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Wednesday 29 June 2016

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 29 June 2016

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

Portfolio Question Time

Communities, Social Security and Equalities

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The first item of business is portfolio question time. To get in as many members as possible, I would prefer short and succinct questions, and answers to match.

Energy-efficient Housing (West Aberdeenshire)

1. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much it has allocated to making houses in west Aberdeenshire more energy efficient. (S5O-00061)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Under our home energy efficiency programmes for Scotland area-based schemes programme and its predecessor, the universal home insulation scheme, Aberdeenshire Council has since 2010 been allocated a total of just under £12 million to deliver home energy efficiency improvements to private sector houses in selected areas across Aberdeenshire.

Allocations are made at local authority level and are not disaggregated to constituency level. Local authorities are responsible for choosing the areas where measures are offered and the types of measures. They are required to focus on areas that have higher levels of fuel poverty.

Alexander Burnett: I am sure that my constituents welcome the minister's warm words but, given that the Existing Homes Alliance has shown that 20,000 homes in Aberdeenshire West are cold homes, will the minister support the Conservative manifesto commitment to allocate 10 per cent of the capital budget to energy efficiency measures?

Kevin Stewart: It would have been useful if Tory Governments had not cut successive capital budgets and if, beyond that, they had dealt with schemes appropriately south of the border. We are spending £103 million this year on tackling fuel poverty and increasing energy efficiency, which is £103 million more than the Government south of the border is spending.

As for the member's constituency, area-based schemes to install energy efficiency measures have been carried out in places across west Aberdeenshire, including Insch, Echt, Huntly, Alford, Aboyne and Banchory. Further schemes are planned for Monymusk, Lumsden, Rhynie and Huntly. If Mr Burnett wants to join me in asking his Tory colleagues south of the border to increase capital budgets, I will welcome his help.

Homelessness (Oil and Gas Sector Job Losses)

2. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of how the loss of jobs in the oil and gas sector has affected homelessness in the north-east and what action it has taken to mitigate this. (S5O-00062)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council have said that there has been no increase in the number of homelessness presentations in their areas. That is supported by Scottish Government statistics, which show that homelessness applications in Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire fell continuously throughout 2015. In the final quarter of that year, the figures were at their lowest level since 14 years ago, when electronic recording began. In addition, private rental costs have reduced in both areas.

The homelessness legislation provides a safety net for all unintentionally homeless households. It is a strong form of mitigation if people are in danger of losing their homes. All 32 local authorities are focused on preventing homelessness through the housing options approach. That approach enables a local authority to look at all the options that are available to households, which may include a homelessness application.

Mike Rumbles: It is clear from the minister's reply that neither he nor any other minister has assessed the effect on homelessness of the downturn in the oil and gas industry. His response was rather complacent. It is not good enough to ask just Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council what has happened historically. There is anecdotal evidence, to say the least, which I can make available to the minister if he wishes to pursue the issue, as I hope that he will.

Kevin Stewart: I am certainly not complacent when it comes to the north-east of Scotland. As I stated, the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire homelessness stats fell continuously throughout 2015. Yesterday there were new homelessness statistics that show that homelessness has been dropping, and I will analyse them.

I say to Mike Rumbles that this Government will continue to focus on homelessness. We have some of the best homelessness legislation in the world, and he can be assured that I will continue to scrutinise all the figures.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Maurice Corry has a supplementary.

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): A new report published by Your Move found that typical rents rose by 1.3 per cent in the month after the introduction of the land and buildings transaction tax surcharge. It has also concluded that rent controls would not help matters—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: May I interrupt you, Mr Corry? I called you for a supplementary about homelessness in the north-east, but I think that you have gone on to your own question.

Maurice Corry: Oh, sorry. I beg your pardon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Do you have a supplementary?

Maurice Corry: I do not.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Okay. I remind members that, if their name is on the order paper for a question, they do not need to press their button. They should press their button if they want to ask a supplementary to another question.

Maurice Corry: My apologies.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is quite all right.

Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare (Meeting)

3. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the meeting of the joint ministerial working group on welfare on 16 June 2016. (S5O-00063)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): I am pleased to say that the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work and I had a productive meeting of the group, and I look forward to it being a meaningful way of taking forward the important work of transferring social security powers and welfare benefits to this Parliament in the years ahead.

At the meeting we discussed terms of reference and set out a programme of work for the next 12 months. I have written to the relevant parliamentary committees updating them about the meeting, and we will continue that process following future meetings.

Colin Beattie: Is the working relationship between the Scottish Government and the

Department for Work and Pensions sufficiently strong to satisfy the cabinet secretary that robust data provision will ensure that welfare benefits transition is seamless and that no Scottish recipient will be disadvantaged?

Angela Constance: Colin Beattie is right to highlight the importance of robust data provision and information sharing. It is early in my relationship with the DWP, but I have been encouraged by the meetings that we have had. I believe that both Governments have the safe and secure transfer of benefits as a priority, and I am clear that we will work hard to ensure that no one will be disadvantaged as a result of the transfer of powers. Ensuring access to data will be part of the process, and I am pleased that it is marked as a priority area for the next 12 months.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for keeping the Social Security Committee fully informed of the meeting of the joint ministerial working group, which has said that it is

“important to have a common understanding of practicalities and timetabling of commencement”

in relation to the transfer of social security powers.

Does the cabinet secretary envisage that that common understanding will include any sort of transitional period, in which some functions of the Scottish social security agency will continue to be administered by the DWP, and, if so, does she have any sense of how long that period might last?

Angela Constance: I am grateful to Adam Tomkins for his question and for recognising that the Government is determined to keep committees informed every step of the way, not just about notifications of the joint ministerial working group but about the outcomes of those discussions. We will release a joint communiqué following every meeting.

Timescales are important. Our manifesto set out our plan for the next five years, and we have started getting into the detail about commencement with United Kingdom Government ministers. The member will have seen that there is tranche 1 commencement; the Secretary of State for Scotland will have to take that through by order, through the UK Parliament. It is hoped that that will be done before the UK Parliament rises for the recess.

We need to work out carefully not just commencement dates for tranche 2 but how we can work together to implement the various responsibilities that are coming our way. We will need legislation. The crucial issue is how we deliver on the powers that we get. We will work hand in glove with the committee and the UK

Government, so that we have a plan, in recognition of the fact that we have not done anything on this scale in the history of devolution.

Social Rented Housing (Tenants in Moderate Housing Need)

4. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that housing allocation in the social rented sector takes consideration of tenants in moderate housing need. (S5O-00064)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Under housing law, social landlords—that is, councils and housing associations—are responsible for the allocation of social housing in Scotland and are expected to allocate their housing on an objective assessment of housing need. In general, people with the greatest need will be given the highest priority. That is the right approach to allocating a limited resource.

We recognise that many people who would like social housing are having to wait a long time for a suitable house to become available. The Scottish Government is committed to preserving and expanding its social housing stock, as part of action to create a fairer society. That is why we legislated to end the right to buy on 1 August this year, which will prevent the sale of up to 15,500 houses over the next decade, and it is why we announced our bold and ambitious more homes Scotland approach, which will deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes, of which 70 per cent will be for social rent.

Bob Doris: People in moderate housing need can wait many years for an offer of a suitable home, given that people who are in greater housing need are—understandably—allocated homes first, on the priority basis to which the minister referred.

Everyone should have the prospect of having their housing needs met at some point in their life. Will the minister acknowledge the independence and flexibility that social housing providers have to give greater priority to the length of time spent on their housing waiting lists? What guidance or indeed recommendations exist on such flexibility? Some of my constituents will never, ever get a move, despite waiting for a long time. It is understandable that people in greater need can get a house and move in quickly, but other people are trapped for ever.

Kevin Stewart: Social landlords review their allocation policies periodically. In addition, when we implement the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, we will introduce changes to the law on allocations. We will publish guidance on the

provisions later this year, and social landlords will then need to review their allocation policies, to ensure that they can comply with the legislation when it comes into force. As part of that process, landlords will of course need to consult tenants and applicants about their allocation policies. Given that landlords will be doing that, we should allow some time to see what happens.

Social landlords can already give points for time spent on the waiting list, as long as that does not outweigh the points that are given for housing need. I recognise that some applicants are frustrated about having to wait a long time for an offer of housing, but I think that giving priority to people in greatest need is the right approach.

I reiterate that this Government is ensuring that we meet our ambitious target of 50,000 affordable homes, 35,000 of which will be for social rent. That will help some of the folk Mr Doris described.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Having rejected the United Kingdom Government's approach to underoccupancy, is the Scottish Government considering action of its own design to try to free up the vast amount of space in the social rented sector that is simply underoccupied?

Kevin Stewart: I am surprised to hear a member of this Parliament defend the bedroom tax. This Government will get rid of the bedroom tax as soon as we have the power to do so.

Housing associations and councils can take other measures to deal with folk who are in a house that is too big for their needs now. Some authorities have previously helped people with housing moves and offered grants for folk to move out of houses that have too many bedrooms for their needs. However, the Government will certainly not penalise the most vulnerable in our society with regressive policies such as the bedroom tax.

Proposed Planning Legislation

5. **Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its proposed planning legislation will ensure that new housing developments comply with the aspirations of the Scottish planning policy. (S5O-00065)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): We will introduce proposals for further planning reform, including a planning bill, later in the year. In the meantime, we expect development plans to reflect the Scottish planning policy and its commitment to enabling the delivery of new homes.

Ivan McKee: In the Robroyston area of my constituency, where work has begun on a 1,600-

house development, the local community is rightly concerned about the lack of clarity on the provision of local facilities in an area that already suffers from a lack of such provision. Is the Government minded to accept the recommendation of the independent review of the Scottish planning system, which states that we need

“An infrastructure first approach to planning and development”,

including the provision of local services and social facilities?

Angela Constance: We certainly agree that there need to be far stronger links between planning for housing and supporting infrastructure. Communities need far more than homes to live in, important though they are. In principle, we accept many of the recommendations of the independent review of planning, but we are considering all of them in more detail. Mr McKee talks about the infrastructure-first principle as an approach to planning and development. We will set out a full programme for planning reform later this year.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): With reference to the same report, and specifically the principle of

“Collaboration rather than conflict—inclusion and empowerment”,

will the Scottish Government consider reinstating the requirement for a local authority to notify the Government when its development or city plan has been breached? If not, what plans does the Scottish Government have to give communities alternative ways of addressing decisions that breach such plans so that they feel much more part of the system?

Angela Constance: Ms McNeill raises some important points. The purpose of the planning review was clear. Its time had come and there is cross-party consensus that we need to review how planning operates in Scotland, not least to ensure that we are able to achieve our ambitions on increasing the supply of affordable housing.

The point that Ms McNeill raises about community involvement and engagement is important. I was pleased that the independent planning review made some important recommendations on that. As we move forward, we will aim to get some early wins from the planning review, because not everything will require legislation. However, it will not be too far into the future before we are ready to respond in detail to the 48 recommendations that came from the review.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are not getting on very quickly, so I ask for shorter

supplementaries and shorter answers from ministers if possible.

We come to question 6. Your time has come, Mr Corry.

High Rents

6. Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. My apologies for my earlier intervention.

To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to tackle high rents. (S5O-00066)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): The most recent official statistics from the Office for National Statistics show that private rents in Scotland increased by 0.5 per cent over the year April 2015 to April 2016. The Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 will provide clarity and predictability in relation to rent increases, as rents will be able to rise only once in 12 months and tenants will have three months’ notice of changes to enable them to budget accordingly. In addition, councils will have the ability to apply to ministers for a cap on rent increases in their areas for up to five years.

The Scottish Government continues to value social housing with affordable rents, and gives it a high priority for funding because of the security and protection that it offers people who have low incomes or who are vulnerable in other ways. We are committed to building a further 50,000 affordable homes—70 per cent of those for social rent.

Maurice Corry: Does the Scottish Government agree that the best way forward is to solve the issue of high rents by tackling the housing shortage and building 100,000 new homes over the next five years?

Kevin Stewart: We are committed to building 50,000 affordable homes. As I pointed out to one of Mr Corry’s colleagues a few weeks ago, the 100,000 homes that were mentioned in a Conservative amendment—50,000 affordable homes from the Scottish Government and 50,000 in the private sector—would actually be a decrease on what has happened in recent times. Last year, the private sector built 12,000 homes in Scotland, and I hope that we will be able to build many, many homes across all tenures over the coming parliamentary session.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A quick supplementary please, Mr Findlay.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): During the election, the housing minister posed with a poster stating

“It’s time for rent controls”,

endorsing the living rent campaign. I welcome his public commitment to that. Will he today set out the timescale for the introduction of legislation to enact his pledge?

Kevin Stewart: The Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 addresses the problem of excessive rent rises for sitting tenants in the private rented sector. Local authorities will be able to apply to ministers to set a cap on rent increases for sitting tenants in areas where significant rent increases are having a detrimental impact on tenants. We should wait and see, analyse what happens when the powers come into play, and then take other decisions.

Post Offices (Town Centre Economies)

7. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of post offices on town centre economies. (S5O-00067)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): As was set out by the Minister for Business, Innovation and Skills in his written answer to Mr Bibby last month, the Scottish Government recognises and prioritises the importance of our town centres and local high streets through our town centre action plan. We also recognise the importance of post offices to local communities and economies in Scotland. Post offices and postal services are reserved and we have made it clear to both the UK Government and Post Office Ltd that they have a responsibility to ensure that the availability of existing services is maintained across Scotland.

Neil Bibby: The cabinet secretary is aware that Post Office Ltd is proposing to close Paisley Crown post office and move services into a W H Smith store. Thousands of customers have signed the Communication Workers Union's petition against the move, but concerns are not just limited to customers and staff; local businesses are concerned about the impact on the town centre economy from the reduction of footfall at the current location. Does the cabinet secretary share concerns about the impact that such proposals could have on town centres? Given her remit for town centres, will she speak to her ministerial colleagues and use the Scottish Government's influence to urge Post Office Ltd to reconsider this case?

Angela Constance: The Government is always more than willing to reiterate its views, either to Post Office Ltd or to the UK Government. We recognise that post offices are important to local communities and local economies. As local members, we have all experienced post offices closures or relocations in our constituencies. Relocations are obviously preferable to closures,

but Post Office Ltd needs to be transparent about what is driving the proposals for Paisley. I note the member's motion on that matter; it is crucial that local people are listened to and they deserve the facts and the opportunity to be part of a solution.

Occupational Segregation

8. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address occupational segregation. (S5O-00068)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): Occupational segregation is a complex and deep-rooted problem, but we are determined to make progress. That is why it is a top priority for the Government's developing the young workforce programme, which has set ambitious targets to increase the gender minority share in the most imbalanced college subjects groups and modern apprenticeship frameworks by 2021.

In addition, we are investing up to a total of £1.5 million over the next three academic years through the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council in a programme of quality projects across colleges and universities. We will also look to the new advisory council on women and girls to help us to identify what additional action we and others need to take to tackle this serious issue.

Alison Harris: Occupational segregation is one of the barriers that prevent women from fulfilling their potential in the labour market. It is vitally important that women have the opportunity to work in traditionally male-dominated industries. According to a report from Close the Gap, the latest figures show that the science, research, engineering and technology professions are 78 per cent male dominated. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that women have the opportunity to learn skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects to enable them to embark on careers in the science, research, engineering and technology sector?

