. Unfortunately, there are no gamekeepers in Cambuslang and Rutherglen—[*Interruption.*] That is maybe an economic opportunity. What strikes me, particularly in speaking to young people who are leaving school, college or university is that in some of them there is an element of frustration that the jobs that they get are low quality, are not well paid and are not very fulfilling. At the same time, among some businesses there is frustration that they are not able to recruit people who are sufficiently skilled to fill the roles in order that they can exploit the economic opportunities that they are looking for so that they can make the best of their businesses. Those kinds of conversations play into the points that some members have made about the skills shortage. The point has been well made that we need 150,000 engineers by 2022. We need to do significantly more to get more women engineers and to promote women who are in such positions.

On information technology, there has been a real growth in the app economy. I am sure that 10 years ago members would not have known what an app was—I certainly would not—but nowadays everybody is into adding apps to their phones. By 2018, across Europe there will be 5.8 million jobs in that economy—an increase of four times over recent years. That is a real opportunity to grasp in Scotland, but there needs to be some pace and urgency to what we are doing.

Teacher numbers are falling. Some members gave examples around maths and physics and the numbers who are studying and passing exams in engineering. We need to look at what is happening in the classrooms and what are the requirements for college and university courses if we are to fill the skills shortage that there is just now and meet the potential gap by 2022. There is a real job to do there.

I also want to mention the living wage. I am not going to re-run last year's debate, but I would like the Scottish Government to demonstrate—as I asked then—what it is doing to ensure that the £10 billion that it spends on procurement promotes payment of the living wage in contracts that it influences.

Mark McDonald quoted Brian Wilson and said that it was unusual for the SNP to agree with him. I actually agreed with Mark McDonald, and I do not think that I have ever said that before, but he made some good points about payments and the living wage in the private sector.

There is a new McDonald's restaurant opening soon in Rutherglen, which will create 65 jobs. I welcome that development in the Rutherglen constituency, but I want to see McDonald's in Rutherglen paying the living wage. That will make a difference not only to the 65 people who will work there, but to McDonald's itself, because it will ensure that people are motivated to provide a good-quality service. It will also ensure that people are being decently paid and are able to spend well in the local area, which will promote the Rutherglen economy, so I urge McDonald's to listen closely to that plea.

In summing up, I urge the Scottish Government to listen to the advice on the ground, to look to the future opportunities, to promote fairness and to promote people in the economy, because that can make a real difference.

16:31

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I back up at a personal level what Dennis Robertson was saying. My granddaughter starts university next Monday; she is going into earth sciences and I know that she is not alone, so it is good to see that women are following that career path. Knowing Abigail as I do, I am sure that she will be a great example to everybody who follows in her footsteps.

We have heard both sides of the economic debate today. We have heard, "It was the Tories that did it," courtesy of Murdo Fraser, and "You're rubbish; we'd be better," courtesy of Jackie Baillie and many other Labour members, but the cabinet secretary and others have highlighted the benefits of the hard-working policies that have been implemented by the Scottish Government, so I do not feel that I need to go over that. However, I would like to highlight a few examples from my constituency of how small businesses, organisations and people have grabbed the opportunities that have been offered to them to grow their businesses and to improve their lives and therefore to improve the economy of the country.

We have seen a welcome increase, as has been mentioned, in the number of registered businesses in Scotland, which was at a record high of 166,000 in 2014. There has been a national increase of 10 per cent since we came into office in 2007.

There are two examples of new businesses in my constituency. Next door to me—unfortunately, as I am trying to lose weight—is a company called Bakey Cakey. Guess what it does. It is run by a woman who was a fairly high-ranking civil servant who decided that she wanted to be self-employed. She was working in Westminster, but she came back to make her home in Scotland again and took the opportunity to build that business. I would love to say that she is rolling in dough, but I cannot say that for a certainty. I apologise. The opportunity to make that joke was there, and I had to take it. The business seems to be a success and the place is busy, which is great. She is a great neighbour to have.

The other example is the Dandelion Cafe, which was started by two women who, again, decided to take the opportunity that the economic climate in Scotland had given them to take over a derelict tennis pavilion in a lovely local park, Newlands park, and create a small cafe. I opened the Newlands fête on Saturday, and I have to say that the queues were so long that I could hardly get into the cafe. It was encouraging to see that success. Not only have those women taken advantage of the opportunities that are available to them, but they also assist in providing a vital link in the supply chain of small, independent businesses in Glasgow and the surrounding areas.

For many reasons, not the least of which is the economic wellbeing of the country, education is at the heart of everything that the Government does. It is vital that there is flexibility in the system to reach those whom traditional methods fail to engage sufficiently. Therefore, I am delighted with Newlands Junior College's work with pupils who find mainstream education challenging and unresponsive to their emotional needs. The courses that it provides dovetail the academic component, in which the focus is on English, maths, the sciences and IT, with vocational training in areas including engineering and music technology. That mix is also tied up with motivational coaching including Duke of Edinburgh award training.

The work that the junior college has done has been great. Everyone who finishes the course is guaranteed an apprenticeship or a place in college. The flexible approach, which tailors education to the pupils' emotional needs, will help to bridge the attainment gap. Other policies, including curriculum for excellence, will raise attainment and provide children with the flexibility

that they require. We should congratulate Jim McColl for his foresight and determination in establishing that new centre of learning.

The role of housing associations as social enterprises is vital. For example, Cassiltoun Housing Association in Castlemilk, which is just one of the housing associations in my constituency, is doing great things on employment and making sure that its area is a better place to live in. Across its Cassiltoun group, from the community woodlands project through to the nursery and housing associations, the focus is on being a thriving social enterprise and providing unemployed graduates with hands-on experience across a range of internships. It has received money from the community fund, which it has used to provide paid positions for three people for six months. Cassiltoun's record is impressive: 80 per cent of the volunteers and interns have found employment after their work experience. Therefore, I am pleased that this Government is encouraging and nourishing the power of community-minded social and affordable housing landlords and not selling its stock from under their feet, as is proposed by Westminster.

Our country faces many challenges, but when I look at the falling unemployment figures in Cathcart and the growth of businesses and the new exciting education opportunities in my constituency, I appreciate the positive changes that the Government and its local partners have made. However, just as important, I look forward to—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your time has ended.

16:36

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): We have had the usual array of contributions to a debate on the economy, with the SNP members once again blaming everything on the UK Government. However, we have had a first today: an argument that I had not heard before. That argument was uttered by back-bench MSP Stuart McMillan, who blamed the 2008-09 recession on the austerity policies of the Conservative Government of 2010. He may well have been told that in his briefing, but even the most hardened nationalist would struggle to blame the 2008-09 recession on policies from 2010. Perhaps we will hear the answer from him.

Stuart McMillan: I am sure that, if Gavin Brown looks at the *Official Report* tomorrow, he will be able to quote me correctly. I did not just make that particular point; I made other points after it, too.

Gavin Brown: Stuart McMillan did not deny saying that the austerity policies caused the recession but, of course, I will check the *Official*

Report this afternoon and, indeed, tomorrow morning.

We agree with the first part of the Government motion, which is perfectly sensible. Thereafter we do not agree, because it asks us to endorse the Government's economic strategy and support its programme for government.