Angela Constance: This is a subject that is close to my heart. Ms Harris is right to say that occupational segregation is a barrier to women either entering the labour market or reaching their full potential once they are in the labour market. It is also certainly a drag on economic growth.

It is important for us to have a system-wide and comprehensive response to the issue. I am sure that we will debate it in more detail during this afternoon's debate. However, I point the member to the important work that we are doing on developing the young workforce and challenging some of those stereotypes. Of course, we need to

start challenging such stereotypes much earlier, well before children get to secondary school.

I have touched on the work that the funding council and Skills Development Scotland are doing through their specific action plans.

It is important to recognise that entries and passes in STEM qualifications are increasing, although when we scrape down to the detail, we are concerned about computing science, for example. We have more women in our college sector studying science, maths and engineering, as well as more science undergraduates, but we do not dispute that there is still some way to travel.

Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare (Meeting)

9. Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what issues were discussed at the first meeting of the joint ministerial working group on welfare. (S5O-00069)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): In addition to what I said in my answer to Mr Beattie's question on our programme of work, we discussed commencement of 11 of the 13 welfare provisions in the Scotland Act 2016.

Richard Lyle: We have already seen the incredible uptake of the Government's Scottish welfare fund and the help that it offers to people in communities across Scotland. What is the projected impact on further social security provision as a consequence of the austerity agenda that the United Kingdom Government is pursuing?

Angela Constance: We know that the impact of austerity is severe. The previous UK Government's package of welfare reforms takes out £2.5 billion in 2015-16 alone. Today we published our annual report on welfare, which demonstrates the scale of the challenge and the squeeze in incomes as a result of austerity. We will always do what we can to protect people from the worst of those measures, but we have to recognise that we will gain powers over only 15 per cent of social security spend in Scotland and that 85 per cent spend will remain under Westminster's control. That means that we cannot redress all the unfairness in the current UK Government's system.

Waste Management Facilities (Planning Guidelines)

10. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it is giving to reviewing the planning guidelines on the proximity of waste management

facilities to residential areas and community facilities. (S5O-00070)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Scottish planning policy is clear that planning authorities should consider the need for buffer zones between dwellings or other sensitive receptors and certain waste management facilities. We have no plans to review the policy at this time.

Monica Lennon: I draw attention to my entry in the register of interests, which states that I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and an elected member of South Lanarkshire Council.

I am disappointed to hear the minister's answer. Will he undertake to meet me and my constituents in Whitehill in Hamilton, where a decision was taken by the Scottish Government to grant planning permission on appeal, which is out of step with the Government's own guidelines in Scottish planning policy? I note that there is to be a planning review and that there is a commitment to empower communities, but we have a fairly recent example of public trust being broken. That is very much a live issue. I would welcome the minister coming to my community to try to learn some lessons.

Kevin Stewart: I am happy to meet Ms Lennon to discuss the issue. However, paragraph 180 of Scottish planning policy is clear that development plans

"should enable investment opportunities in a range of technologies and industries to maximise the value of secondary resources".

I do not know all the ins and outs of the Whitehill decision, but I am willing to meet Ms Lennon. If she contacts my office, we will arrange that—possibly we could do it before the end of term.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I thank the minister for his answer, but it is actually Whitehill and it is in my constituency of Uddingston and Bellshill. What powers do local authorities have to recall decisions that have been made to grant planning permission for waste management facilities near residential areas and community facilities? What action can South Lanarkshire Council—I know that Monica Lennon is still a councillor in South Lanarkshire—take to recall the decision in this case?

Kevin Stewart: Planning authorities have powers to revoke planning permission under section 65 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. Where planning permission is proposed to be revoked, the agreement of the Scottish ministers is required. Where planning permission is revoked by planning authorities or the Scottish ministers, the planning authority is liable for any claim for compensation. Planning

authorities have the right to revoke planning permission.

Town Centres (Government Investment)

11. Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of the retail industry to discuss Government investment in town centres. (S5O-00071)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with the Scottish Retail Consortium and other partners, such as Scotland's towns partnership, to take collective action to revitalise Scotland's town centres. Most recently, officials attended the Scottish ratepayers forum meeting with the Scottish Retail Consortium on 20 June, when a number of issues were discussed, including investment in town centres.

Gordon Lindhurst: Given that answer, the cabinet secretary is no doubt aware of the concerning figures that the Scottish Retail Consortium has released showing that Scotland's high streets have seen a slump in sales, with falls across all retail categories of about 3.3 per cent year-on-year in April of this year. I realise that there has been a welcome slowdown in that drop just in the last month, but I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees that the Scottish Government should recognise the important contribution that town centres make. My supplementary question is therefore this: Will the Government today commit to supplementing the first two tranches of the town centre regeneration fund, which were originally successful in ensuring proper funding to continue essential services and shops in Scottish town centres?

Angela Constance: I am, indeed, aware of the figures that Gordon Lindhurst mentioned. It is important to recognise the work that was done on the town centre action plan, which was a result of the national review of town centres. The Scottish Retail Consortium was an important member of that review group. One of the main findings of that work was that town centre regeneration has to move beyond provision of retail to have a wider focus on public services and community enterprise that will complement the retail offer in a town. A wide range of actions are required, and they are not just actions by the Government.

I am conscious of time, Presiding Officer, and I am also conscious that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution is sitting just two seats away from me. Obviously, the Government will announce its spending plans in due course. However, we have invested a considerable amount in regeneration, and a lot of those regeneration funds are available to town centres.

There has also been targeted funding for town centres.

Local Government Budget Reductions

12. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what impact reductions in local government budgets are having on communities. (S5O-00072)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): The 2016-17 local government settlement funding package was focused firmly on the delivery of joint priorities to deliver sustainable economic growth, protect front-line services and support the most vulnerable in our communities. Those shared priorities will improve outcomes for local people.

We have protected the council tax freeze for a ninth year, thereby providing much-needed financial relief to vulnerable groups, in particular. We are investing £250 million in integrating services, and we are improving educational attainment by maintaining the pupil to teacher ratio in Scotland's schools. Taking into account the £250 million for health and social care integration, that means that the overall reduction in local authorities' total estimated expenditure is less than 1 per cent.

Neil Findlay: Jeezo! I do not know what planet the minister is living on. In communities across Scotland, bus services have been cut, jobs are being lost, community groups are losing funding and the educational attainment gap is growing. That is bad for our economy, for social cohesion and for the wellbeing of families, and—as always—it is the poor and vulnerable who suffer most. Will the minister commit today to making it clear to her cabinet colleagues that she will not tolerate any real-terms cut in her departmental budget?

Angela Constance: Of course, Mr Findlay is being his useful constructive self in respect of how he conducts himself in the chamber. I remind him that Councillor John McGinty, who is Labour leader of West Lothian Council, said on 18 February:

“we have a budget that focuses on and meets the needs of local people whilst protecting services that have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable members of our society”.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will recall that Neil Findlay abstained rather than voting for or against European Union membership when it was debated in the chamber last month.

Can the cabinet secretary tell us—for Mr Findlay's benefit—what the impact of Brexit is likely to be on Scotland's public finances, on top of

the cut of £1.5 billion in 2016-20 by his better together allies in the UK Tory Government? Does she share my astonishment at the litanies of the Tory MSPs who come here week in and week out demanding that more money be spent across the board when it is their Government that is cutting our budget?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson, your question is over.

Angela Constance: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that tax rises and spending cuts will be needed to deal with the economic impact of leaving the European Union, but he has stopped short of announcing an emergency budget. What is clear is that there will be an economic impact, which will feed through into public finances.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution is engaging closely with Her Majesty's Treasury and with counterparts in other devolved Administrations to further our economic interests. It is, of course, for Mr Findlay to account for the positions that he holds.

Housing (Building Rate)

13. Mairi Evans (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the rate of housebuilding in Scotland compares with the rest of the United Kingdom. (S5O-00073)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): The 15,954 new-build homes that were completed in Scotland in the 12 months to December 2015 equates to a rate of 297 homes built per 100,000 population. That rate is higher than all other areas of the United Kingdom, where the rate was 261 in England, 219 in Wales and 287 in Northern Ireland.

Over the lifetime of the previous session of Parliament, we surpassed our target by delivering 33,490 affordable homes, and within that 22,523 social homes including 5,992 council homes.

Since 2007, our sustained high level of house-building has enabled 41,000 more homes to be built under this Government than would have been built at England's lower per capita rate. That is the equivalent of a new town the size of Paisley.

Mairi Evans: Can the minister provide an update on how many jobs are expected to be supported by house-building schemes over the course of this parliamentary session?

Kevin Stewart: It is estimated that our 50,000 affordable homes target will support approximately 14,000 full-time equivalent jobs a year in the construction industry and related industries in Scotland over the next five years. In addition, it is estimated that our current help-to-buy scheme will support around 2,000 full-time equivalent jobs a

year in the construction industry and related industries in Scotland over its three-year lifespan.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The figure may well be higher in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom; nevertheless, Scotland has a housing crisis that needs to be tackled. The Government has committed itself to building 35,000 social rented houses over the next five years. Can the minister advise whether the Government has a national house-building plan in place to deliver those houses, how many of them will be built this year and what planning is taking place to ensure that those much-needed houses will be built year on year?

Kevin Stewart: Our more homes Scotland approach is bringing all aspects together to ensure the delivery of those 50,000 affordable homes—35,000 of them for social rent—over the parliamentary session. I assure Mr Rowley that I am having conversations with our partners day and daily to ensure that our ambitious target is met.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That ends portfolio question time. I ask members to note that we managed only 13 questions because of the length of questions and the length of responses from Government ministers. I ask members to think on that over the summer.

Provisional Outturn 2015-16

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a statement by Derek Mackay on the provisional outturn 2015-16. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement. There should, therefore, be no interventions or interruptions.

14:41

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): I welcome the opportunity to update Parliament on the provisional budget outturn for the 2015-16 financial year. Before I do so, I will address the outcome of last week's European Union referendum as it relates to the public finances.

First, no one can deny the significance of last week's events for our economy, our communities and, indeed, our constitution. At such a time, it is imperative that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament work together to demonstrate to those whom we serve that we will continue to manage the public finances competently and in their interests. I commit to working with all members—particularly those on the Finance Committee—to ensure that that aim is achieved. I welcomed the opportunity for discussion at the committee this morning.

Secondly, we cannot consider the public finances in isolation from the wider economy, particularly in the light of the devolution of fiscal powers through the Scotland Act 2016. The First Minister has made it clear that we will take all necessary steps to stabilise and grow Scotland's economy, and that will be a guiding principle in the actions that I will take in managing the Scottish budget. Scotland is a vibrant country that values greatly the contribution that those from other countries make, and it presents excellent opportunities for investment and to do business both now and in the future. The Scottish Government is already engaging closely with the business community, delivery partners and a range of other stakeholders to underline our commitment to key programmes, particularly around support for the economy and public services.

Finally, I assure Parliament that the Scottish Government will engage closely with Her Majesty's Treasury and our counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland over the coming months to work together in the interests of our economies and public finances. However, as the First Minister has said, we will also seek direct engagement with EU leaders and institutions to further the interests of the people of Scotland.

With a forthcoming change of Prime Minister, it is not clear what a future United Kingdom Government's fiscal plans will be. The chancellor has said that there will not now be an emergency budget, which is to be welcomed, but we must not be complacent and assume that nothing will change. It will, therefore, be important to take appropriate time to consider and be ready to respond. I will consequently urge my counterparts in the UK Government to reflect very carefully on the impact of continuing austerity on our economy, our public services and our communities. We have a duty to be prudent and provide stability at this time. Although there may be no emergency budget, there will inevitably be budget adjustments by a new UK Government, the scale of which we do not know.

I turn to the provisional outturn for 2015-16. Financial year 2015-16 represented the final year of the 2010 UK spending review settlement that saw the Scottish Government's discretionary budget fall by almost 10 per cent in real terms and, within that, the capital budget fall by almost a quarter. It also represented the first year in which the Scottish Parliament became responsible for landfill tax and the land and buildings transaction tax. In being the first finance minister in Scotland for more than 300 years to set national taxes, my predecessor adopted a fair and progressive approach to rates and bands. That prudent and principles-based approach to taxation is one that I plan to replicate over the course of this session of Parliament.

Under the current devolution settlement, the Scottish Parliament is not allowed to overspend its budget. As a consequence, we have consistently adopted a position of controlling public expenditure to ensure that we live within the budget caps that apply, but remain able to carry forward some spending power resources for a future year. That prudent strategy has proved to be the right one, particularly in light of last Friday's events.

In 2015-16, the Scottish Government has therefore once again demonstrated a sound grip on the public finances. I can report that, within the fiscal departmental expenditure limit—fiscal DEL—representing the resources over which this Parliament has discretion, the provisional outturn for 2015-16 is expenditure of £29,160 million against a limit of £29,275 million. That means that there is a fiscal DEL cash underspend of £75 million in resource spending and £40 million in capital spending, which represents just 0.4 per cent of the total fiscal DEL budget. Both those sums are carried forward into 2016-17.

There is also a provisional outturn underspend of £40 million in respect of financial transactions that, through rules set by HM Treasury, are ring

fenced for loans and equity investment outside the public sector. Again, that is carried forward into 2016-17.

Overall, including financial transactions, that means that we will be carrying forward 0.5 per cent of the total 2015-16 cash budget. Those sums are carried forward using HM Treasury's budget exchange facility that was agreed in the last spending review. That will ensure that there is no loss of spending power to the Scottish Parliament.

Given the considerable uncertainty that has now been created as a result of the EU referendum vote, I do not intend to rush immediate decisions on the deployment of these resources. Instead, I will consider their deployment when it is appropriate to do so, taking account of prevailing economic conditions and in full consideration of need and spending pressures.

I turn to the non-discretionary elements of our budget—the non-cash DEL provision—which, I remind Parliament once again, cannot be used to purchase goods or deliver public services. Based on the provisional outturn position, expenditure is lower than budget by £130 million, which is consistent with previous years. As the description suggests, these resources are not cash in nature; rather, they provide very specific budget cover for differences between estimated accounting adjustments and the final amounts calculated. Over £80 million of the total relates to a lower than expected write-down of the carrying value of the income-contingent repayment student loan book. That is an accounting adjustment and has no cash consequences. Other uses for that budget include the depreciation and impairment of assets, all of which have no cash consequences.

Finally, under devolved powers from the Scotland Act 2012, and as I have already indicated, 2015-16 was the first year in which devolved taxes in respect of LBTT have been managed in Scotland. A total of £572 million has been collected, some £74 million above the initial estimates. Again, recognising the uncertainty that has been created in the economy, I have also decided to take a prudent view of the deployment of those resources. I am mindful, in particular, of the impact of the EU referendum decision on property transactions and the need to manage potential volatility in future tax revenues.

The additional taxes will therefore be placed in the Scottish cash reserve—a new facility, created by the 2012 act, that allows excess tax receipts above forecasts to be held for later deployment. That will allow me to have greater flexibility and to carry those resources forward into 2016-17 and potentially beyond, if necessary. I set out my thinking on the budget and spending review process earlier today, and I will consider the

deployment of those tax receipts as part of that process.