Last week, I was interested to hear what was going to be in the programme. The First Minister, with the usual modesty of the Scottish Government, described the programme as

"a vision for the coming decade."

She was quite happy to say that she was

"setting out a bold ambition—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2015; c 13.]

Therefore, I was interested to hear what the First Minister said and, indeed, to read the document. I have to say that she was somewhat overselling the case. There was the usual padding and rehashing and reheating of policies. Indeed, some policies were being reannounced for the fifth, sixth or even seventh time.

The programme for government lacked genuine meat. It lacked new policy measures that could underpin the ambitions that we all have for Scotland. There was little in there. Let me explain that a little. I read through the programme line by line. We heard that there will be a new infrastructure plan, a manufacturing plan in the autumn, a social enterprise strategy next year, a cyber resilience strategy in November, a refresh of the oil and gas strategy at some point, and a trade and investment strategy later this year. The list goes on. The Government's strategy appears to be filled with the idea that our strategy should be to have more strategies. That does not take us anywhere.

The reason why I am so critical is that when the Government announced its programme for government 12 months ago, on the appointment of the new First Minister, it said almost exactly the same thing: "We're going to have all these strategies." The Government repeated that when it announced its economic strategy and it repeated it last week. Saying that there will be a plethora of strategies is not the same thing as having a strategy and having hard policies in place.

Dennis Robertson: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: I am happy to give way to Mr Robertson.

Dennis Robertson: With regard to the strategy, does the member accept that the Oil and Gas Authority, which is led by Andy Samuel, was convened by the Westminster Government and that it is a question of working with both

Governments to ensure the best outcomes for the oil and gas industry for the future?

Gavin Brown: I do not disagree with a single word that Dennis Robertson said, although I am not sure why he felt the need to make that point. I do not think that it is a defence of the Government's approach to strategies. However, for the record, I agree with what he said.

What policies has the Government actually put forward? What has it announced? It announced that it would have a Scottish business development bank. The problem is that it did so two and a half years ago, then scrapped the idea, then announced it again, scrapped it again and announced it again. It has been reannounced three times in the past 11 months and we are told that we will hear more about it by the end of the year. That is woeful. It shows that no work whatever was done before the first announcement—it just sounded like a good idea, and two years on we are no further forward and we have no detail on what the bank will do.

We heard about the other flagship policy, the Scottish business pledge. That is a perfectly admirable policy, with which it is difficult to disagree, but what has actually happened on the ground is not quite as impressive as the Government likes to make out. The policy was given the full authority and backing of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, who both put their stamp on it, launching it amid much fanfare back in May. The business pledge has a dedicated website and phone line, and the Government put a lot of stock into it. Three months later, the Government proudly says that 100 businesses have signed up to the pledge. That might sound impressive initially, but when we consider that 80,000 businesses benefit from the small business bonus scheme, or that there are 300,000 businesses in Scotland, the fact that 100 have signed up after three months is not quite so impressive.

In the closing speech, let us hear from the Government what policies it will put forward to deliver the ambitions that we all have for Scotland.

16:42

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The debate is important for our Parliament. Like many of my colleagues across the Parliament, I want to focus on how the Parliament can foster economic growth, not as a means to an end in itself but as a means of encouraging our constituents to reach their potential and reap the financial rewards.

I start on a positive note. I think that members of all parties accept the principle of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work and that in that regard the

Government's commitment to promoting the living wage in the private sector is worth while and ought to be commended. We know that more than 400,000 Scots are paid less than the living wage. Around 51,000 of those people live in Central Scotland, the region that I represent. A living wage would mean, on average, an annual wage rise of more than £2,600 for every one of those people who is in a full-time position.

I know that I am not the only parliamentarian who has heard from employees and employers about the benefits of the living wage, not just for the workforce, which receives more equitable wages, but for employers. Research from the Poverty Alliance suggests that there is a direct correlation between the living wage being paid and a 25 per cent fall in absenteeism, that there is a positive impact on recruitment and retention and that some 80 per cent of employers think that paying a living wage enhanced the quality of staff's work. The cabinet secretary acknowledged that in his speech. We know that the economic benefits of the living wage are impressive. Staff who receive the pay increase are likely to spend the money in their communities and on the businesses on which we rely for our economy to prosper.

However, the Government's record on the living wage is not perfect. It is true that the Scottish Government is a living wage employer; it is rightly praised for that. However, many of the less glamorous jobs in the Scottish Government's offices are outsourced to private sector companies, who are under no obligation to pay our cleaners, janitors or kitchen staff the living wage, despite it being something that the people for whom they cater and clean take for granted.

Scottish Labour has in the past introduced proposals in Parliament calling on the Scottish Government to rectify that situation. The proposals, which were supported by trade unions and charities alike across civic Scotland, demanded that the Government use its powers over procurement to promote the living wage in the private sector. However, the Government rejected them, in contrast to the stated aim of its motion: the desire to build a better, fairer Scotland in which our growing economy is used to improve the condition of the low paid.

I am pleased to speak in support of Jackie Baillie's amendment. It reiterates our values and priorities, nowhere more so than in the last line, which states:

"the foundation of Scotland's economic strategy must be a successful education policy and that therefore tackling educational inequality must not only be a political priority but also a spending priority."

Our new leader Kezia Dugdale has spoken eloquently in the chamber and outside it about the

need to ensure that our schools are world-class centres of learning, and she has argued strongly that we should not settle for standards remaining “satisfactory”.

I will take this opportunity to talk about school leavers, and to challenge once again the Scottish Government’s position on further education. As someone who went from high school to college and then on to university, I can personally attest to the importance of our college sector in preparing young people either for work or, as in my case, for higher education.

We know that it is predominantly people from less affluent backgrounds who go to colleges. With that in mind, it is difficult to understand how the Government can claim to be pursuing an economic strategy

“characterised by inclusive growth and opportunities for all”,

given that there are now 140,000 fewer Scots going to college than when the Government took office. As John Pentland and Mark Griffin said, we need to do more in that area to tackle the attainment gap, which the Government views as a priority.

As members know, I am passionate about seeking equality for disabled people in our society. It is for that reason that I submitted a freedom of information request last month to all 32 of Scotland’s local authorities asking for the number of staff that they employ in schools who are specifically trained to support pupils with additional support needs. I found that the number of those staff members had declined in 22 of the 32 authorities, representing an overall drop from 3,363 in 2012 to 2,963 in 2014 across Scotland. I urge the Scottish Government to investigate the matter urgently as part of its overall growth strategy. How can we as legislators hope to maximise the economic and societal potential of some of our most vulnerable people when, as they increase in number, we cut the specialist support that is available to them?

The Scottish children’s services coalition has already warned that the cuts to support staff could lead to the prospect of

“a lost generation of young people”.

We can add to that the fact that children who are identified as having additional support needs disproportionately come from lower-income families and areas of high deprivation. We must remove barriers, and not allow them to stay up.

I have previously called on the Government to use the public sector socioeconomic duty to properly scrutinise the legislation that it makes. I believe that the area that I have just highlighted is a perfect example of where the Government could use that duty.