This statement of the 2015-16 provisional outturn reflects the position against HM Treasury budgetary controls, and it will be followed by reporting on the final outturn against the 2015-16 budget act limits in a suite of annual accounts that together report on the total Scottish budget approved by the Scottish Parliament.

The annual accounts of the Scottish Government and of all the individual bodies that are funded from the Scottish budget will report on their expenditure compared with the budget act allocation. The annual Scottish Government consolidated accounts and a statement of total outturn for the financial year 2015-16 against the final budget for the Scottish Administration as a whole will be provided to the Scottish Parliament later this year.

As we enter a period of considerable uncertainty for individuals and businesses, it is incumbent on the Government and Parliament to demonstrate strong leadership in managing the public finances. We have entered a period of considerable financial and economic turbulence in what was already a challenging climate. The Government's continuing competence in the management of the public finances has once again been demonstrated in our management of the 2015-16 budget. That prudent approach has served us well, so we must not make any rash decisions now. To do so would risk our ability to respond to as-yet-unknown events.

I therefore commend today's figures to Parliament and very much hope that members will join me in commending the approach that we are taking.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for that, after which we will move to the next item of business. As a lot of members wish to ask questions, I ask that questions and answers be succinct.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement and for advance sight of it.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments on the need for stability in the wake of last week's referendum result. The economic fundamentals in the United Kingdom are sound, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear earlier this week. Now that a decision has been made, I hope that the cabinet secretary would agree that it is important that all politicians avoid whipping up hysteria about the consequences of leaving the EU. I hope that he would also accept that, with the rest of the UK accounting for 64 per cent of

Scottish exports and Europe accounting for just 15 per cent of them, the greater risk to the Scottish economy comes from any plans that the Government might have for a second independence referendum.

I have two specific questions for the cabinet secretary. One of the largest departmental underspends is in the Government's priority area of education and lifelong learning, where there is an underspend of some £90 million in cash. Will the cabinet secretary explain how that figure has been arrived at?

The cabinet secretary mentioned LBTT. He will know that the revenues from domestic LBTT are some £33 million lower than originally estimated, and that is not entirely explained by the forestalling that occurred at the start of the year. I ask this question not merely because I am in the process of moving house. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is time to look again at LBTT rates to see whether a reduction in certain levels might increase the tax take?

Derek Mackay: I thank Murdo Fraser for his questions. I thought that it was interesting that, having asked me to provide reassurance and calm in this time of uncertainty, he started whipping up fears and engaging in a bit more scaremongering on the prospect of another referendum.

I revert back to what I did at this morning's meeting of the Finance Committee, which is to say that the First Minister has explained our constitutional position and the aims and objectives that we are pursuing. Of course I want to provide stability and calm. The Government has been very proactive in engaging with stakeholders in an effort not just to calm people on the position in Scotland but to seize the opportunities that may well exist.

As far as doom and gloom is concerned, it was the chancellor, George Osborne, who outlined a number of the risks to the economy of leaving the EU, and some of that is turning out to be accurate. We all have a shared responsibility to deliver the best that we can for Scotland, its people and its economy.

On education specifically, as is the case with every budget line, there is detail behind the line. I can give more information to the member—or any other member—but, as an example of what happened with part of the underspend in education that the member cited, £50 million of accumulated Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council reserves were transferred back to the Scottish Government through cash demand changes with no loss of spending power to the higher and further education sectors. That is quite a substantial figure, and I think that it gives a sense of how

some of this is more of an accounting exercise rather than a loss of spending power. Of course, education continues to be a priority for the Government, and we are proposing additional resources for it.

Secondly, on the point of general tax, surely even the Conservatives will welcome the fact that we have generated more income than we had forecast. However, I will work on a more consensual basis and look at LBTT rates. I think that the Government had always committed to carrying out a review after the first full year; that was welcomed by stakeholders, and I am happy to commit to taking an inclusive approach to looking at the levels of taxation and the rates to ensure that we have got them right. Given that we have exceeded our forecast, though, it is fair to say that so far we have done an effective job with the new devolved taxes that have come our way.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's words on the impact of the EU referendum. I also reassure him that the priority of Labour members will be to focus on jobs, the economy and workers' rights and that where we can support the Government we will.

In answer to a recent written question, the finance secretary advised me that the Scottish Fiscal Commission would not be producing its own independent forecasts until the summer of 2017 and that in the meantime the Government would continue to produce its own forecasts. Does the cabinet secretary have any plans to revisit that decision in light of last week's referendum results, and is he currently confident that he has the data that he needs to monitor and assess the impact of Brexit on Scotland's economy?

Derek Mackay: There is now a great deal of uncertainty in the economy that was not there before and it is for that reason that, as I outlined to the Finance Committee this morning, we have to look more closely at budgetary timescales. We are dependent on a number of forecasts, some of which come from the UK Government and some of which come from the Office for Budget Responsibility. The Scottish Fiscal Commission will act in an advisory capacity before it takes up its fuller functions. I also addressed the issue of capacity and support for the commission at today's Finance Committee meeting.

I am therefore satisfied that I have as much data as can be given at this time. Despite the new level of uncertainty that has been generated, we will work very hard not only in the reciprocal arrangements with the UK Government but with the other devolved Administrations to put ourselves on the strongest possible footing, to understand the impact of the proposed exit and to respond.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):

Given that the variation is only 5 per cent of total fiscal DEL, the figures show commendably tight financial management. However, as both of the previous questions have pointed out, there are troubles ahead, and it is obviously right for all options to be examined.

With regard to those options, I wonder whether the cabinet secretary will say a little more about the cash reserve process. It is encouraging to know that we now have the opportunity to create that reserve, but it would be useful to know the conditions under which it can be used and his policies and plans for using it, should that become necessary.

Derek Mackay: It is fair to say that I have inherited a strong position from my predecessor. The 0.5 per cent underspend is welcome, given that resources that are carried forward can be deployed in any way that we think appropriate. That is why I am not making any spending announcements today, just days after the Brexit decision and in light of the uncertainty that exists.

When we raise more tax than has been forecast, we are allowed to put that money into the cash reserve. That is what I am proposing to do, and we can draw on that as and when required. However, the constitutional position and the financial and fiscal position of the Scottish Government and the Parliament will continue to evolve as the Scotland Act 2016 is fully implemented. We have increasingly more flexibility to use the carry-forward and, indeed, the cash reserve.

The kinds of issues that we would want to consider would include our not meeting income targets in future. That might happen because of the impact on the property market, which in turn might impact on LBTT, or indeed the impact on income tax, on which we will be more heavily reliant.

I will consider the taxes that are generated, the pressures on public expenditure, and how we respond to the pressure on our country as a consequence of the outcome of the referendum while pursuing the Government's objectives.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I note from the supporting documents an overspend of £128 million under health, wellbeing and sport. Does that reflect the growing problem of deficits in a number of Scottish health boards? Does that outstanding high figure indicate a growing problem that may destabilise budgets in coming years?

Derek Mackay: No, I do not think that that is a fair characterisation at all. As with the education question, I am happy to give more information—an

almost line-by-line analysis—specifically on that particular issue.

On the particular spend on health, there has been an issue around Office for National Statistics classification and there have been other matters that relate to capital. It is very important that we focus on the detail and understanding the difference between revenue and capital. I am happy to write to the member with a fuller position.

I am sure that, with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, we will pay close attention to those matters, but I do not accept that characterisation. There are specific classification issues on which I am happy to give information in much fuller detail to the member if that would be of assistance.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):

Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the Scottish cash reserves can and will be used to support our public finances and public services during this period of economic turbulence, which has been caused entirely by the shambolic UK Tory Government?

Derek Mackay: It must be reassuring that we have the ability to carry forward any underspend. That was not always the case.

The figures are only provisional. We will be able to draw on the specific cash reserve, and we have a great deal of flexibility. It is right not to rush to new spending decisions, but to take a prudent and cautious approach in light of circumstances and use the mechanic of the financial flexibility that the Government now has.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I note from the documentation that has been provided that there is a £67 million cash underspend in the communities portfolio, which includes housing. That comes on the back of yesterday's statistics, which show that more than 5,000 children stay in temporary accommodation. I am sure that, like me, the cabinet secretary finds that unacceptable. I ask him to look at how the cash reserve can be managed to address that situation and ensure that our children do not stay in vulnerable and insecure situations.

Derek Mackay: I think that that was the first, immediate bid for access to the cash reserve—it was only a matter of time. We will, of course, consider all those issues when we take forward our spending proposals through the budget. We will do so earlier than that if that is required. I take very seriously the challenge that has been identified. In supporting people through this period of austerity and through difficult times, we will, of course, be very mindful of the choices that we make with the available resources.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of the statement.

Normally, there might be great value in having a relatively low level of underspend, but we face the strong possibility in the future of further cuts from Westminster and increased procurement costs right across the public sector as a result of the low value of the pound. Would it be useful to assess the impact on procurement costs in the public sector as a result of that circumstance? Has the Government begun to undertake such an exercise?

Derek Mackay: Mr Harvie is right to raise that as one of many issues of uncertainty that we will have to wrestle with. The situation will have an impact on procurement and borrowing costs and will inevitably lead to impacts on the capital plan and the other choices that we will be able to make.

We are looking at a range of analyses, and it is clear that some of the impact is as yet unknown as the markets settle. We are actively looking at the area along with a whole host of funding streams that deliver services in Scotland, many of which relate to EU funds, of course. We will have to consider all those matters in the round.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): What measures will the Scottish Government take to support economic growth and help Scotland to weather the economic shocks caused by Brexit?

Derek Mackay: The Government has outlined its economic strategy, which includes a focus on internationalisation, innovation and infrastructure-led recovery, and clearly all those things will be impacted by the outcome of the referendum. We will continue to focus on delivering the manifesto on which we were elected. We have made some announcements on the review of the enterprise agencies, which will continue to enable infrastructure investment, including digital infrastructure. We have a competitive rates scheme and we will continue to deliver on modern apprenticeships.

We will look at how we can support the economy, deliver stability and take advantage of any opportunity that may exist in these uncertain times.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing an advance copy of his statement.

Can the cabinet secretary provide some information as to why the financial transaction arrangements budget has been more underspent this year than in previous years? He rightly warns us of the potential cuts that might result from Brexit. Will he therefore reconsider the Government's approach to the use of income tax

powers? He talked of using all necessary means in order to deal with the troubles ahead, so will he consider a more expansive use of the income tax powers?

Derek Mackay: Some of the financial transactions underspend might be to do with the uptake of particular schemes and the complexity around that. I would be happy to provide the member with further information.

We will have to take a strategic approach to the budget process. When I engaged with the Finance Committee this morning, I put my view that we should bring a one-year budget to Parliament because I do not think that a three-year spending review would be wise in the circumstances.

When I approach the budget process, I will engage with all political parties and hear what they have to say on spending and tax choices. We outlined our position on tax during the Scottish Parliament election and we were elected on that mandate. However, given the current degree of uncertainty, we will have to look at the financial pressures that we face and the decisions made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer—whether George Osborne or his successor. We will have to consider the autumn statement to see what tax and spending decisions the United Kingdom Government makes and what their impact will be on Scotland.

We aim to see through the manifesto on which we were elected, but I am happy to engage with all political parties to secure the passage of the budget through Parliament.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the competence of the Government in managing public finances. A significant number of cost overruns have been experienced recently in information technology and other projects overseen by the Government and its agencies, including the system for European Union farm payments, the NHS 24 project and Police Scotland's IT project. Can the cabinet secretary confirm the total amount of additional expenditure made by the Government and its agencies as a result of those overruns?

Derek Mackay: I do not have such a figure to hand. We take very seriously our duty to look after the public finances, to deliver solid public services and to deliver sound procurement. I am happy to discuss further some of the challenges that we have had in relation to some of those schemes. Where there have been challenges we have tried to recover the position to deliver the best that we can for the people of Scotland. In all the areas that

have been identified we are working very hard to recover our position.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Before I ask my question, I briefly mention that the First Minister has appointed me to serve the Scottish Parliament as the parliamentary liaison officer for the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution.

Brexit poses a number of specific challenges in relation to the forecasting of tax revenues. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that we continue to manage tax volatility during these turbulent times?

Derek Mackay: I have engaged with the chancellor, the UK Government and Her Majesty's Treasury. There is a reciprocal arrangement around information and a degree of pragmatic co-operation, because our position is still dependent on a number of UK factors. The specific decisions that I have taken and brought to Parliament today around the use of the underspend and the allocation to the cash reserve shows that we are taking a sound, prudent and cautious approach, and giving ourselves the ability, as a Government and as a Parliament, to respond in due course.

On forecasts, given the level of uncertainty, a number of things will change. We do not yet know the impact on our devolved taxes, never mind the impact on the UK taxes. However, it was the chancellor who said that he thought that the UK would be poorer, that taxes would be likely to go up and that public spending would be likely to go down. Knowing that austerity will be prolonged is very concerning for us all.

We will make the best assessment that we can, and I will come back to Parliament. Fundamentally, we will make the right decisions to deliver stability and to offer protection in very challenging circumstances.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I note Dean Lockhart's question about the general cost of IT project overruns. Within the rural affairs, food and the environment budget line, I note £46 million-worth of overspend in financial transactions. We note with concern the issues that have been faced with the administration of common agricultural policy payments. Does the cabinet secretary have details of the amount that is attributable to the issues faced by that department—or indeed figures for other items in that budget line?

Derek Mackay: Again, I am happy to engage on the fine detail of that issue. The £54 million overspend on financial transactions reflects the loans in respect of the less favoured area support scheme, which will be recouped in 2016-17. I am happy to come back on the detail of that portfolio

rather than take even more time now to explain it across the chamber.

Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): What steps will the Scottish Government take to provide businesses with reassurance and certainty during the current precarious economic climate to help ensure that we continue to attract investment and build a strong and competitive Scottish economy?

Derek Mackay: First, we want to ensure our continuing place in the EU and to seek the opportunities that that would bring for Scotland. We will engage with business stakeholders. Indeed, just hours after the referendum result, cabinet secretaries were engaging in meetings and dialogue with key stakeholders not only to provide that stability and reassurance, but to hear from them about what else we could do to give further support at this time.

Scotland's economy is fundamentally strong and there are great opportunities ahead, despite the uncertainty that has been created. We will continue to recalibrate our efforts to deliver that stability and economic opportunity, and although the climate in which we are operating has changed, we will also continue to deliver on the Government's economic strategy, which has been outlined to Parliament. I will continue to engage with all relevant parties to take forward our agenda.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Thank you very much. That ends questions on the statement. I will allow a minute or so for a changeover on the front benches.

Gender and the Workplace

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-00607, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on gender and the workplace.

15:14

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): I am pleased to open the debate—the first that I have opened as the Minister for Employability and Training—on a subject as important as gender equality and the workplace is. I think that I am right in saying that, to a great extent, the subject unifies—as it should—rather than divides our Scottish Parliament.

Progress has been made and continues to be made, but women in Scotland continue to face a multitude of barriers and inequalities in relation to the labour market. Challenging those inequalities will be a priority for the Government.

Scotland's economy rests on the talents of our people. I am sure that we all agree, as an Administration and collectively as a Parliament, that we can have a fully participative economy only by harnessing our collective strengths so that we can be more productive, more innovative and more successful.

To truly maximise our country's potential, we must break down the barriers to work that women experience. Women are the focus of the debate, but it applies to other groups, too, including people from ethnic minority communities, disabled people and people who have experienced economic deprivation. Many individuals fall into more than one of those groups, which opens them up to multiple barriers.

On Monday, the Scottish Government published a research paper called "New Perspectives on the Gender Pay Gap: Trends and Drivers". One of the key findings of the research is that the pay gap differs greatly by age group and is a particular problem for older workers. The paper reinforces much of what we know about the causes of the gender pay gap, including occupational segregation, discrimination and the inequality in unpaid care responsibilities between men and women.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I am pleased that the minister referred to older workers, and to older women workers in particular. All the briefings that we have had show a big deficit in research on policy. Will he address that in this parliamentary session?

Jamie Hepburn: I know that the parliamentary session has been going for a while, but this is my

first opportunity to welcome Ms McNeill back to Parliament. I do that now, if it is not already somewhat late in the day to do so.

I will always be open minded about suggestions on where we could do additional work to fill gaps in the data that we collect. I am happy to reflect further on Pauline McNeill's point. If she wants to contact me directly, I will be happy to respond to her.

The research paper also provides us with reflections on the prevailing attitudes to the roles of men and women in relation to work and the home. The first point, which is something for us to welcome, is the substantial reduction in the full-time and overall pay gaps in Scotland over the long term. The overall pay gap, which relates to all full-time and part-time workers, stands at 16.8 per cent. That is still too high, but it is down from 26.6 per cent in 1997. The full-time pay gap in 2015 was 7.3 per cent, which is 2.1 percentage points lower than the United Kingdom figure for the same year, and is down significantly from 18.4 per cent in 1997. There has been considerable positive progress.

However, if there is one word that is used to describe the gender pay gap time and again, it is "persistent", so although we welcome the progress, we are not complacent. We are clear that achieving gender equality in the workplace will require action on lots of fronts. One such area, which I mentioned a few moments ago, is occupational segregation—the concentration of men in higher-paying employment and of women in lower-paying job sectors and industries. It is arguably one of the biggest drivers of the pay gap, and that is reflected in Alex Rowley's amendment. I say at this early stage that we will be very happy to support that amendment this evening. I hope that the rest of Parliament will join us in that.

Occupational segregation is not easy to address. The process whereby men and women are channelled into different jobs starts early—perhaps from birth, when gender stereotypes start to be imbedded. That happens not maliciously or nefariously, but perhaps unconsciously, so rooted are traditional ideas about what is gender-appropriate in our society. If we are honest with ourselves, it is something that probably all of us are guilty of perpetuating in that unconscious manner, in small ways—for example, the language that we use and the toys that we buy for our children.

Gender constructs start very early and are easily carried into and through a child's education and into adulthood. That is why challenging the gender stereotypes that lead girls and boys to feel that they cannot study some subjects or do some particular forms of employment is vital. It is essential that we challenge such stereotypes, so

we are seeking to do that on a number of fronts, with the help of our partners. It is a top priority for the Government's developing the young workforce programme, and we have set ambitious targets to increase the gender minority share in the most imbalanced college subject groups and modern apprentice frameworks by 2021. We are investing £1.5 million over the next three academic years, through the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, in a programme of equality projects across Scottish colleges and universities.

We will continue to support third sector partners, including Equate Scotland and Close the Gap, to support recruitment, retention and return of women in sectors where they are underrepresented; to encourage workplace cultures and practices that support gender equality; and to help young people to challenge gender stereotypes in subject choices and careers.

We are also taking decisive action to combat pregnancy and maternity discrimination. That follows a report that was published last year by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which revealed that every year one in nine new mothers is forced out of her job as a result of pregnancy and maternity discrimination. We would do well to reflect on the fact that that is not only totally and utterly unacceptable but is against the law.

I am therefore happy to announce to Parliament that I will personally chair a working group to identify action to tackle that unacceptable discrimination, including by developing guidelines for employers to ensure that they meet their obligations. The group will work with NHS Health Scotland to ensure that work environments are safe and healthy for pregnant women and new mothers, and to provide employment rights information for pregnant women at first contact. I will be very happy to speak with any member of this Parliament who has a particular interest in the area, if they want further details, and to keep Parliament informed of that working group's work, as it moves forward.

Inequality in the context of unpaid care is another underlying driver of the pay gap between men and women. Women are more likely to work part time, juggling responsibilities for caring for children or grandchildren, or for disabled or elderly family members, friends or neighbours. The impact of the disproportionate shouldering of caring responsibilities by women is highlighted in the report, "An Investigation of Pensioner Employment", which was published on Monday. The researchers considered the experience of working pensioners and found that female pensioners tend to work in lower-skilled jobs than their male counterparts, which is likely to be the

result of their balancing of work and caring commitments.

That is not necessarily a new finding, but what is interesting in the context of the gender pay gap is how ingrained in society traditional attitudes about the roles of women and men are. According to social attitudes surveys, there remains a persistent general view that women, rather than men, should make the compromises that are necessary to balance family and work—and that view is shared by women and men.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I am very interested in the minister's comments about unpaid carers. Given the legacy from the previous parliamentary session and the new powers that are coming to this Parliament from the Department for Work and Pensions, will the Government or the Social Security Committee consider the unpaid-care aspect of proposals? For example, an unpaid carer could be looked on more favourably if they had been late for an appointment and sanctions were being considered.

Jamie Hepburn: We need to remember that not all this area will become the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament; I do not want to give unpaid carers out there the impression that we will be able to do absolutely everything. However, having been the minister with responsibility for Scottish Government policy on carers, I can say that we have a good track record of doing what we can to support unpaid carers. Parliament passed the Carers (Scotland) Bill earlier this year; it will be for my colleague Aileen Campbell to implement the legislation. Where we have control and responsibility, we will do what we can to support Scotland's unpaid carers better.

The prevailing view among men and women—that women should make the compromises that are necessary to balance family and work—has interesting consequences for how improvements in family-friendly working policies and flexible working opportunities might impact on the pay gap. If it is predominantly women who take advantage of such opportunities, it is conceivable that the overall pay gap will widen, rather than narrow. Of course, that does not mean that we will stop promoting family-friendly practices and flexible working opportunities. Far from it—it will continue to be a priority, because it is incredibly important if we are to address the pay gap that is experienced by older female workers and female pensioners who want to continue to work. However, we should also support men in accessing such opportunities. We should encourage both women and men to return to work after a break, if that is their choice. The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 should make a difference in that regard.

We have announced that we will trial a new women returners project to help women to get back to work after a career break. The project aims to address the issue by working with employers to put in place the right training and processes to support women to make the transition back into the workplace, if that is their choice.

Ms White asked how we will use the new powers. We are using the new powers that have been transferred through the Scotland Act 2016 to remove fees for employment tribunals because a strong legal framework protects women—and, indeed, all workers—only if they can access justice.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is coming into his last minute. He has already taken interventions. However, if it is a brief one, I have no difficulty with his taking it, if he has no difficulty with that.

Jamie Hepburn: No—by all means.

Liam Kerr: I thank Jamie Hepburn for his largesse. Is the minister aware that Unison has so far made two applications for judicial review of tribunal fees, both of which the High Court has dismissed because there was insufficient evidence that the drop in claims since the introduction of fees was due to inability to pay?

Jamie Hepburn: I am sure that the member thought that that was a tremendously clever question. No, is the answer; I was not aware of that fact, but through my work with the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth unemployed workers centre—which is an important organisation that is based in my constituency—I am aware of the tremendously negative impact that the introduction of the fees has had on the ability of low-paid workers to access justice. We will stand by the move that we have taken.

We will continue to champion the living wage, which helps women, who account for 65 per cent of employees who earn less than the living wage. Right now, working with the Poverty Alliance, we have more than 550 accredited living-wage employers in Scotland, and we aim to reach 1,000 by the autumn of 2017. The Scottish Government, of course, pays the living wage to everyone who is covered by its pay policy. This is probably an appropriate juncture to set out that that is the reason why we will not support the amendment in the name of Ms Wells, which says that we should welcome

“the UK Government’s introduction of the national living wage”.

We know that it is anything but the living wage. It is a con trick; it is not the living wage that has been set by the Living Wage Foundation, which is the living wage that we will stand by and continue to pay so that low-paid workers—especially low-paid women—can benefit from it.

We will continue to do all that we can, make every effort and take every stride to reduce the gender pay gap and ensure that women have the same opportunities as men in the Scottish workplace.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government publication, *New Perspectives on the Gender Pay Gap*, which shows that the gender pay gap is lower than in the UK and has reduced substantially over the long term, recognises that a significant gap persists for some age groups, sectors and occupations and explores key drivers such as inequality of unpaid care, traditional social or employment attitudes and culture; notes the wide range of Scottish Government policies designed to help close the gap and benefit women in the workplace, including encouraging payment of the living wage, increasing free childcare, challenging pregnancy and maternity discrimination, addressing occupational segregation, working towards gender balance on boards and promoting family-friendly and flexible working; agrees with the establishment of an advisory council for women and girls; welcomes the addition to the National Performance Framework of the new national indicator tracking the gender pay gap over time, and commends the work of the Strategic Group on Women and Work for helping bring this agenda forward across the various sectors of the Scottish economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I gave the minister some extra time for taking interventions.

15:32

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I welcome, as I am sure many people do, Scottish politics’ strong engagement with the issues of gender equality. Scotland’s largest three parties are now led by women—Ruth Davidson, Nicola Sturgeon and Kezia Dugdale—and, as Ruth Davidson showed last week in the televised debate, women can be as formidable as any man.

However, I am not so naive as to think that everything is hunky-dory. There is much more to do to promote gender equality in public life. Female employment figures in Scotland are at a record high of 71 per cent—second only to Sweden—but I will discuss more complex forms of inequality in the workplace. To address such inequality, we need to look at the lack of women in science, technology, engineering and maths, at the gender pay gap and at inflexible and unaffordable childcare.

As it stands, women are still underrepresented in a variety of spheres. Although female employment recently hit record highs in Scotland, women make up only 36 per cent of public boards,

less than 35 per cent of MSPs and 24 per cent of councillors. As Equate Scotland does much to publicise and address, women continue to be underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and maths. For example, in 2014, only 3 per cent of engineering modern apprentices were female, and a recent Education Scotland report found that girls represented a mere 20 per cent of entries for higher computing. That is why I am pleased to see the Scottish Conservatives' support for the Royal Society of Chemistry's endeavour to get STEM specialists in primary schools.

There is still a sizeable pay gap between men and women. Women managers earn on average 22 per cent less than their male equivalents and, across the UK, a woman earns on average 80p for every £1 earned by a man. That is why I welcome the UK Government's proposal to push businesses with more than 250 employees to publish the difference in earnings between average male and female employees. We are lucky as MSPs to work in an environment where pay is transparent and fair. Unfortunately, that does not apply everywhere.

The likes of Norway, Belgium, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain have all introduced mandatory gender quotas; supporters claim that they speed up women's representation where it is developing too slowly and provide a positive counterbalance to existing discrimination. So, what is not to like? I believe that gender quotas are not the best tool to achieve equality and diversity, for a number of reasons. First, positive discrimination of that sort runs the risk of alienating women who have achieved their positions on merit. Quotas may foster attitudes that women have been successful only because of quotas, rather than because they have been recognised for their achievements. Quotas tend to drive the wrong behaviour, fulfilling targets but masking and ignoring underlying problems in organisational attitudes and infrastructure.

Gender quotas can have unintentional negative effects that entrench gender inequality. That is most clearly seen in Norway, where a small number of women sit on multiple public boards in order to fulfil the gender quota commitment of 40 per cent. That has led to a small group being nicknamed "golden skirts". A recent study showed that, over a period of four years, eight women had more than 16 directorship appointments, compared with only two men. That only serves to aid a very narrow group of women rather than securing wider benefits. It has also been shown that stock prices and asset values dropped following the introduction of quotas in Norway, and that it led to younger, less experienced and less capable boards.

Nor are gender quotas supported by British businesses. A recent study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found that 60 per cent thought that mandatory quotas should not be introduced. Several respondents felt that mandatory quotas could result in a numbers game rather than addressing the real issues concerning female progression to senior roles. I share the view that quotas lead to the glossing over of structural problems once the box has been ticked and targets have been met.

The factor against quotas that I find most convincing is that they undermine women's confidence in their own abilities, as colleagues presume that they have reached their positions only because of gender, rather than on merit. Studies by the psychologist Heilman between the mid-80s and mid-2000s found that women who were explicitly identified as being hired under quotas were generally seen to be less competent and deserving of their positions. That applied even where it could be demonstrated that they were as competent and qualified as their male colleagues.

The work of the UK's Davies commission has shown that a voluntary, business-led approach can be successful instead of using mandatory quotas. There are now no all-male boards in the FTSE 100 and there has been no shortage of experienced, capable women to fill those seats. Women on Boards UK now counts nearly 10,000 aspiring women in its network. Executive search companies have adopted a second voluntary code to promote transparent and fair recruitment practices. All those have been achieved without the need to rely on mandatory quotas.

There are clear alternatives to mandatory quotas in order to boost female representation. Promoting good work-life balance is crucial to ensuring that both women and men can thrive in organisations. Accessible and affordable childcare arrangements are a critical part of that, as I have referenced in my amendment. The Scottish Government's plans to double childcare for three and four-year-olds—to 30 hours a week—is fantastic in theory, but hours are split into blocks of three hours and ten minutes. For the majority who live hectic lives, and for anyone working nine-to-five or shift patterns like I did in retail, the numbers—although high—are unworkable. The Glasgow-based campaign group fair funding for our kids has worked tirelessly to highlight that issue. The group began its focus in Glasgow and now champions reform countrywide; it argues that families are not able to make the most of their entitlements because of the unsuitable hours that are offered by most council nurseries.

We need innovation such as that in Sweden, which uses a childcare credit or voucher system. Parents should be able to use their hours how

they wish, using a mixture of private, local authority and partnership care. That is the only way in which we will be able to accommodate any increase. Under the Scottish Government's proposals, doubling childcare eradicates the one-day model made up of one morning and one afternoon session. A new 9-to-3 model will require huge investment in childcare—that is not accounted for by the Scottish Government. We estimate that 650 new nurseries will need to be built and 3,250 new nursery staff will need to be trained. The move to 30 hours a week will result in a 40 per cent reduction in available council places, with 72,000 places needing to be found.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Annie Wells: I am in my final minute; I am sorry.

In Glasgow alone, it is estimated that there will be a shortfall of nearly 3,500 nursery places for children aged two to five. That is echoed elsewhere in the country.