Before I moved to my new position in the Scottish Labour finance team, I was the party’s spokesperson for women’s employment. It would therefore be remiss of me not to at least touch on the issue of how we can better encourage growth with maximum societal benefits by opening up metaphorical doors for women.

The fact that, in the 2012 flagship modern apprenticeship programme, 98 per cent of construction apprentices were male and 97 per cent of childcare apprentices were female has often been brought up in the chamber, and rightly so. It goes to show what can happen if care is not taken to maximise the potential of everyone in our society.

There is little doubt that Scotland’s jobs of the future lie in the STEM sector, as other members have mentioned. It is no secret that the levels of occupational segregation in that corner of the economy are staggering. Last year, only 68 engineering apprentices were female. In 2015, the Government’s “Maximising Economic Opportunities for Women in Scotland” report demonstrated that 73 per cent of female STEM graduates did not work in their respective fields after graduation.

A few months ago, I said:

“It used to be that advances in science and technology liberated women, but now they have the potential to hold them back.”—[*Official Report*, 2 June 2015; c 42.]

I never followed up by saying—as in retrospect I should have done—that the situation would also hold back our economic growth and aspirations for inclusive growth and opportunities for all.

Few members in the chamber would oppose economic growth, but economic growth for the sake of it is a rather hollow ambition. The Government has taken some encouraging steps in its Scottish economic strategy to broaden the spectrum of beneficiaries of growth in Scotland, but we believe that it must be bolder.

Our Parliament has significant powers over procurement and other areas that have yet to be utilised. We have full control over all matters concerning education, and as the Opposition it is our responsibility to say that the Government has thus far failed to use those powers to promote opportunities for all. The Scottish Government should not have to come out and tell us what its political priorities are: those should be evident in its budget and legislation. At the moment, they simply are not.

16:50

John Swinney: I wish in no way to do damage to Claudia Beamish, but I must say that I enjoyed her thoughtful speech this afternoon. At the

weekend, I followed her advice to spend time with family and nature in that I had to fulfil a Government commitment in Lochboisdale on Saturday afternoon and decided that, instead of spending the weekend with the Government entourage, I would take my family with me, as that was a better prospect. I hope that no one in my private office will take umbrage at what I have just put in the *Official Report*, but it was indeed a pleasant way to spend a couple of days on Government business. That was one of the points that Claudia Beamish made with which I agreed. She was making a point about the breadth of the focus of our work, particularly in our assessment not just of the Government's performance in delivering its agenda but of the impact of the collective activities that the Government, local authorities, public bodies and a variety of other players are involved in that enhance the quality of people's lives in Scotland.

That is the context in which we must consider many of the issues around the economic performance of Scotland. Claudia Beamish went on to apply that approach in a number of different areas, including the roll-out of the common agricultural policy and land reform, the importance of which I saw vividly in the Western Isles on Saturday when I visited a venture that is being taken forward by the community interest company Stòras Uibhist at Lochboisdale. It is a £10 million project that most dispassionate observers would have thought was pretty unlikely to get off the ground but that has successfully delivered new harbour and marine infrastructure that will create significant foundations for economic recovery in a fragile part of the Western Isles. Patrick Harvie also raised issues about the breadth of economic impact and the breadth of the economic analysis that must be considered into the bargain. It is right to look at such questions in that way, and Claudia Beamish made that point powerfully in her speech.

The point was also made powerfully by Joan McAlpine, who cited the specific example of the cafe project, The Usual Place, in her constituency. That served two purposes: first, it added another cafe to my encyclopaedic knowledge of cafes in Scotland that I must visit—and I pledge to do so; secondly, it highlighted the fact that, as Mary Scanlon said, many social enterprises, while running profitable businesses, have a profound impact on the lives and wellbeing of individuals whom many mainstream businesses find it rather difficult to reach. That has been a particular element of the direction that I have given to economic policy in Scotland over the past eight years, as one of our priorities has been to expand significantly the social enterprise sector. The social enterprise census that Joan McAlpine talked about gives us a fantastic analysis of the strength of the social enterprise sector in Scotland, which is

viewed as world leading. The Social Enterprise World Forum 2015 has again focused on the leading work that is being undertaken here in Scotland, which we should very much welcome. The Usual Place illustrates perfectly the point that the Government is making about the need for emphasis on inclusive growth in the Scottish economic strategy.

A lot of the debate has concentrated on engineering and oil and gas activity. Among the commentary about the performance of the engineering sector and Scotland's manufacturing base, Stuart McMillan's points about the welcome news of additional orders for the Ferguson Marine shipyard illustrated the success that we can deliver in improving the depth of the skills base in Scotland and in our economic performance as a consequence. Of course, Ferguson's is still operational only because of very concerted and focused activity by ministers, which was ably responded to by Jim McColl. The fact that we still have on the Clyde the engineering capability to build ships of the scale and magnitude that we can now contemplate being built at that shipyard is an illustration of active Government economic policy.

A number of comments have been made about the oil and gas sector. Tavish Scott made a significant contribution to the debate on the role of the Oil and Gas Authority, with which I had a very constructive meeting just last week. We welcome some of the suggestions that Tavish Scott made about the fiscal regime to encourage exploration and development, particularly through the use of capital allowances, and we will advance them in our wider discussions on the future of the sector.

Neil Findlay: In the discussions that he mentioned, did the cabinet secretary have conversations with the employers about the potential impending industrial action in the North Sea?

John Swinney: I did, because I was anxious to avoid such industrial action taking place. I was anxious to encourage the type of climate that is embodied in the Scottish Government's fair work agenda, which is about encouraging employers and employees to focus on the shared interests that they both have in guaranteeing progress. If there was ever a sector that needs everybody to be rowing in the same direction, it is the oil and gas sector today. Tavish Scott made the point that if there is a premature withdrawal of activity in certain areas, that will jeopardise central infrastructure in the North Sea, which will be to the detriment of everyone. His point was well made and is a siren warning to everyone. Therefore, we need to have a cohesive approach in that respect.

Patrick Harvie: The cabinet secretary might not be surprised to hear that we are not all rowing in the same direction. The previous climate change

minister in the Scottish Government had at least finally accepted the scientific reality that the world must leave most of its fossil fuels unburned. Is that still the Scottish Government's view? What proportion of those fuels does he think that it is responsible to extract?

John Swinney: Mr Harvie knows that the Government is committed to responsible and sustainable extraction of oil and gas reserves in the North Sea, because that enables us to anchor many of the sophisticated engineering opportunities that many of my colleagues have talked about.

As part of the discussion on oil and gas, Rob Gibson spoke about alternative developments that address the issue that Mr Harvie raised and the point that Jackie Baillie made about the post-oil economy. One of the difficulties—this is not a case of blaming someone else; it is just a statement of fact—is that the UK Government's actions have made it more difficult to secure greater opportunities for the renewable energy industry in Scotland than it was before that Government was elected in May of this year. The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing, will pursue that with Amber Rudd, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, when he meets her in due course.

Although a number of thoughtful speeches have been made, the debate has been characterised by a great deal of negativity from the Labour Party. We had to listen to six minutes 57 seconds of Jackie Baillie before she said that it was necessary to think about the future and to be positive, but she then went back to being negative. If we can get to a position in which the director of CBI Scotland, Mr Hugh Aitken, can say that

"The Government's economic strategy rightly prioritises making Scotland more competitive by investing in infrastructure, education and apprenticeships",

and Grahame Smith, the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, can say that

"The STUC enthusiastically welcomes the strong commitment to tackling inequality which infuses the 'refreshed' Government Economic Strategy"

and that the strategy is

"improved and strengthened by the introduction of fair work as a key priority",

I remain optimistic that one day, somewhere over to my left, somebody will be able to say something positive about our economic strategy.

In its amendment, the Labour Party even wants to remove from the motion—Jackie Baillie railed against my friend Stewart Stevenson when he made this point—the statement that we welcome the fact that

"the Scottish economy has experienced its longest period of uninterrupted economic growth since 2001".

Can the Labour Party not just accept the fact that the Government's economic strategy is delivering positive returns for the people of Scotland and get behind us in our efforts?

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-14171, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for Wednesday 9 September 2015.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 9 September 2015—

after

followed by Scottish Labour Party Debate: Housing and Wellbeing in Scotland

insert

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2015 [draft]

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick: S4M-14163 is on substitution on a committee and S4M-14172 is on the referral of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Dr Richard Simpson be appointed to replace Jackie Baillie as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Finance Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2015 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on progress in the Scottish economy, if the amendment in the name of Jackie Baillie is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-14156.3, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-14156, in the name of John Swinney, on progress in the Scottish economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)

Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 33, Against 77, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-14156.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S4M-14156, in the name of John Swinney, on progress in the Scottish economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 12, Against 98, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-14156, in the name of John Swinney, on progress in the Scottish economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 60, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the news that the Scottish economy has experienced its longest period of uninterrupted economic growth since 2001 and has a higher employment rate than the UK as a whole and further welcomes independent forecasts predicting growth of around 2.4% in 2015; endorses the refreshed Scottish Economic Strategy launched earlier this year, which sets out the approach taken by the Scottish Government and wider public sector to achieve a Scottish economy that is characterised by inclusive growth and opportunities for all, and supports the *Programme for Government 2015-16*, published on 1 September 2015, which sets out the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to foster a supportive business environment, invest in infrastructure and skills and support entrepreneurship, innovation and internationalisation while promoting and expanding fair work and the living wage and raising attainment.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-14163, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on substitution on a committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Dr Richard Simpson be appointed to replace Jackie Baillie as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Finance Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-14172, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the referral of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2015 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

Human Rights Act 1998 (Amnesty International Campaign)

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-13562, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on do the human right thing: keep the Human Rights Act. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I warn members that time is extremely tight.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the launch of the Amnesty International campaign, Do the Human Right Thing: Keep the Human Rights Act; understands that this campaign aims to raise awareness of the importance of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the threats that it faces from some politicians, who would like to scrap it; considers that the Human Rights Act is a fundamental safeguard to the freedom of every citizen, including those resident in the Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse parliamentary constituency, as well as any visitor to this country; believes that it has given people the power to challenge decisions made by public authorities and has also led to positive policy changes, and hopes that this campaign will help to raise awareness of what it considers this important issue.

17:06

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I thank all my colleagues across the chamber who signed the motion to allow us to debate this very important issue, and I thank Amnesty International UK, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, the human rights consortium Scotland, the Jimmy Reid Foundation, the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the many other organisations that have helped us with understanding the process and in giving us some input on how they see the piece of work shaping up.

The Magna Carta went viral in 1215. Thirteen copies were made, complete with spelling mistakes, though there was blissful unawareness of LOL and the potential for tweeting the document. Unlike the declaration of Arbroath, which enshrined the rights of Scotland's sovereign people, the Magna Carta enshrined the rights of the barons of the time. However, it was still a bill of rights in its limited sense. That the Prime Minister was happy to tear it up on its 800th anniversary speaks volubly of his approach to human rights—even those of his barons. He has, of course, displayed something similar in completely failing to recognise the rights of hundreds of thousands of refugees and to give them safety across Europe. I listened to a wee bit of the Westminster debate this afternoon and have to say that I was not very much enthralled by it.

While Germany happily absorbs 800,000 people, David Cameron stands back and, under pressure, says, "Well, we might take a thousand or

so from the camps, but we're not taking anyone who has 'jumped the queue'—as one of Nigel Farage's acolytes put it. That arrogant, selfish lack of the remotest compassion or even simple empathy with the family of Aylan Kurdi, as his small three-year-old body was carried out of the sea, brought anger and distress across Europe. The public outcry has been such that even David Cameron, who admits that he has not a clue about the price of bread, had to back down a bit more than he would have liked. It might even upset some of his back benchers, but he will have to take some desperate people from the refugee camps.

According to David Cameron, King John was an outrageous bully, and it was the brave barons who sat him down, gave him a jolly good talking to and asked him to seal the document. Good on them: we should all stand up to bullies wherever we see them, whether that is in the school playground or, indeed, the House of Commons. We need to stand together to fight the kind of right-wing, extremist messages that are infiltrating our communities and terrifying our towns and cities with their messages of hate and blame.

Amnesty International UK's drive to do the human right thing is about exactly that. That campaign to save the Human Rights Act 1998 demands that the Westminster Government is stopped from bullying the very citizens who put it into power. That is yet another one of those arenas in Scotland where we get a double whammy: we cannot decide to hold on to the act for ourselves and we cannot stop proposals being passed by David Cameron's Government and ourselves being subjected to the loss of our human rights. In other words, we are being bullied.

As you know, Presiding Officer, our Scottish Parliament has its foundations in human rights legislation, but there seems to be no thought about the impact on how this place, with cognisance of its human rights, formulates its policy. I am extremely proud of our approach to human rights; it is threaded through the Scotland Act 1998, and we should all be extremely proud of that.

That is why Amnesty's campaign is so important. Scrapping the Human Rights Act would be a dangerously retrograde step that could put us all under the threat of tyranny. As Allan Hogarth, the head of advocacy and programmes at Amnesty, succinctly puts it:

"Human rights are not a gift to be bestowed upon us by monarchs, barons or democratically elected politicians, they are ours to be treasured and protected. It is not up to them to decide who and who is not entitled to human rights—the 'human' part of this is universal.

If the Prime Minister is sincere about protecting human rights in the UK and is proud of the Magna Carta's legacy, he should stop attacking the Human Rights Act and think

about how he can ensure that we all have equal access to justice."

The people spoke out and the Tory Government had to listen. As we were preparing for the juggernaut of a bill that would scrap the act, we were suddenly told that there was to be a consultation and not a bill. Ordinary people refused to be bullied by the Government, but make no mistake: dumping the Human Rights Act and withdrawing completely from the European convention on human rights is still a live option. It has not gone away.

People tend to concentrate on the Human Rights Act's importance for refugees and for those who are tortured, threatened or trafficked, but its impact reverberates through far more lives than those on the front line of conflict situations.

Jan, an MS sufferer, believed that her lack of care support infringed her human rights as an individual. She says that studying the legislation

"helped me to feel stronger—strong enough to search for the support to challenge my local council".