The Scottish Conservatives champion establishing unbiased human resources policies that are regularly monitored and reviewed. That is a step in the right direction, and it includes establishing a transparent recruitment process that is free of bias. Organisations must also do all they can to retain talented women. That can be achieved through dynamic career planning, so that employees have a clear sense of direction; solid promotional opportunities for women; and high levels of support, training, coaching and mentoring for all staff, regardless of gender. Closing the pay gap between men and women would also make for a fairer system and providing positive female role models in an organisation sends the message that women can get on.

This all boils down to the need to have an open and supportive culture in an organisation that values merit and allows women to rise through the ranks.

Rather than rigid quotas, I would like to see women's progression supported by open and supportive working cultures, transparent and unbiased recruitment processes, clear career paths, and good work-life balance achieved through flexible working and appropriate childcare provision.

I move amendment S5M-00607.1, to leave out from "including" and insert:

“; welcomes the UK Government's introduction of the national living wage; calls on the Scottish Government to increase free childcare to include a higher proportion of disadvantaged one and two-year-olds and to implement this in a way that is flexible with modern working patterns; notes Scottish Government measures to challenge pregnancy and maternity discrimination, address

occupational segregation, work toward gender balance on boards and promote family-friendly and flexible working; agrees with the establishment of an advisory council for women and girls; welcomes the addition to the National Performance Framework of the new national indicator tracking the gender pay gap over time and commends the work of the Strategic Group on Women and Work for helping bring this agenda forward across the various sectors of the Scottish economy, and also notes that work must be done to encourage appropriate male and female representation across all professions.”

15:41

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the debate. The level of interest in the debate and the number of briefings that have come in from different organisations shows how important the issue is seen to be across Scotland. It also shows that there is a lot of expertise out there and many organisations that want to see Scotland making good progress.

In the discussions that we have had on the communities brief, we have said that we need to create a joined-up, inclusive strategy across Scotland. That is the only way that we will make real progress on many of the issues. Added to that, we need joined-up government. The minister said that there are many actions to take on many fronts and, as members can see from the briefings that we have received, there are many issues to consider. If we are to achieve some of those actions, we need joined-up government in which the Scottish Government works with local government and Scotland's dynamic third sector. That has to be our aim if we are to move beyond just having debates in the chamber and make really good progress.

Although I am supportive of the motion and we accept that progress has been made, we need to make more progress. I am pleased that the minister has said that he will accept Labour's amendment. On the Conservative Party's amendment, we need to stop confusing the increase that George Osborne made to the minimum wage with a real living wage. That creates confusion; the two are not the same thing.

In its briefing for the debate, close the gap talks about the education and skills pipeline. It says:

“Gender segregation is evident along the skills pipeline with assumptions made about the capabilities and interests of girls and boys from pre-school onwards. From a very early age, fixed ideas based on gender norms and stereotyping influence the decisions that children and young people make around subject and career choice.”

That is absolutely correct. This morning, I was thinking about my visit to the aircraft carrier project at Rosyth. We went on to the aircraft carrier and then came off to have a meeting. Somebody asked me whether I had noticed many young women or girls working on the ship as apprentices

or engineers, and I said no. They said that if I had gone to any other major engineering project across Europe I would not have found the same situation. There seems to be a British or Scottish thing going on here. We can maybe learn some lessons from the rest of Europe about encouraging people from a young age, because that does not seem to happen here. Most of the engineers on that carrier project would be earning fantastic salaries and would have a real bright future in front of them.

When thinking about that, I reflected on my visit a couple of weeks ago to the Kelty community centre for the STEM family morning for primary schools in the Beath high school catchment area—a headteacher had asked me to come along. There were children, parents and guardians and in some cases grandparents all carrying out different exercises to do with STEM subjects. One of the points that was made to me by teachers there was that we have to involve families and encourage them to encourage children to get involved in those subjects.

It is right for me to flag up to the former education secretary that many local authorities have difficulty recruiting specialist teachers in the STEM subjects. That demonstrates the need for joined-up thinking. As was evidenced to me in Kelty that day, we need local strategies to be put in place that match a national strategy. I can never say enough about the need to ensure that we have a joined-up strategy.

The briefing from Engender describes exactly where we are. It states:

“The gender pay gap persists at 14.8%, with women who work part-time earning 33.5% less than men working full-time ... Women are 75% of the part-time workforce ... Women have less access to occupational pensions than men ... Women are 66% of the paid workforce living in poverty in Scotland ... On average women earn £175.30 less per week than men ... 64% of these workers paid below the living wage are women ... 40% of low-paid workers are women working part-time ... 55% of workers on zero hours contracts are women.”

Those statistics are quite stunning and should galvanise all members to say that, although we should debate the issue, we should also start to look at what action we will take as we move forward.

The minister spoke earlier about social security and the powers that are coming to the Parliament on that. On social security, Engender says:

“The Scottish Government ... has the opportunity to design replacement programmes with gender equality as a central aim. New powers over employment support offer the potential to design programmes that take account of the particular barriers faced by women in the labour market. Failure to do so will ensure that women are further entrenched into low-paid, low-valued, and often less secure work.”

So, using the new social security powers that are coming to the Parliament, that is something specific that we would be able to do if we so wished.

I was struck by another point that Engender makes on workers' rights. It states:

“Legislation introduced by the previous UK Government, and plans by the current Government have severely restricted, and will serve to further restrict, trade union activity in the UK.”

There is a lot of detail there, but work is going on between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Trades Union Congress and trade unions. In that work, we should ensure that we address the issues that we are discussing today.

In a recent report on the women and work partnership project, the STUC said:

“A lack of accessible, flexible and affordable childcare emerged as one of the main barriers to women fully participating in the labour market.”

As a granddad, I certainly know how difficult it was, when my granddaughter was younger, for my daughter to find childcare and indeed afford it.

We have been given some statistics in the chamber on the cost of childcare. I have one very brief point, if I could just—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rowley, I hate doing this to you, as I have done it before.

Alex Rowley: I know. The Poverty Alliance—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This has to be really ultra-brief.

Alex Rowley: The Poverty Alliance highlights some of the key issues in childcare that we should tackle.

Let us bring together all those different people. We should not only debate the subject in the Parliament, but look at the strategy for tackling those issues.

I move amendment S5M-00607.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises that employment and industrial barriers faced by women have a negative impact on Scotland's economy with, for example, the Royal Society of Edinburgh explaining that the lack of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) jobs is a loss of a potential £170 million per annum to the Scottish economy, and believes that the Scottish Government must prioritise supporting women into senior management positions and industries where they are currently overlooked”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. We move to the open debate, with speeches of six minutes or thereabouts.

15:50

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am pleased that the minister concentrated on the pay gap in his speech. I will cover the same area. I agree, too, with Alex Rowley's assessment of the confusion that has been caused by George Osborne's use of the term "living wage", which does not match our understanding of the term "living wage" in Scotland.

The minister may want to respond to or think about this, but it occurs to me that, just as we have living wage accreditation in Scotland, we might consider equal pay accreditation with the same benefits for Government contracts and how we do business in this country.

In my office, I have a poster from the close the gap project of a smiling young boy and a frowny young girl. The slogan is: "Prepare your daughter for working life. Give her less pocket money than your son." I am always amazed at the controversy that it causes among schoolchildren of whatever age who visit my office. They often say, "Do you really believe that?"—the irony is lost on them at that age. Young people—male and female alike—say, "That is just so unfair." It amazes me that what is unfair to our young people quickly becomes normalised, institutionalised and condoned in our working environments.

The Equal Pay Act came into being in 1970, and yet we have made such limited progress in that area. A *Guardian* article entitled, "Mind the gap: when will women finally be able to celebrate equal pay?" highlighted the work that must be done and noted that there is still a 20 per cent pay gap in the UK. I commend Jo Swinson MP for the work that she did on issues such as the mandatory publication of gender pay differences and league tables.

The big question for us all is why the pay gap is taking so long to tackle and why we are having to revisit the issues time and time again in the chamber. In September last year, *The Guardian* published an article on a report by the accountancy firm Grant Thornton entitled, "Women in business: the value of diversity". The report, which was based on a study across the UK, the US and India, stated clearly that companies that have at least one female executive on the board perform better. According to the article, the report noted that

"Publicly traded companies with male-only executive directors missed out on £430bn of investment returns last year"

and highlighted that, given the value of women to the workplace, the lack of diversity was damaging the economy in this country.

What do we have to do? Do we simply appoint women to boards, and after that performance will increase, everything will be solved and there will be no other problems? As we know, life is not that simple. It is probably much more likely that the companies that value diversity at all levels in the workplace, as evidenced by a woman achieving board status, perform better, because diversity really matters in decision making and innovation in all areas of business.

I turn to my previous employment in the information technology industry. In a blog post in 2014, Fiona Woods, the former head of human resources at Cognizant Technology Solutions, highlighted the difference in women's decision making using the left and right brain and what that means for the IT business, with gender differences encouraging various perspectives and ideas from individuals that foster innovation. Different voices and views lead to new ideas and the creation of new services, and provide valued insight into customers.

Interestingly, in 2014, the British Computer Society recommended diversity training and the embedding of diversity in our HR departments to achieve that. In April 2016, the BCS decided that it would recommend a fresh look at quotas. Its research shows all the things that have been mentioned by members today about the importance of role models, the need to tackle the pay gap, part-time working, childcare and recruitment processes. However, it has moved away from diversity training because it says that the three perceived barriers to women achieving senior executive positions are senior male executives recruiting in their own image, unconscious bias issues and women returning to work after a career break.

We all suffer from unconscious bias. Marketers and advertisers will tell us about it, but we seem to miss it in the business context. People cannot feel a sense of belonging to an organisation if they cannot see themselves in the people working around them. I thank Sandra Pickering of Opento for a blog piece in which she says:

"The psychology of non-conscious influence tells us that how the most powerful people look and act becomes desirable and normal. Until Diversity is clearly the responsibility of the CEO and Board and the Board itself is diverse and chooses diversity, this will not change."

That is one of the most important areas for us to tackle if we are to achieve gender equality in all aspects of what we do. The work that has been done in the area by Agenda is very important, and Equate Scotland does much in the STEM subjects, but we have a lot to think about in considering how we will tackle the issue in the future.

15:56

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): It is great to observe that female members outnumber male members by 16 to 12 in today's debate, but that is not normally the case. The motion recognises our cross-party determination to bring about gender parity, and the Scottish Conservatives understand that it is vital that we tackle the root causes to help to close the gender gap in the workplace. We have proposed commonsense policies relating to childcare, apprenticeships and the participation of female pupils in STEM subjects to help redress the balance.

Reading the motion reminded me of a number of points in my life. First, it reminded me of my education at school, where competition was fierce but good-natured and did not necessarily prepare me for the wider world. Observing the outcomes for my two eldest daughters, one at university and the other in sixth form, made me think about what the Scottish Government has done to support women from school and into the workplace—and, indeed, whether we have made any progress at all.

Although 60 per cent of new university graduates are female, women are outnumbered by men in leadership positions in the corporate sector in the UK. Perhaps that reflects the current failings of the curriculum for excellence to promote STEM subjects to females or the much-needed collaboration between the business sector and schools to create an understanding of what qualifications and skills are really needed.

Research by the Scottish Conservatives has highlighted that the Scottish Government is failing to increase the number of female pupils who are studying subjects in science, technology, engineering and maths. In 2015, just 47 per cent of maths exams were sat by girls compared with 49 per cent eight years ago. Over the same period, the number of girls studying computing fell from 24 per cent to just 17 per cent. Physics and technology numbers remain much the same, with only 28 per cent of girls sitting a higher physics exam in 2015.

Sectors that depend on STEM graduates have long complained about a shortage of applicants—particularly females—from Scotland's schools and colleges. Recent figures have also shown that the number of teachers in STEM subjects has dropped. For example, we have 300 fewer maths teachers. The loss of 152,000 college places under the SNP Government does not help, as it has been shown to particularly affect women. Let us also not forget that the single mother, the woman returning to work and the woman caring for her family deserve opportunities, too, and

benefit greatly from vocational learning opportunities.

The Scottish Conservatives want to expand prospects for women and have consistently made the case for more vocational and educational skills training to be aligned with business demand. Per head of population, Scotland has only half the number of apprenticeships that England has, and we believe that that must change. We want to see an additional 10,000 apprenticeship starts every year by the end of this session of Parliament.

We recognise that many women count themselves out before they even get to a selection or recruitment process, and my experience mirrors that. Collectively, the Scottish Government needs to address why that is and what obstacles we must overcome. Like those of many women, my career path was peppered with difficulties created not by a dearth of ambition or a lacklustre attitude but by a recruitment process dominated by men in suits. In 1992, girls had to be as tough as ever. I remember “manning up” and shifting my acquiescent manner to an attitude that allowed me to be treated as an equal—or “one of the boys”, as they say.

My own experiences have shown me the need to challenge pregnancy and maternity discrimination. Understandably, my natural instinct was to be with my first-born daughter. Many members may remember Nicola Horlick, who juggled a multimillion-pound fund manager's job and five children, setting an almost unachievable target for many women. After getting to grips with looking after a very new baby, and guided by maternity laws at the time, I headed back to work after just 12 weeks—grappling with a full-time job ill suited for motherhood. A request to my boss for flexible or part-time hours was greeted with the answer that if he allowed me to have special working hours, all the men in the organisation would have to be treated the same. My options were to shut up or get out.

The underrepresentation of women in the workplace has been a persistent issue in both the public and private sectors, particularly in senior positions. However, it is worth pointing out that the latest Office for National Statistics labour market figures show that the UK-wide employment rate for women is 69.2 per cent—the highest since comparable records began in 1971.

It is clear that when we get gender balance right, corporate success improves dramatically. Women being in boardrooms brings the benefits of a new way of thinking and of other elements that men are not predisposed to. In Scotland, we are fortunate to have a number of noteworthy women working in our significant public sector roles. Caroline Gardner, the Auditor General for Scotland; Alison Di Rollo, the recently appointed

Solicitor General for Scotland; Dr Catherine Calderwood, the chief medical officer for Scotland; and Elaine Lorimer, the chief executive of Revenue Scotland, are all key role models.

There is much more work to be done—particularly on the retention of women in the workplace and their progression up the career ladder—but those women set an example, proving that senior board-level positions are achievable. They have earned their place on merit, just like their male colleagues. I would argue that recruitment and selection processes play a more significant part in achieving board and senior-level representation; they are an area that we should be tackling.

It is true that promotion prospects come at just the time when women start to have families. With expensive childcare, and few meaningfully family-friendly workplaces—[*Interruption.*]

I seem to have come to the end of my time, so I am going to close there by saying that it is disappointing that we have lost college places, created more barriers and not extended provision to childcare. I am sure that, through the Parliament, we can work together to overcome those challenges.

16:03

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I hope that, one day, we will not have to have this debate, as gender in the workplace will be irrelevant. However, for me, it was not until I worked in the private sector that my gender became something that I felt was an issue. I was brought up in a household where I was never made to feel that I could not achieve anything because I was female, and then went on to university where, as members will know, people exist in a forward-thinking, liberal, egalitarian bubble. Therefore it came as quite a shock to me when I encountered discrimination in the workplace. That was not because of my gender per se but because I did what, thankfully, a lot of women do: I decided to have a baby.