She won that additional support and the sense of her own worth that she had lost over time. Without the act, what would have happened to Jan? Would she have managed to get more support? Getting rid of the obligation to treat people as human beings is another handy, back-door way to save money. Welfare reform already includes the erosion of human rights. Can we bear to imagine what might happen if we lacked the ultimate security of the ECHR?

What about families who are trapped in domestic violence? A woman who is stalked and abused by a violent partner surely has the right to escape with her children, and that right is enshrined within the HRA. The act makes it safer to be gay, which is still illegal and could lead to execution in 78 countries in this world. Thanks in large part to the ECHR and the UK Human Rights Act, our rights to be treated as equals with equal access to protection, regardless of gender, sexuality, race or age, are protected by law.

The struggle for equal rights has been significantly advanced by the laws, campaign groups and trade unions. The frightening thought that the UK might withdraw from the European Union and remove from us such crucial protections is yet another solid reason for Scotland to retain its integrity and compassion by staying in Europe. Scots have always viewed the right to civil liberty as fundamental. Our history in the trade union movement and people such as Keir Hardie are testament to that set of values.

Today the UK Government announced that it will repeal the Human Rights Act 1998 and bring forward a bill of rights. It is time now: let us all back Amnesty's do the human right thing

campaign. When enough people speak, Governments listen.

The Presiding Officer: Many members want to speak so I advise them that they should take no more than four minutes.

17:13

Kenny MacAskill (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): I thank Christina McKelvie for her motion. It is an important issue that we have to discuss, especially today.

Human rights and the Human Rights Act 1998 can challenge Governments and other public and private institutions, and rightly so. I required to deal with the consequences of the Cadder decision but we, as an Administration, accepted it, although we were probably rather begrudging about it.

It is important that we allow decisions to be challenged and not simply imposed upon people. Every democracy requires there to be a separation of powers. There requires to be the Government that is held to account as the executive by the wider Parliament. Equally, there requires to be a legislator to whom people can go if they have queries or if they feel that the Parliament or the Government are acting outwith their powers or are failing to act appropriately. That is how it should be in all democracies.

Even the United States, a country that sometimes I and other members would challenge, sees court decisions as fundamental to the defence of the constitution, and there have been many areas in which the US has seen the court overturn the legislature and the executive to protect the rights of citizens. It should be no less so in this country—and indeed it has been no less so in this country, with people able to go to the courts to take issue with actions by Government or institutions on a variety of reasons or grounds.

I accept that the Conservatives are being driven not so much by a desire to abolish human rights—there is a willingness to impose a UK bill of rights—as by their antipathy towards ECHR and to Europe in particular. However, I believe that a UK bill of rights would be no substitute for what is an international institution that is accepted by almost all right-minded countries. It is important that we should remain part of the mainstream, not simply by being a member of the European Union, which is a separate political action, but by subscribing to ECHR and accepting the right of the European court to hold the Government—Scottish or UK—to account.

This is about the right of citizens to be able to challenge those who are much more powerful or who are in much more privileged positions. There

is a great deal of obsession in the media about crime. That, after all, is one of the things that helps to sell tabloid newspapers. Many of the major challenges that have been faced in Scotland and in the UK have been related to criminal justice—I have already mentioned the Cadder issue—but the Human Rights Act is much wider and broader than that, as Christina McKelvie correctly said. It is about the rights of citizens, whether in relation to mental health, access to legal aid, or a whole gamut of other aspects. It is important.

Equally, if the UK were to repeal the Human Rights Act, it would put Scotland in limbo, given the act's constitutional position in the very founding document of this Parliament. Withdrawing would leave the UK isolated, along with North Korea and other countries that do not seek to be part of the mainstream world. That is why we should, and must, preserve the Human Rights Act and remain signed up to ECHR.

It would perhaps be remiss of me not to take the opportunity to put a sting in the tail. In championing human rights, it is important that the Scottish Government should take cognisance of ECHR and the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights on the right of prisoners to vote. That would be no small step to make sure that we got on the right side of the European Court. It is perhaps something that we should think about as well as chastising the Tory Government for its proposed actions.

17:17

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Christina McKelvie on lodging this important motion. I agree with what she said at the start of her speech about refugees but also more generally about the importance of the Human Rights Act 1998 in protecting fundamental liberties and holding power to account.

Of course, the Human Rights Act was passed by the Labour Government in 1998. It was seeking to ensure that people who previously had to take their case to the European Court of Human Rights could, from 1998 onwards, take their case to the domestic court. The UK Government is seeking to abolish that aspect of ECHR but my understanding is that it also wants to have the right to veto ECHR more generally. That would require it to depart from ECHR and from the Council of Europe. Some people argue that it would even need to depart from the EU, although I do not think that that would necessarily follow.

The Conservatives also want to limit human rights coverage to the most serious cases and deny people human rights if they are not deemed to have made a positive contribution to the UK.

Those are significant changes and although I reminded people that it was the Labour Government in 1998 that brought in the Human Rights Act, it was a Conservative Government in the early 1950s that was very keen on ECHR. Churchill was keen on it and it was a Conservative member of Parliament, Maxwell Fyfe, who was instrumental in the drawing up of ECHR.

It is a new departure for the Conservative Party to be challenging fundamental rights in this way and I know that quite a few Conservative MPs in the UK Parliament are not happy about that. Part of my grounds for optimism is that they may rebel; my other ground for optimism is that I think that abolishing the 1998 act requires the consent of this Parliament. I think that we have an important role to play in protecting the act and ECHR more generally.

The European Court of Human Rights has made groundbreaking judgments on a wide range of issues, helping the UK to become a more progressive society. To those who criticise some of the judgments, we should emphasise how many of them have helped some of the most vulnerable people in society. For example, the act has protected older and disabled people who receive care, helped victims of rape to sue the police for failing to act on their complaints and been used to hold social services to account for not doing enough to stop child abuse. Of course, the act does not protect only the vulnerable; it also helps to protect the freedom of the press, which I am sure that we all believe in, and it has defended the rights of servicemen and women to have the right equipment when serving overseas.

I therefore strongly support the Amnesty campaign that was launched in April and which urges people to do the human right thing and protect the act. The Amnesty campaign uses examples to highlight the very real impact that the act has had. There is also a petition, which has nearly 100,000 signatures—people can add their names to it at www.savetheact.uk. The Amnesty campaign gives powerful examples. I have given some general examples already, but it is important to remind people who are critical of the act exactly what it has meant in practice. For example, a woman with multiple sclerosis who was forced to spend all day every day in bed was able to use the act to get her local council to increase the amount of care that she received. A second example that Amnesty gives is of an elderly couple who were placed in separate care homes after 65 years of marriage and who were able to use the act to successfully persuade their local authority to allow the woman to move into her husband's care home.

I have other examples, but my time is running out. We need only glance abroad to the crises in Syria, Gaza and other places or look to the horror

that is being faced by refugees on the shores of the EU to recognise just how precious our human rights are and how we must fight for them. We must fight for the human rights of others and we must face down any attempt to withdraw those rights in the UK.