I had recently been in charge of some major projects, after being with the company for only a couple of years, and there was talk of management training programmes coming my way. When I asked for a meeting with the managing director, to let him know my baby news, I got the first indication that all would not be well: “I thought you were interested in your career,” he said.

I took only three and a half months off for maternity leave—maternity leave and pay were not as good then as they are now. When I came back, there was no further talk of management training, my maternity cover replacement was kept

on, large projects seemed to go to them instead of me and I never dared to ask for any flexibility in any working day, for fear of further discrimination or disadvantage—much as Rachael Hamilton has just described.

I lasted two more years in that environment before I went into teaching and moved into the public sector, where, on having my second baby five years later, I found out that attitudes to returning mothers were completely different: they were supportive, flexible and non-discriminatory. As a consequence of that and so many other things, I stayed in that job for 15 years. Which organisation got the best bang for its buck out of me as a worker—the flexible, supportive one or the one that could not get over the few months of maternity cover that I had cost it?

I am 18 years on from that negative experience. The Government’s motion cites a great range of drivers to help women to make a substantial contribution to Scotland’s economy, and I welcome every one of them. If there is a theme to my contribution to the debate, it is that those drivers do not cost companies money; they make them money—they are an investment. Recruiting and keeping good-quality workers is key to a company’s success and profitability. Annie Wells—who is not in the chamber at the moment—talked about the cost of childcare. I will talk about the cost benefit of childcare, albeit that I am not really going to talk about childcare.

Those measures are there not just to help parents—largely women—to access the world of work. They are measures that will grow our economy. I stress that such drivers also help fathers to play an equal part in their children’s care. I remember reading a study by the Institute for Public Policy Research a couple of years ago, which concluded that one of the main provisions that contributed to an increased female work rate was women being given more control over their working schedule. If work was flexible, women tended to be able to work more hours and to stay longer with an organisation. Allowing flexible working unlocks employee potential and improves productivity. As we know, in many cases the Nordic countries—particularly Sweden—lead the way in this area.

When we talk of flexible working, there is a tendency to assume that that means part-time work, and that is largely the case at the moment. The difficulty that we face is the nature of most part-time work in Scotland’s private sector. Part-time work opportunities are disproportionately allocated to more elementary occupations relative to—and at the expense of—professional occupations. The professional institutions are missing a trick. That is not to say that there are not part-time workers in the professions, but the same

IIPPR study found that most of those positions came about as a result of negotiation once a full-time worker was in post. For women who are re-entering the workforce following a period of no employment, the fact that the availability of part-time flexible work at the recruitment stage is so skewed towards low-skilled, low-paid work is a real problem. That means that professions are missing those skilled women who are looking for work within their skill set but who want flexibility to fit in with their family commitments. By not advertising that part-time and flexible work is available, companies are limiting the pool of talent on which they can draw.

If a woman re-enters the workforce after a break to care for her children and has to take a lower-paid job that is underneath her skill set just because it is more flexible and fits in better with her family life, it is not just the woman who loses out—our economy loses out, too. It is a missed opportunity for a business to recruit and retain talent.

Alex Rowley: I agree with everything that Gillian Martin says, but does she accept that, in countries such as Norway and Sweden, not only is it the case that the childcare is far superior, but they raise taxes to ensure that that happens?

Gillian Martin: Yes, but I make the point that those countries are also in control of their entire fiscal area. In another debate, I commented on the fact that the Norwegian Prime Minister has cited women working and paying tax as the number 1 source of Norway's wealth. If we had such a fiscal arrangement, whereby we were able to look after all our money, I am sure that we would be in a situation in which we could generate a lot more money.

Women taking lower-paid, lower-skilled jobs results in less tax being paid and skills being underused. It is a sheer and utter waste of education and expertise, and it is a major contributor to the gender pay gap. I heartily welcome Clare Adamson's suggestion on pay equality accreditation—she nearly got a standing ovation from me. The driving of professional women into work below their skill set as a result of a lack of flexibility costs Scotland money, and flexible working for dads, too, might mean that we have a future in which debates of this nature are not needed.

16:09

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Today, children and young people have unprecedented access to technology, but having an iPad at her fingertips will not necessarily lead a young girl to aspire to a career in software production or application design. As we have

heard, if she does, she will already know that because of her gender it is likely that she will achieve more but earn less.

On the day of the Scottish Parliament elections last month, I was standing outside Whitehill neighbourhood centre, which, as well as acting as a polling station, was serving its usual purpose as a community hub. Two primary 7 girls from nearby Beckford primary school struck up a conversation with me. They began with some political advice that parties should work together more and politicians, in general, should stop shouting at each other. With current events in mind, I wonder whether they are available over the school holidays to offer further counsel.

What struck me most about the conversation was the girls' excitement about coding and learning how to code in class. However, they were also very aware that if they went on to work in the technology industry, they would be paid less than their male counterparts and would be less likely to reach senior positions. That was their expectation. Here were two 11-year-old girls in Scotland in 2016, standing outside their youth club and telling me that, even if they had the same or higher qualifications or abilities, they expected to earn less than boys and not have the same opportunities. They understood the gender pay gap. Both girls were articulate, confident, funny and very smart. Instinctively, I could tell that they had much to offer our community, our economy and our wider society. I have thought of them dozens of times since our conversation, and I feel guilty that we are letting them down.

We have talked a lot today about the leaky pipeline in STEM subjects, with girls either choosing not to pursue science and technical subjects at school and university or, if they do, not continuing into STEM careers or not reaching the same senior levels as their male counterparts. We have heard a lot of the statistics and I will not repeat them, but the evidence is stark: 73 per cent of women who graduate in STEM subjects do not stay in the sector. That is an enormous waste of potential.

Last week, *The Herald* covered national women in engineering day, which was launched by the Institution of Civil Engineers Scotland. The article highlighted that although Scotland needs an extra 440 new civil engineers this year to meet its needs, the number of engineering students in further education has fallen by a third since 2010. Moreover, seven out of eight ICE members are men. I welcome the Scottish Government report on addressing the underrepresentation of women in STEM subjects and recognise that that work will be done in partnership with the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and our colleges and universities. In that respect, I also

welcome the additional £1.5 million that is being invested in equality projects.

However, more must be done, and Scotland needs to catch up. Sara Thiam, director of ICE Scotland, has pointed out that Scotland lags behind much of Europe with regard to having a gender-balanced workforce and she has warned:

“Employers who ignore the benefits of attracting more women into the profession risk becoming increasingly marginalised.”

Moreover, Belinda Oldfield, a Scottish Water executive, has said:

“It is quite shocking that less than seven per cent of parents with girls would recommend engineering as a good career route for”

their children. As Jamie Hepburn suggested, old-fashioned attitudes persist in our homes, our schools and our workplaces.

Today, though, we should recognise some of the good practice that is out there. Close the Gap has already been mentioned, and its “be what you want” work in schools is enabling young people to make informed subject and career choices and encouraging them to take or pursue non-traditional jobs. Importantly, the initiative also provides resources for teachers and career advisers on occupational segregation and gender stereotyping.

I also note that, according to an Institute of Physics study, career materials are not gender neutral. As a result, there is a huge amount of work to be done to ensure that the good practice that I have mentioned can be rolled out further. As we know, if children are conditioned at a young age, they conform to gender roles and the barriers reinforce the structural inequalities in our labour market.

I have been sitting here thinking about my daughter, who on numerous occasions has come home from school or her activities, complaining that the teacher or coach “isn’t a feminist, mum”, because they asked “strong boys to volunteer to lift some chairs” or assumed that girls do not want to play football. To echo Clare Adamson’s comments, I am heartened that many young women are growing increasingly impatient and are not willing to put up with attitudes that are holding them back.

Much of what I was going to say has been said, but I want to pick up on the issue of gender quotas because, quite simply, a lot of rubbish has been talked about them today. We in the chamber know that equality does not just trickle down. It is not enough to have a few women in positions of political leadership; that simply does not do.

I note that Annie Wells is speaking at the Parliament event tonight to try to encourage more women to stand for office. I hope that we will have

a genuine conversation at that event. There are some excellent speakers in the programme, not least Nan Sloane, who has done terrific work across the field.

We have to challenge the misconceptions out there that gender quotas somehow produce women who do not have the same merits as men. We have not seen progress sustained in the chamber. It is a fact that women’s representation in the Parliament has stagnated simply as a result of the Tories’ success at the polls. They did not have enough women candidates.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is just concluding. I hope that she will conclude shortly.

Monica Lennon: I am being told to sit down. I hope that the member will come to the event tonight, because we have to continue this conversation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not think that I was so rude as to say, “Sit down.”

16:16

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): It is with the same pride and the exact same passion that I continue to address the societal and structural imbalance that affects women. That imbalance is particularly relevant to women in the workplace. All my life—whether as an MSP, a trade union official or an activist—I have always championed the fight for women’s equality and I will continue to do so, because that just seems to be in my DNA.

It is a great privilege to support the motion. I welcome the release of the Scottish Government’s report, which ultimately shows that its priorities lie in reducing the mass discrimination that is felt by women in work and thus giving those women the rare privilege that is often enjoyed solely by men; in giving women the opportunity to carve out a successful and thriving career that is not based on anything other than their talent and fortitude; and in giving women the opportunity to break out of the cycle of poverty and unleash their full potential on the world of work.

The report shows that the pay gap in Scotland has reduced substantially, from 18.4 per cent in 1997 to 7.3 per cent in 2015. We still have a way to go, but that means that a whole generation of girls and young women who are taking their first tentative steps into the workplace can do so without having the same fear and gender restrictions that once controlled them, their mothers or their grandmothers. The Government should be congratulated on that, but we will not

rest on our laurels. As I have said, there is still a way to go. We will not be confined to the small-time kitchen mentality that once defined a generation of women.

We have sought to address the societal imbalance that I talked about through specific Government policies. The approach can range from the transformative funding for quality, affordable childcare that we have implemented and continue to implement, to the initiatives that we have taken to tackle maternity and pregnancy discrimination in the workplace. I am sure that we will take up that topic in the equality and human rights committee at some point.

If the Presiding Officer will forgive me, I will return to what has been a well-worn debate over the past week: the European Union. The European Union provided extra safeguards against maternity and pregnancy discrimination. For example, the EU pregnant workers directive, which guaranteed the right to paid time off to attend antenatal appointments and benefited more than 430,000 women workers a year, now faces an uncertain future—although not, I suspect, in this place.

Those rights are now coming under severe threat that was brought on by the pure complacency of a Westminster Conservative Government so preoccupied by appeasing its right-wing factions that it forgot what it left behind. What did it leave behind? It left behind the hard-fought-for workplace rights of social progressives throughout Europe. Undoubtedly, that uncertainty will impact on the precarious woman worker much more than on any other cohort.

The Government seeks to address that theme of precarious work and gender-specific work in the future. Indeed, the report calls for more to be done to tackle the occupational segregation that still exists between genders. I will highlight that, after all these years, South Lanarkshire Council has still to sort out its gender pay gap.

Why should women conform to the atypical, maternal carer role that society often expects of them? Why should women not seize the reins of prosperity and occupy what the report deems to be the highest earning roles: the managers, directors, senior officials, doctors, consultants and lawyers?

That is the point on which the Government will make its voice heard. I suspect that many members across the chamber will raise their voices on the issue, too. The ambition to have diversity in the boardroom—to have 50:50 by 2020—is challenging, but certainly worth while. Things that are worth while are rarely easy. May I say, Presiding Officer, that well-behaved women seldom make history.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Am I to take that personally, Ms McKelvie?

Christina McKelvie: Many of us can take that personally, Presiding Officer, and I welcome the fact that we do.

It is my determination that when the next generation of women reach the world of work, their ambition will have no glass ceiling—or sticky floor—and there will be no restrictions on their ability to dream. It will be an individual's talent, skill and hard work that matters, rather than their sex or gender. That is what we must focus on.

From the plurality of modern apprenticeships available, to the living wage for social care workers—by that I mean the real living wage—to the family friendly working Scotland partnership, the Government has set out bold and transformative policies that can accelerate the decline of disparity and help to transform women's lives in the workplace.

I am sure that many of my colleagues from across the chamber, both women and men, are committed to ensuring that we create the best environment for our women and girls to work and grow in. If we can do that, we will make the world a better place for our men and boys too.

16:22

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to have the chance to take part in today's debate on such a vitally important subject. It is important for a variety of reasons, but, above all, it is crucial that we ensure that women face no extra barriers in their chosen careers because of their gender. It goes without saying that women contribute a huge amount to our businesses and public services and it is essential that they continue to do so and that they have the opportunity to do so.

A quick glance at the latest labour market figures from the ONS shows that, across the UK, the employment rate for men was 79.3 per cent between January and April 2015, compared with 69.2 per cent for women. I understand that the latter figure is the highest since comparable records began in 1971.

The Scottish Government's annual population survey reports that, in Scotland, the employment rate for women between April 2015 and March 2016 increased over the course of the year by 0.2 percentage points, from 69.5 per cent to 69.7 per cent. That compares to an increase of 1.1 percentage points for the rest of the UK, from 67.5 per cent to 68.6 per cent, over the same period. Clearly progress has been made both nationally and in Scotland, but there is still a great deal that needs to be done to achieve greater parity.

I turn briefly to occupational segregation, which is one of the barriers that prevent women from fulfilling their potential in the labour market. Fundamentally, women should have the opportunity to work in traditionally male-dominated industries. In science, research, engineering and technology occupations, the breakdown between men and women is 78 per cent and 22 per cent. In the skilled metal, electrical and electronic trades, women represent only 2 per cent of the workforce.

If women do not want to work in those sectors and occupations, that is fine—but what if they do? We need to overcome the stereotypes that often underpin occupational segregation and to give women the opportunity to enter traditionally male-dominated sectors. To that end, we need to look at skills training and apprenticeships, and to encourage more women and girls to study STEM subjects—an area where the Scottish National Party's record is woefully poor.

There is a huge gender imbalance in apprenticeships. Skills Development Scotland figures for 2014-15 show that, although the figures are broadly equal at modern apprenticeship level 2, at level 3, around twice as many males start an apprenticeship and, at level 5, 10 times as many males start an apprenticeship. That is clearly disappointing, and the reasons for it must be understood and addressed.

There have been some equally disappointing figures relating to the number of females studying STEM subjects. Skills Development Scotland emphasises that those subjects are “dominated by men”. It is extremely worrying that

“73 per cent of female STEM graduates are lost from STEM occupations, compared to 48 per cent of males.”

Furthermore, although some STEM subjects have seen improvements, there are still worrying signs. As has been alluded to today, the statistics show that, in 2007, 20 per cent of students who took higher computing were female, but in 2015, only 17 per cent of those studying higher computing were female. The figures highlight that the trend is going in the wrong direction.

It is abundantly clear that only by giving women the opportunity to learn skills and undertake training in the STEM sectors can we hope to make any meaningful progress in addressing the gender imbalance. That has to be kept in mind through all stages of life and education. Girls must be encouraged, starting at home and continuing through primary and secondary school to apprenticeships and university.

Although females must be given opportunities and encouragement to study STEM subjects and enter male-dominated workplaces, I do not believe that we should impose gender targets across the workplace. Women deserve to be chosen on their

own merits: they should be chosen for their talents and because they are the best person to do the job, not because they happen to be female. Across the political landscape, private industry and our public services, women have reached the top not because of a quota imposed by the powers that be, but because of what they have to offer. Artificial quotas are not the answer. The solution lies in education and in providing sensible policies that knock down existing barriers.

16:27

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):

Like colleagues across the chamber, I strongly welcome the recent publication of “New Perspectives on the Gender Pay Gap”, particularly its conclusions that the gender pay gap, both for full-time employees and overall, continues to reduce, and that it is lower in Scotland than in the UK.

Of course, we still have a long way to go. I equally welcome the report highlighting where work is most needed and our Government's clear commitment to work with partners to continue tackling the gender pay gap and other gender-related inequalities in the workplace, to ensure that nobody faces barriers to subject or career choice due to their gender.

As we have heard, many gender-based inequalities disadvantage women, whether exclusively or predominantly. The gender pay gap is a clear example, as are pregnancy and maternity discrimination and affordable childcare.

Occupational segregation, however, is a workplace inequality of detriment to both men and women, and to the overall social and economic wellbeing of society. Women are disproportionately affected by occupational segregation in financial terms—they are clustered in undervalued, low-paid and unpaid work, and unfortunately the situation is familiar in other industries. However, in terms of the fulfilment of individual potential, both men and women lose out. If we look at the impact on wider society, we can see that we all lose. As much as we need more female scientists, we also need more male nursery teachers and social care workers.

I am sure that some colleagues will share my concern that a series of recent reports have shown that, despite higher numbers of women studying STEM subjects than ever before, successfully building a career in science remains difficult for women.

First, strong unconscious and subtle bias against women remains in the publications and research grant applications process. It has been shown that both men and women rate identical scientific papers more highly when they are

submitted under a male name, that female-authored submissions are reviewed more harshly, and that men have higher success rates than women when applying for research grants. A recent study by *The BMJ* has also shown that the number of women listed as lead author in high-impact journals

“has plateaued or declined since 2009 at a level below women’s representation in the medical community”.

That is all crucial because securing academic funding and getting published are central to pursuing a career in science.

A recent House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report highlighted how, in addition to women’s voices not being taken as seriously, women have to compete against structural bias. Initial scientific careers are dominated by short-term contracts and poor job security, often exactly at the time when women who wish to are looking to start a family. That can leave women faced with a choice between career and family.

Not only does the glass ceiling in science stop women fulfilling their individual potential but, in economic terms, the late Professor Ailsa McKay estimated that the lack of women in science and engineering occupations represents a loss of £170 million a year to the Scottish economy. In policy terms, we lack female voices—the input of more than 50 per cent of the population—when it comes to research and the provision of evidence that will drive future healthcare policies and standards of care.

As such, it gives me great pleasure to note the Scottish Government’s recent announcement of £79,000 of funding to continue the careerwise programme, which was set up in 2013 to offer female undergraduates paid employment with STEM employers. I also welcome the continued Government funding of the partnership project close the gap, which is dedicated to addressing women’s inequality at work, as well as the establishment of an advisory council on women and girls to advise on tackling workplace and occupational segregation.

Women often have the required scientific qualifications but face difficulties in pursuing a scientific career, whereas we have yet to overcome the first hurdle of encouraging men to study the relevant subjects to enter traditionally female domains such as childcare. College courses that focus on care are strongly dominated by women. That gender bias not only hinders men from fulfilling their potential but limits the experience and development of our young children. It is crucial for children from an early age to have positive male and female role models, to experience different perspectives, interaction and

play in the nursery setting and—crucially—to see that caring, nurturing and empathy are healthy and positive for men and women.

I have mentioned this before, but I take the opportunity again to commend the work that Ayrshire College is doing in my constituency through its on-going efforts to challenge gender stereotypes, promote the role of men in care work and inspire more men to join the profession. The college recently held a successful recruitment event to encourage men into programmes such as its higher national certificate in social care and its early education and childcare courses. The event featured the testimony of men who work in care and was advertised by the evocative and powerful hashtag #ThisManCares.

Tackling occupational segregation and addressing all matters of inequality are about not just fairness but Scotland’s overall economic and social wellbeing. I look forward to supporting the Scottish Government and working with other members and partners locally and nationally to make sure that the skills that are available to employers are not limited by gender stereotypes and that men and women have an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential.

16:33

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): On behalf of the Scottish Green Party, I very much welcome the Scottish Government’s report “New Perspectives on the Gender Pay Gap” and the news that the pay gap in Scotland is in long-term decline. However, as others have made clear, the report makes it clear that the pay gap is a complex phenomenon so, although the overall trend is encouraging, progress has been less impressive among groups such as older workers and among senior positions.

As we have heard, of the many factors that are at work in producing the gender pay gap, horizontal occupational segregation is a significant one. Having raised the issue during the Holyrood election campaign this year, we particularly welcome the report’s focus on the severe underrepresentation of women in particular sectors of our economy and their overrepresentation in others—for example, women are more likely to find themselves in insecure, undervalued and poorly paid work, such as that in retail.

We will continue to argue for a real living wage and better working conditions for everyone, regardless of their gender or employment status, but it is clear that that alone will not be enough to eliminate the gender pay gap.

As we have heard, underemployment of women in the science, technology, engineering and maths

sectors is particularly acute. According to labour force survey figures, women represented only 13 per cent of the UK STEM workforce in 2013. Segregation within education and training is a serious and on-going problem. For example, between 2010 and 2015 there was an increase of only 1.5 per cent in the proportion of female modern apprentices in engineering, and a dramatic fall of around 35 per cent in the proportion of those in information technology. The apprenticeships that women dominate, such as hairdressing and early years care and education, are shorter in duration and less generously funded, and have lower rates of pay, higher drop-out rates and poorer labour market outcomes.

That problem is all the more pressing given the major skills shortages in STEM sectors of our economy. Scottish Power has warned of a major skills shortage in the energy sector. Eighty per cent of its engineers are due to retire within the next 20 years and at present only 16 per cent of the energy workforce is female.

The Scottish Green Party manifesto called for an occupational segregation commission, so we welcome the Government's similar plan to establish an advisory council on women and girls, to advise on action to tackle workplace and occupational segregation. Although there has been laudable ministerial focus on occupational segregation for some years, not enough progress has been made to open up sectors of the economy that are closed to women. I hope that the advisory council will help ministers to redouble their efforts.

I will move on to the role of employability support in helping to address the pay gaps. As Alex Rowley observed, a recent report by Engender argues that current employability programmes, particularly those that are delivered by the UK Government, do not consider sufficiently the employment challenges that women face. An individual's readiness to work is influenced by their education and skills, their caring responsibilities, their safety at home and in the workplace, and the types of work that they are able to access. Women have different experiences from men in all those areas. Employability programmes need to, but currently do not, take account of those differences. Indeed, after the closure last year of the Edinburgh employment charity Women Onto Work, there are no employment programmes that specifically target female jobseekers.

As the gender and labour market experts at Close the Gap note, the generic skills support that is offered by current employment programmes, especially those that are offered by the UK Government, is likely to replicate gendered patterns of skills acquisition and employment,

which is likely to entrench occupational segregation and widen the gender pay gap. As we prepare for the devolution of UK employment programmes next year, I urge the Scottish ministers to consider how the Scottish replacements for the work programme and work choice schemes can be made gender sensitive. The promotion of women's economic equality should be a cross-cutting theme of employability programmes and be included as part of funding and evaluation criteria.

I commend Clare Adamson's proposal for equal pay accreditation and I suggest that the Government explores all possible options for encouraging businesses and employers to step up to the plate on equal pay, including options on how we deliver things such as the non-domestic rating regime to businesses.

I will mention briefly the UK Government's introduction of employment tribunal fees. Official statistics show an 81 per cent drop in the number of claims lodged between April and June 2014 compared with the same period in 2013; the number of sex discrimination cases reduced by 91 per cent. That is why, in the election campaign, we called for an end to tribunal fees. We welcome the Scottish Government's pledge to remove tribunal fees when the power is devolved, because people who feel that they have been discriminated against must have access to justice.

"New Perspectives on the Gender Pay Gap" was very clear that inflexible working practices are a major barrier to women's access to employment and a cause of the gender pay gap. There is a wealth of evidence in that report and many others to suggest that women bear the brunt of employers' unwillingness or inability to offer flexible working. We require great cultural and attitudinal changes among employers. The Scottish Greens offer all support to the Government to reduce the gender pay gap. It accords very much with our fundamental principles of equality, peace, environmental sustainability and radical democracy, and we look forward to working with the Scottish Government to further those aims.

16:39

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to speak in this important debate.

I welcome the substantial difference that the Scottish Government has made in relation to the gender pay gap. The advances in recent years are incredibly encouraging, and I think that the improvement is due in no small part to the Government's progressive policies on, for

example, the living wage and childcare, as other members have said.

The plans to increase free childcare provision to 30 hours per week will bring more benefits for families, particularly mothers, throughout our country. In this day and age, it is disgraceful that some women are treated unfavourably just because they are pregnant or a mother. In many cases, such treatment results in the woman feeling that she has no alternative to leaving the employment—something that can continue to impact on her in future. The increase in childcare provision will help to counter that effect, but we also need a more understanding, compassionate and inclusive approach, across all sectors, to supporting parents, particularly mothers.

Female employment is on the rise and the pay gap continues to narrow, but there is more that we can do. I welcome the plans that the minister set out today. Although great steps have been taken in relation to the gender pay gap, I think that all members recognise that there is still some way to go. We must continue to put pressure on organisations throughout the country to put an end to gender pay inequality as quickly as possible.

On that note, I intend to use the remainder of my speech to highlight the problems that face many serving and retired employees of North Lanarkshire Council in relation to the equal pay claims that have been going on for many years. I declare an interest: I was a councillor at North Lanarkshire Council until earlier today—that is unrelated to this debate.

Although the equal pay issue has affected male employees, the overwhelming majority of affected people are female. What worries me is the way in which North Lanarkshire Council has fought its workers' equal pay claims for more than a decade—although that council is not alone in doing so. Members might know—I am sure that Clare Adamson does—that there have been two claim periods. First-wave claims relate to the period prior to the introduction of new job evaluation-based pay arrangements in 2007, and second-wave claims relate to the period after the introduction of those arrangements.

I am deeply concerned at reports that some employees have been told to sign confidentiality agreements and that some offers of compensation have been withdrawn after people discussed their settlement with peers or published it online.

There is a dispute about whether claims are pensionable. North Lanarkshire Council has not ruled out a legal challenge to the Scottish Public Pensions Agency, which ruled that arrears of pay should be pensionable. That relates only to second-wave claims, because the council has accepted that first-wave claims should be

pensionable, although Mark Irvine, from Action 4 Equality Scotland, told me yesterday:

“The 1st Wave claims have been adjudicated by a formal decision of the Glasgow Employment Tribunal in May 2015—North Lanarkshire Council accepts that these claims can and should be made pensionable if the claimants wish so, but over a year after the ET decision the Council has still not actioned people's requests”.

That is unacceptable. North Lanarkshire Labour must recognise that the money that has been awarded is not compensation or some sort of bonus but back pay of wages that were short paid. The sad fact is that, in some cases, people have died without their claim being completed. The workers of North Lanarkshire should not have to keep fighting for what is rightfully theirs. It is time for the council to own up, step up and make the payments.

The Labour Party in North Lanarkshire regularly highlights the authority's financial position. I think that all members accept that all levels of government in Scotland face budget constraints, which have been caused by continued unnecessary austerity from the Tory UK Government. I suggest that North Lanarkshire's problems are largely down to the council's overreliance on private finance initiative projects, which left the people of North Lanarkshire with crippling repayments. In addition, if the council had settled equal pay claims and sorted out the issue at the first opportunity, it would not now feel that it must fight legitimate claims from staff.

A new leader is in place at North Lanarkshire Council. I welcome the fact that he has said that he is keen to resolve the matter. I hope that he delivers for the workers who have waited for so long. However, if the Scottish National Party takes control of the council next May there will be changes to how the council conducts itself on such matters. I can assure people who are involved in equal pay claims that if the SNP emerges as the majority party in North Lanarkshire next year, the aim will be to settle claims at the earliest opportunity.

We should not have to engage lawyers to achieve equality in the workplace. Equality should be provided in all walks of life, without question.

16:45

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate about gender and the workplace. We should challenge discrimination and loss of opportunity wherever we see it and there is no bigger impact than that of gender discrimination, because 50 per cent of the population are affected by the issues, as raised by Engender in its briefing for the debate. I thank it and the many other organisations that have contacted MSPs with

briefings, which shows how important the issue is to people inside and outside the chamber.

Engender said:

“occupational segregation, ungendered employability programmes, unpaid caring roles, violence against women and different forms of discrimination all contribute to the gender pay gap, which is a key indicator of women’s inequality in the workplace”.

I have a seven-month-old daughter called Eva. My wife and I will do the best that we can to give her the confidence and the skills that she needs to succeed. I can already see how bright she is and I have visions of her growing up to be a successful engineer or scientist—there is certainly no danger of gender segregation in the Griffin household. The point is that she should not have to work harder or need more encouragement to pursue a career in science or technology than our neighbour’s baby boy who was born just a few weeks later.

We have lodged an amendment that highlights the point that the employment and industrial barriers that women face have a negative impact on Scotland’s economy. The Royal Society of Edinburgh explained in its recent report that the lack of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics jobs is a loss of a potential £170 million a year to the Scottish economy—a point that Ruth Maguire made. I appreciate the Government support for our amendment, but I have said before and still believe that the Scottish Government must prioritise supporting women into STEM industries, where they are currently grossly underrepresented.

We need to take a look at the jobs and industries that will give people the best opportunities to succeed. Those will be the highly skilled, highly paid jobs in science, engineering and technology. There is no future for Scotland as a low-skill, low-wage economy; there is no future competing with developing countries for those jobs. How we give all our young people, or people who want to retrain, the chance to get a job in a high-tech industry will play a massive part in how we take our country forward. To do that, we need to break down the barriers that women face. There is a massive prize to aim for in that. According to research, more than 7 million jobs in the UK will depend on science skills by 2030. Those STEM jobs are exactly the kind of jobs we need—high-quality, highly skilled and highly paid jobs, which emerging economies cannot compete with us for.

I studied mechanical engineering at university. It is a key source of skills and graduates for the STEM sector. The course provided fantastic opportunities for highly skilled, highly paid work. There were 120 students on my course, just four of whom were women. How the Government opens up careers in science and technology to

half of our population will determine how successful it is at tackling issues of gender in the workplace.

It is clear from the Engender briefing that curriculum segregation is still evident at school and college even before we get to university. In colleges, women are clustered in art and design, where they make up 72 per cent of the total; care, where the figure is 73 per cent; hairdressing and beauty, where it is 97 per cent; and languages, where it is 64 per cent. Men are more likely to be found studying construction, where they make up 92 per cent of the total; engineering, where the figure is 87 per cent; nautical studies, where it is 93 per cent; and land-based industries, where it is 68 per cent.