17:21

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

This is not a new subject, as it has been covered in topical questions and in other debates. However, I thank Christina McKelvie for lodging the motion and providing me with the opportunity to set the record straight regarding the UK Government's proposal to put the European convention on human rights into a British bill of rights.

Britain has a proud tradition of upholding human rights and it played a significant role in drafting the European convention on human rights, which was enacted in 1953. That represented an historic and groundbreaking codification of the rights that all humans should expect to enjoy.

In June this year, the UK Government confirmed that it would bring forward proposals, including a public consultation, on replacing the Human Rights Act 1998 with a British bill of rights. Since then, much political capital has been made from the proposal. It is unfortunate that Amnesty International's campaign, in seeking to ensure that the Human Rights Act 1998 is not repealed, infers that British citizens will suddenly lose their right to life, education, marriage, liberty and property—the list goes on. That is despite the acknowledgment from the then justice minister Roseanna Cunningham that

"The precise implications of repeal"

of the act

"would depend on the detail of the repealing legislation."—
[Written Answers, 30 October 2014; S4W-22699.]

Let us be clear that, in proposing to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998, the UK Government is not proposing to abolish human rights; instead, it proposes to uphold them in a way that reflects the values of those living in the UK by ensuring that the interpretation of European convention rights lies with UK judges. That addresses concerns over the so-called mission creep of the European Court of Human Rights. A recent case in point is the European court's decision that life imprisonment for the most serious violent offenders should not be allowed, on the basis that it amounts to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, regardless of the severity of the crime.

Another example is the European court's decision on the rights of prisoners to vote, to which Kenny MacAskill referred. Nicola Sturgeon, who is

now First Minister, recognised that decision as problematic, when she disagreed and said:

“people who commit crimes and are sent to jail do not get to vote. I do not believe that a good case has been made for changing that situation.”—[*Official Report, Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee*, 28 March 2013; c 314.]

However, it is only fair to point out the irony of so much political capital being made of the supposed adverse effects of the proposed bill of rights when the Scottish Government has allowed potential human rights abuses to continue on its own watch on issues for which it has complete devolved competence. The so-called consensual stop and search by police in Scotland, under which thousands of people—including children—have been searched without knowing that they had a right to refuse, is evidence of the infringement of human rights here.

To put it in perspective, rather than raising the topic repeatedly when nothing further has happened since the initial announcement last year, the Scottish Government should concentrate on making sure that the devolved issues over which it has competence are not the subject of the infringement of human rights in Scotland.

I again thank Christina McKelvie for bringing the debate to the chamber and allowing me to set the record straight.

17:25

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I congratulate Christina McKelvie on securing this debate on an important issue. The UK Conservative Government would have us believe that the Human Rights Act 1998 undermines the sovereignty of Parliament and the independence of our courts and that it goes far beyond the UK's obligations under the European convention on human rights. The Government talks of the European Court of Human Rights being afflicted by mission creep. It is determined to abolish the act and proposes replacing it with a British bill of rights and responsibilities. It has admitted that the new bill of rights would apply only to the most serious cases. Which of our human rights are not serious? What is a trivial breach of human rights?

The UK Government's plans state that it would

“Limit the reach of human rights cases to the UK, so that British Armed forces overseas are not subject to persistent human rights claims that undermine their ability to do their job and keep us safe”.

That would set a dangerous precedent. Human rights are not something to opt into and out of. As a Liberal Democrat, I firmly believe that they are universal. In this of all weeks, when David Cameron and his Government have been found so wanting in their response to the refugee crisis, why

would anyone even contemplate allowing them to tamper with the hard-won freedoms that are set out in the convention and the act?

Amnesty International's do the human right thing campaign focuses on saving the act. I strongly support the campaign and the work that Amnesty International does on the issue. The act compels us to comply with the European convention on human rights. Let us not forget that, as others have said, both documents were drafted by UK lawyers and fully reflect British values. They are not, as some might want us to believe, foreign diktats that allow criminals and terrorists to act with impunity, avoid punishment or exploit loopholes; on the contrary, they protect the most vulnerable in our society.

The Human Rights Act has helped to keep families together by ensuring, under the protection of our right to family life, that care homes and local authorities keep elderly married couples together. It has helped to secure proper support from local authorities for people with a disability. It has protected the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people at home and abroad. It also protects the dignity of some of our most marginalised citizens.

Furthermore, scrapping the act would cause specific legal issues that relate to those of us who sit in devolved Parliaments. The act is hardwired into the devolution settlements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Good Friday agreement was achieved in part thanks to the assurances that the act provided.

The Conservatives have admitted that, if the international community did not accept their proposed British bill of rights and responsibilities, the UK would be forced out of the convention. Abolishing the act and leaving the convention would put us in the same club as Belarus, which is often dubbed the last dictatorship of Europe. To walk away from the act and the convention would undermine our ability to ask other countries to respect their citizens' rights. It would send a damaging message that the UK does not respect its international obligations, so why should anyone else?

Only the presence of Liberal Democrats in the previous UK Government prevented the Conservatives from abolishing the act earlier. Unfortunately, they are now in a position to jeopardise those rights that we hold dear. I support the motion and Amnesty International's campaign. I will work with colleagues around the chamber to do the human right thing. As Amnesty has said, we cannot let the UK Government

“turn universal freedoms into privileges for a chosen few.”

17:30

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate and commend Christina McKelvie for bringing it to the chamber. As others have indicated, it is perhaps hard to remember that Conservative politicians of the late 1940s and early 1950s were proponents of the European convention on human rights, for they recognised the need to move forward in Europe and not to move backwards—even though David Maxwell Fyfe, to whom Malcolm Chisholm referred, would perhaps have been surprised at the extent to which the convention has moved forward on matters of sexual morality.

Last autumn, Conservative plans to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998 and replace it with a British bill of rights were announced, together with a move to stop the UK courts having to take account of Strasbourg jurisprudence. Since the election in May, Conservatives have reiterated that commitment and we now seem to be moving towards a consultation.

Why are the proposals worrying? Because the act sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that everyone in Scotland and the UK has access to. Those rights and freedoms are based on the European convention. According to the act, all public authorities—including prisons, police officers and councils—must respect those rights and freedoms. That is an essential mechanism for protecting our rights and freedoms.

Scotland has a long and rich tradition of upholding human rights and freedoms. The Scottish Government's recent commitment to accept a fair and proportionate number of refugees in Scotland, in the wake of the European refugee crisis, is a fine example of the commitment to those who have no rights in their own countries. Furthermore, the act is at the heart of Scottish legislation. Any withdrawal from it, under the Sewel convention, might have implications for the devolved settlement.

As we know, the Conservative Party has only one MP in Scotland, which means that only one representative out of 59 is committed to the proposals. I urge the Conservatives to think carefully about the wider implications of the move. They simply have no mandate to tamper with Scotland's long and rich commitment to human rights. I am sure that my SNP colleagues at Westminster and Holyrood will continue to oppose Tory proposals to repeal the act.

Furthermore, it is quite indicative that several charity organisations and groups, including the SCVO and the Health and Social Care Alliance, have highlighted their concerns about the potential risks that are associated with repealing the act.

Even some in David Cameron's party, including David Davis and Ken Clarke, have voiced opposition to the UK Government's plans to repeal the act.

For all the talk of bad decisions on prisoners' right to vote—with Westminster and the Scottish Parliament taking the view that prisoners should not have the vote—the European Court of Human Rights decided in February this year, no doubt to some lawyers' disappointment, that UK prisoners who were barred from voting were not entitled to compensation.

I suspect that a British bill of rights will be equal to an English bill of rights, which would fail to take into account the needs and interests of the people of Scotland. From the Conservative proposals that were published in October, apart from a small reference to the claim of right of 1689, one could be forgiven for thinking that Scotland did not exist at all. We are right to fear a British bill of rights, particularly in relation to social rights, and we can be certain that it will severely curtail anything that might look to be a right to economic assistance, housing or welfare.

I will conclude by referring to the possible constitutional crisis that the Tory proposals will cause. In the view of Michael Pinto-Duschinsky and other commentators, Scotland and the UK risk being forced out of the European convention on human rights altogether. His view is that it is impossible to leave the court's jurisdiction without also rejecting the convention. In the view of Professor Francesca Klug, there is also a problem for the UK's continued membership of the European Union. In her view, a country needs to adhere to the convention in order to be a member of the EU. That no doubt sounds grand to Tory Eurosceptics, but I would say to more considered people in the Tory party, "Don't do it."

17:33

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Christina McKelvie on securing the debate. The topic is very appropriate, because the human rights of millions of people in Syria and across the middle east and north Africa are threatened to the extent that they have had to flee their countries of origin and seek asylum elsewhere.

In Europe, there has been an outpouring of humanitarian response to the horrific experiences of our fellow human beings. While we compare our situations with theirs, it is worth reflecting on how the European convention on human rights, which was drafted way back in 1950 in the aftermath of the second world war, protects those of us who are fortunate enough to live in Council of Europe

member states from the atrocities that others suffer.

As a Scottish Labour member, I am proud that incorporating the convention into UK law was one of the first actions of the incoming Labour Government in 1997. I am pleased therefore to fully endorse Amnesty International's do the human right thing campaign to raise awareness of the importance of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the threat that is posed by the UK Government's intention to repeal it and replace it with a so-called British bill of rights. It is a bill of rights and not a bill of human rights that is proposed.

In October last year, Professor Alan Miller, chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, warned:

"Human rights laws often benefit us in ways we do not always realise. Here in the UK, they have been used to expose fatal failures in hospitals and care homes and to challenge the unfair impact of the bedroom tax. From protecting soldiers serving in battle to challenging prison conditions that have no place in a decent society, the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights provide a safety net for everyone."

Why would the UK Government wish to remove that safety net and risk expulsion from ECHR?

A clue to that is in the way in which the original announcement by Chris Grayling, who was Secretary of State for Justice at the time, was greeted by delighted headlines in right-wing tabloids that trumpeted so-called British values and the removal of the authority of "meddling European judges". For years, those same publications had reported human rights as in their view benefiting only bad people such as offenders and others who those tabloids consider to be undesirables. Theresa May contributed to that in 2011 with her unfounded story at conference about an illegal immigrant being allowed to stay in the country because he had a cat.

Like organisations such as the SHRC, the Amnesty International campaign presents the other, important side of the argument. Malcolm Chisholm referred to the vulnerable elderly couple who would have been separated when the man was admitted to a care home because the woman did not fit the criteria for that home. Their human right to a family life have now been respected.

A woman who, with her children, was fleeing domestic violence was accused of making her children intentionally homeless and threatened with their removal. That family have now been rehoused because their human rights were recognised. Other examples are rape victims no longer being subjected to cross-examination by their attackers, and the journalist who, on appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, was permitted not to reveal his source on the takeover of a company so that the information that he had

obtained from the source could be provided in the public interest.

A human rights approach can force us to focus on controversial issues. We discussed one—the age of criminal responsibility—at the Justice Committee this morning. Issues such as the right of prisoners to vote or the physical punishment of children can provoke instinctive responses. ECHR and the Human Rights Act 1998 have forced us to consider difficult issues more deeply and thoughtfully.

Repeal of the act would be a deeply retrograde step. I wish Amnesty International every success in its campaign to make the Conservative Government think again.

17:37

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I, too, congratulate Christina McKelvie for a timely debate—although I always think that it is timely to discuss human rights. I thank everyone for their briefings, declare my membership of Amnesty and indicate my support for the do the human right thing campaign.

I alluded before to a meeting of the Highland senior citizens network that I attended as part of the Scottish national action plan on human rights process, in which civil society was consulted on how we should go about dealing with and embedding our human rights. The chair of the network—a very respected individual—acknowledged that he had no previous experience of human rights; in fact, many of the people there wondered about their relevance to them. However, due to the network's extremely positive work in relation to the quality of care that was provided in care homes, the dignity of residents and issues such as hydration, mobility, bed sores, medication and privacy, it became apparent that it fully understood the need for a rights-based approach.

That is in line with what Amnesty told us in its briefing, which was that the Human Rights Act 1998 is for the most vulnerable people. However, Amnesty also said that the act guarantees important rights for everyone living in the UK. Relevance is the key to this.

We are having the debate because of an erosion of respect for individuals. That is part of a concerted—I would say neoliberal—campaign; indeed, I would describe it as mission creep. That is reflected in policies that attack the poor and vulnerable and undermine hard-fought-for workplace terms and conditions. It has brought about a discussion about deserving recipients of public support: I say that everyone deserves the protection of human rights. I make no apology for repeating that a UK Prime Minister talked about slaying the "health and safety monster". The

highest levels of cleanliness must apply in our hospitals. I speak as the proud son of a hospital cleaner. It is about the dignity of patients and their wellbeing, and it is about fundamental human rights and health and safety. If we make those links to practical things, it makes the debate make sense to a lot of people.

"The Human Rights Act has consistently proved its value by providing an essential safeguard in areas such as protecting older and disabled people who are receiving care."

That quotation is from one of the briefings, and we have heard that point consistently throughout the debate. I commend the Equality and Human Rights Commission not just for its work but for the very diplomatic phraseology that it used in relation to the situation in which we find ourselves. It has said—and I quote—that

"Scotland's devolution settlement is directly tied to the Human Rights Act and ECHR. Any change to our human rights framework would have to take careful account of the implications for the UK's wider constitutional architecture."

I seek an independent Scotland, but I am not going to revel in highlighting the differences. I want the highest standards to apply across these islands, regardless of our constitutional arrangements. I would like one very clear message from this debate to be that everyone wants the highest standards to apply not just within these islands, but beyond. I commend the UK's three national human rights institutions for working together to pursue that.

There was a time when the UK was admired as a place of sanctuary, but I have to say that that reputation has been sullied of late. I do not want to see us being complacent. We have no need to be complacent in Scotland—we have had issues such as Gypsy/Travellers, stop and search and votes, which have been alluded to.

The UK has an opportunity to show that it has a heart that has regard for human rights. I hope that it takes that approach and does the right thing.

17:41

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I add my thanks to Christina McKelvie for bringing this debate to the chamber. It is very important and, as John Finnie just said, it is timely. Perhaps Margaret Mitchell does not know this, but the Tory plan to scrap the Human Rights Act was confirmed in Parliament today. The consultation will come forward from the Conservative justice minister, Mr Raab, who said at Westminster that the bill will give the UK Supreme Court supremacy over the European Court of Human Rights and

"a greater respect for the legislative role of hon. Members in this place."

It is important that we have the debate today.

I look forward to having a lot more debates about this subject, because it is very important that we talk about human rights in terms that are different to those that the Conservatives are using. John Finnie talked about a "neoliberal ... campaign"—he might be right. Mr Chisholm talked about the many Conservatives in the past who were very much guardians of our human rights. I do not think that the Conservatives today are in the same place as their predecessors.

We are in a different place altogether in relation to the language that is used, and which is so important. Christina McKelvie started by talking about the refugee crisis that we have just now. We can see how language is so important in a debate about human rights. We want to focus on making sure that we have more and more debates about that. Politicians have a responsibility, as do the media, to ensure that we use positive language when we talk about human rights. Human rights are good things for the people of Britain—for everybody who lives in Britain, just as they are for those outside Britain. It is important to remember that they are not British rights or Labour rights, even if Labour introduced the Human Rights Act 1998. They are everybody's rights.

The key evidence in the refugee crisis and the conversation that we are having about human rights is the use of language. There are a few examples of that in the Conservative proposal for changing Britain's human rights laws. A lot of the language really should not be used. For example, it twice states that

"we must put Britain first".

In the context of a refugee crisis such as we have just now, or of human rights in general, that is the last thing that we should do. Rather, we should put humans first—everybody, wherever they come from and wherever they live.

Margaret Mitchell talked about offenders. She forgot to use the exact phrase in the Conservative proposal, which is "foreign nationals". In a debate about human rights, mixing up foreign nationals with the perpetrators of one of the most evil crimes is absolutely not the right thing to do. If the Conservatives have a plan for change, that is not how we should debate it. I remind Parliament that we all have a responsibility to be mindful of the language that we use when discussing human rights.

17:45

The Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment (Marco Biagi):

It is fair to say that few members' business debates attract the level of interest that we have had this evening, but it is rare that a question mark hangs over fundamental rights. Everybody who has

attended deserves credit, starting with Christina McKelvie, of course, who brought the subject to the chamber.

I also congratulate Amnesty International on the campaign that it has launched today. Let me be clear that that campaign has our support. Amnesty International is a well-chosen name for an organisation. I want to draw attention to the international part of that, because the UK Government has promised to bring forward proposals for a British bill of rights. The desire to remove the word “human” is no accident and is much more than a cosmetic change, because it signals a desire to move away from a universal standard—a separation from a human rights framework that is meant to connect and unite people around the world regardless of their circumstances.

Let us make no mistake. Reducing the human rights safeguards that we currently have would threaten the fundamental freedoms of us all, but undoubtedly the most vulnerable members of society are always hardest hit. John Wadham, the former director of Liberty, said:

“a simplistic version of democracy where Parliament rules and Parliament rules alone, is not adequate to protect our democratic values”.

He also said:

“the bill of rights we have is the Human Rights Act, and the bill of rights we need is the Human Rights Act.”

As a result of that desire to move away from the existing terms, it is no surprise that the eyes of the world are on us. Contributions have focused on the critical protections provided by the ECHR and the Human Rights Act, but let us not forget the wider framework of seven core United Nations human rights treaties, and eight that we have signed up to under the Council of Europe treaty system.

The UK was recently examined by the UN Human Rights Committee in relation to its obligations under the international covenant on civil and political rights, a treaty that echoes many of the key protections found in the ECHR. Members will not be surprised that the committee’s concluding observations expressed concern in the UN—as there is also in the Council of Europe—at the prospect of the UK retreating from its commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

That concern is widespread. Albie Sachs, a South African lawyer and judge, said:

“If you did a paternity test you would find the UK’s genes are there in the ECHR’s conception. The threat to withdraw would be like Daddy leaving home.”

He went on to say that the country that was among the founders of the European convention on human rights

“could become the dismantler of the entire enterprise”.

We must ask ourselves what message it sends when we wish to provide international leadership on the importance of complying with human rights if we are withdrawing from what is seen as a more international standard.

The Irish Government has highlighted the dimension that affects it, stating:

“Protecting the human rights aspects of the Good Friday Agreement is ... a shared responsibility between the two Governments”.

That is an unusual intervention, but it also reflects some of the constitutional issues that the proposals throw up within the United Kingdom.

Under the Scotland Act 1998, the power to observe and implement international obligations, including obligations under the ECHR, falls firmly within the competence of this Parliament. Like the wider work of this Parliament, that power and those obligations are of immense importance. The Sewel convention exists to ensure that there is some constitutional underpinning of the rights of this Parliament and that its powers will not be changed without its permission, but the Sewel convention is bounded only by the UK Government’s willingness to exercise restraint in using the sovereignty that the Scotland Act 1998 reserves to it. Could there be a more apt illustration of where rights beyond the untrammelled will of Parliament are needed and necessary?

There are some real dangers. Margaret Mitchell has highlighted the proposals, but if we are to have a British bill of rights that is the same as the ECHR, why bother? If it is to be different to the ECHR, it is safe to assume that “different” to the UK Government will not mean stronger, especially when there are accusations of mission creep and where there are the doubts, as Rod Campbell has highlighted, about commitments to social rights. Today, we have heard repeatedly about the desire to reduce the accessibility of recourse to those rights.

Underlying the Conservative proposals is the complaint that, sometimes, courts in the UK or in Strasbourg deliver judgments that the Government of the day does not like. The rule of law means that Governments cannot simply pick and choose which court ruling should be allowed to stand. The fact that courts make decisions with which we disagree should not be used as an excuse to get rid of the court system.

There are a lot of myths in the wider debate. Let me try to scotch a few of them. In 2014, the court

dealt with 1,997 applications concerning the UK. A violation of convention rights was found in only 0.7 per cent of cases. In fact, the UK had the highest numbers of judgments that found there to be no violation.

Malcolm Chisholm, Alison McInnes and others have highlighted some of the positive examples that we need to hear more about: the victims of rape, who can expect to see their complaints investigated; people serving in the army, who can expect to receive equipment and training to an appropriate standard; children suffering mistreatment or neglect, who can expect social services to respond to warning signs; journalists, who are not required to disclose their sources; disabled people, including people with mental health problems in care or detention, who can expect to receive treatment and conditions to meet their specific needs; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, who have used human rights to overcome discrimination; and the elderly couple who after 65 years of marriage were going to be forced to live apart due to their differing care needs, who used article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 on the right to family life to ensure that the council backed down.

With every day that passes, the UK Government shows more and more that its all-consuming obsessions are shrinking the state and an instinctive aversion to almost anything with the word “European” in its title. Those are not my values; they are not this Government’s values; they are not this Parliament’s values. They do not deserve to be called “values” at all. The ECHR has values. Scotland will stand for them; Scotland will do the human right thing. I sincerely hope that the UK Government sees sense and follows suit.

Meeting closed at 17:52.

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