Those are figures that you see repeated again and again. At universities, there are more women than men studying subjects relating to medicine, social studies and languages, while men dominate in mathematical and computing science, engineering and technology, and architecture. As far back as high school classrooms, subjects are gender divided. Young men make up 93 per cent of those studying technological studies; 71 per cent of those studying graphic communication; and 72 per cent of those studying physics. More young women study home economics, where they make up 92 per cent of the total; administration, where the figure is 77 per cent; biology, where it is 64 per cent; and art and design, where it is 82 per cent.

The figures in that gender briefing make stark reading and they probably just confirm what most of us already know. As I said before, there is a big prize to aim for—the 7 million jobs in the UK that are going to depend on science skills by 2030, which are the jobs that we need for the future. It is a challenge to give people the skills and training that they need to apply and succeed in that area, but if we simply accept the barriers to half the population advancing in that key area, we have already lost out.

For Eva, and for the other women who are battling to succeed, we all have to do more.

16:51

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I, too, welcome the publication of the Scottish Government’s report “New Perspectives on the Gender Pay Gap”, which illustrates that the gender pay gap is lower in Scotland than it is in the UK, and that it has reduced substantially over the long term. I also welcome the minister’s opening remarks and the content of the motion.

The title of today’s debate is “Gender and the Workplace”; however, as has been evidenced, the

overarching issue for discussion is, of course, the wider matter of gender inequality and its importance to us all. Let us be clear: as is detailed in the Labour amendment and as was passionately articulated by Gillian Martin, gender inequality not only undermines the integrity of our society, but significantly undermines our productivity, our competitiveness and the fulfilment of our economic potential.

I welcome the wide range of Scottish Government policies that are designed to help to close the gender pay gap and the progress that has been made by the Scottish Government, which ranges from encouraging payment of the living wage to increasing free childcare; from challenging pregnancy and maternity discrimination to addressing occupational segregation; and from working towards gender balance on boards to promoting family-friendly and flexible working. Those policies are making and will make a difference, and we should support them.

I congratulate employers in my constituency and across Scotland who are paying the living wage at the moment, and the local and national initiatives that are promoting payment of the real living wage. It is extremely important for creating equality and also for enhancing demand and productivity in our economy. Furthermore, I congratulate proactive national organisations such as Family Friendly Working Scotland, which is working directly on gender in the workplace. I look forward to meeting such organisations in the coming weeks to learn more about the progress that Scotland is making and the challenges that we still face.

As well as highlighting progress, the report recognises that a significant gender pay gap persists for certain age groups, sectors and occupations, and it explores key drivers, including traditional social or employment attitudes and culture. In that light, I would like to comment on the corporate private sector of our economy—in particular, the corporate legal sector. Prior to being elected, I worked as a commercial lawyer with one of Scotland's many outstanding firms. With a female chairperson, a high proportion of female partners and increasing opportunities for flexible working, the business that I worked for was impressively sensitive and aware of gender equality matters and had a forward-looking human resources strategy.

However, the legal sector as whole is an interesting industry to examine when it comes to gender in the workplace. As was reported in December 2015, Scotland now has more female than male solicitors for the first time, after a sharp increase in the number of women qualifying as lawyers. Figures from the Law Society of Scotland reveal that now 51 per cent of Scottish solicitors

are women, and that the amount increases to two-thirds for solicitors under the age of 40 and to 64 per cent for those who were admitted in 2015.

However, women are still underrepresented when it comes to senior roles with private firms as well as at the bar and in the judiciary. More striking, and unjustly, according to data from July last year, the gender pay gap for solicitors in Scotland is currently a staggering 42 per cent. That is totally unacceptable. I highlight that fact to raise awareness of such deep inequity and to emphasise the wider point that significant gender pay gaps persist in some sectors and occupations, and that that is because of traditional social or employment attitudes and culture.

For example, in the corporate world, the norm is the expectation of long working hours and often unnecessary presenteeism, which are prohibitive to people who have young families or ambitions for a reasonable work-life balance. Although shifts in social attitudes are occurring, and the Scottish Government is taking action to encourage that shift when it can, as outlined by the minister earlier, for clarity it is important to acknowledge that much of the policy agenda relating to gender equality in the workplace and many of the potential solutions orient around employment law and company law: the Scottish Parliament has power over neither.

To echo what Christina McKelvie said, in these times, it is important to acknowledge the valuable contribution that European law and EU membership has made to strengthening employment rights, including in areas that are directly related to gender equality in the workplace. Therefore, as well as endorsing the motion that is before us today, and the Scottish Government's proposals in it, let us also bear in mind that securing Scotland's continued membership of the European Union matters—especially when it comes to building more equal workplaces in our country for our fellow citizens and for generations to come.

16:57

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Christina McKelvie talked about cheeky women. I would not call myself cheeky, but one of the reasons why I became involved in politics was that, when my kids were young, there were absolutely no playgroups, nurseries or anything at all. I took that on board and started up summer play schemes. Through that, I was elected as a councillor because it was the only way that I could continue. I did not see myself as being cheeky; I just thought that there was an injustice and that women and children were being hard done by. I know that other people in the council saw me as being cheeky because I am a woman. I thought

that I would throw that in to show that being a cheeky woman and injustice set me on the road to politics.

I welcome the contribution that the minister and others have made today. It has been a good debate, but I am talking particularly about the minister's contribution and his recognition of unpaid carers, of whom more are women than are men. Indeed, women provide about 70 per cent of unpaid care and are twice as likely to give up paid work—a hard choice—to care for someone. That means that 74 per cent—a huge amount—of claimants for carers allowance are women.

I take on board what the minister said about the welfare powers being devolved and I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to equalising the carers allowance with jobseekers allowance once carers benefits have been devolved. That will mean a big improvement and I thank him for that explanation.

Alex Rowley raised an issue that I wanted to raise, which is the other programmes that are being devolved under the Scotland Act 2016 from the DWP to the Scottish Parliament, including the employability programme, the works programme and choice, which the minister had already mentioned.

I believe that that devolution gives the Parliament and the Government the opportunity to introduce work programmes that have gender equality as a central aim. I look forward to exploring that concept in the Social Security Committee and to exploring the new powers on employment support. We need to take into account the barriers that are faced by women who are in work and returning to work. It is a huge barrier that people who are on some form of carers allowance can earn only a certain amount. I am sure that all members have heard from constituents who are allowed to work for only a couple of hours a week simply because they will, if they earn just above a certain amount, completely lose their carers allowance, even if they care for a disabled child. That is no way to encourage people into work. As the largest number of carers are women, that is also discriminatory. I look forward to considering that in the Social Security Committee.

Clare Adamson raised unconscious bias. We are all very aware that unconscious bias exists. Monica Lennon took the issue further when she said that she had spoken to a couple of girls at a polling station who were familiar with the issues but did not seem to mind—they expected to get less money even if they did exactly the same job as a man. In this day and age, it is really quite shocking and worrying that young girls expect that. There is an unconscious bias, not just in girls but

in what is out there: I will come on to talk about the media in my last couple of minutes.

We need to tackle unconscious bias. Mark Griffin picked up on that with regard to careers, in which there is a huge discrepancy. We have to support people in their homes and at school and we have to look at careers advice. We need to look at what is happening in schools and ask why young girls are sent down a certain road or are not encouraged to take up some forms of employment. When I was a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee in a previous session, we looked at that issue and found evidence that people were not getting the best careers advice.

I want to return to the media. We all pay attention to the issue, but the media are never called to account for the way that they portray females—young and old. We need only look at how women are portrayed in newspapers and on TV. I am not talking just about page 3 or whatever—certainly, I do not think that they would like me on page 3, but never mind. I am talking about the fact that the media are very flippant about women and girls in relation to careers. Young girls are very susceptible to peer pressure, but in newspapers and what they see on trains and buses every other day, women are not given their proper place in society. That filters through to the level of jobs that they think they can get and to the perception that men have of them. We need to tackle that.

I have only two seconds left, so I will finish. The debate has been good and has looked at various aspects. We really need to look at the media. If the media would put forward positive images of young girls and women, we might get a bit further in dealing with unconscious bias.

17:03

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I most sincerely welcome the Scottish Government's report "New Perspectives on the Gender Pay Gap". There are also new solutions, perhaps. From listening to the debate, it seems that perspectives might not have not changed as much as we would have liked. Inequalities remain deep. We have received wonderful briefings from organisations such as Engender pointing out that the grotesque disproportionate impact on women still exists. As members have said, occupational segregation is a real challenge. I wholeheartedly welcome the fact that Jamie Hepburn will chair the advisory council for women and girls, which I think has the potential to make a generational difference.

Given the bias that Ruth Maguire talked about in her excellent speech, we know that women have always had to fight for their rights in society—

whether they were cheeky or otherwise, as Sandra White said. I hope that the next generation of women, who will continue to fight for those rights, will recognise that we have made progress, but they will know that we still have far to travel.

Women are the front-line victims of austerity. They have fewer assets and they are less likely to be part of an occupational pension scheme. Staggeringly, they make up 92 per cent of lone parents and 75 per cent of part-time workers. According to Oxfam, women form the majority of those in the world who are living in poverty. They are exposed to violence and forced marriage and, across the world, provision of basic education for girls is still staggeringly low.

Again according to Oxfam, gender inequality is the most serious and pervasive form of discrimination. Women make up half the world's population, but they generate only 37 per cent of gross domestic product. As many members said this afternoon, many women are seriously held back by structural bias. I think that it was Gillian Martin who said that the importance of women's contribution to the economy is missed.

Research shows that women value in their employment things such as support from line management, including support for their return to work following illness or maternity leave. It seems that women value such things more than men. The STUC report "Women's Voices: Women and Work Scotland 2016", which is an excellent report that I recommend to members who have not read it, states positively that there is an

"unprecedented interest in a collaborative and engaged approach"

to women in the workplace.

Issues such as long-term job security and financial reward remain problematic, as do the unequal promotion opportunities for women and the lack of research on and understanding of the barriers for women in employment. I am pleased that the minister has acknowledged the work that needs to be done to research that further, particularly in relation to older women.

Like many women, I believe that a women's place is in a union. Perhaps trade unions are an unexplored source for research into barriers to work. If the minister has not already thought about talking to the trade unions, I commend to him the idea of their being involved in the advisory panel. As a former full-time trade union official, I can testify to the fact that many women would face employment discrimination alone if it was not for their unions.

Unions themselves remain male dominated—organisationally, women are not represented at the top. The fact that some 55 per cent of men and

women are not in a trade union is a matter for another day, but more women need to be in trade unions.

On the question of older women in the workplace, there are issues such as the health deficit for older workers in general. We need to address that because that demographic is going to increase for the next two decades.

I want to say a few words about childcare. We have to ask ourselves what flexible childcare actually looks like. It is a policy area that requires a national all-party focus, because I do not think that we have got it quite right up to now. Scottish Labour supports free childcare. We introduced that policy when we were in government, and I support it, but the approach has sometimes been at the expense of working out how to create a more flexible childcare policy and workplace nurseries in particular. In talking about the importance of childcare, Gillian Martin said that women could work a lot smarter and for longer if they were given flexible childcare.

Many members talked about the pay gap, and we all agree that occupational segregation and the way that society is structured are among the main causes of that. Mark Griffin, Monica Lennon and others talked about how early on in a girl's life the impact sets in if she does not have parents who promote the fact that she has equal opportunity. The role that women play in caring is vital in that regard.

I am glad that the Scottish Government will accept Labour's amendment. I have said why we think that it is important. We will not support the Tory amendment, as Daniel Johnson and others have said, because we support the real living wage and not the one that was manufactured by George Osborne to undermine working family tax credits. In my union career, I never met a Tory who supported either the minimum wage or the living wage, but the Tories are conveniently supporting them now. I therefore cannot support the Tory amendment. I support the motion as amended by Scottish Labour.

17:10

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): We are grateful to Jamie Hepburn for bringing the debate to the chamber. As is shown by the fact that we lodged only a small amendment, there is much in the motion with which we agree. Jamie Hepburn is right to say that many stereotypes start early and feed through to adulthood via course choices, and we agree that it is essential to challenge such stereotypes. Monica Lennon is right to highlight the role played by gendered materials, and I was particularly glad to hear Gillian Martin bring up the issue of flexible working

for dads, which I am passionate about. Above all, we do not argue with Alex Rowley's call for a joined-up strategy, and we heed his call for action from the Scottish Government, not more debate.

Nevertheless, much work is being done. Indeed, in my experience as an employment lawyer principally advising the oil and gas industry, it was notable that the generalised statistics and blunt conclusions that some people rely on mask many subtleties. As Ben Macpherson says, 51 per cent of the 11,000 practising solicitors in Scotland are female, and 64 per cent of those are aged under 40. The percentage of female executives at a major oil company that I dealt with more than doubled between 2000 and 2014. As a side note, I reassure Christina McKelvie that the UK legislation on maternity and pregnancy goes well beyond the European *de minimis*.

The positive change to more gender-balanced industries is hugely encouraging, although we accept that it is a long way from being the general position across all sectors. All that progress has been made without mandatory quotas and top-down diktats. The legal profession is attracting more women because it realised that a more balanced workforce makes for a better workforce and adapted accordingly. It is also increasingly receptive to flexible working to accommodate family commitments. More women have been attracted to the oil and gas industry because universities, technical colleges, schools and the industry have worked together in a joined-up approach to make the industry more attractive.

The three largest parties here are currently led by women, not one of whom got to that position because of quotas or positive discrimination. Those women—and, before them, Annabel Goldie, Wendy Alexander and Johann Lamont—got there because of ability and on merit. As Annie Wells said at the outset of the debate, imposing equal numbers of women and men on boards rather than selecting on merit leads to deterioration in operating performance, negative attitudes and responses to the promoted women, a masking of underlying problems with attitudes and infrastructure and, ultimately, the devaluing of women in relation to both their own self-esteem and the perception of them by those with whom they work. Gender quotas and positive discrimination are not just anti-meritocratic in principle but counterproductive in practice.

Monica Lennon: Liam Kerr has talked about merit, but the Conservative benches are full of men. Is there a problem with the women in the Conservative Party? Were they not good enough to be selected?

Liam Kerr: On the contrary—we simply need the Scottish electorate to continue to do what it started to do a month ago and vote for more

Scottish Conservatives. That is the way in which to increase representation on our benches.

The reason why there are fewer women on boards is not a function of institutional sexism, although I accept that there may be a residual element of that. As many members have said, there are myriad social and economic factors at play, including—as Clare Adamson rightly says—unconscious bias. We should achieve equality by winning the argument, not by bludgeoning businesses into compliance without addressing the fundamentals that underpin the current differences.

I would be surprised if the chamber did not support our amendment on encouraging men into careers that are female dominated, although, as Rachael Hamilton says, that cannot be done in the context of cutting 152,000 college places.

We need more men in teaching, for example. Far too often, we read reports that say that young men turn to crime or bad behaviour because of a lack of male role models in the school environment. Only 9 per cent of primary school teachers today are male, and in education overall, the number hovers around 23 per cent. I think that that is appalling, so I fully support Annie Wells's amendment highlighting that

“work must be done to encourage appropriate male and female representation across all professions.”

I thought that Ruth Maguire spoke very well on that. I simply cannot imagine that the chamber will refuse to support our amendment on that basis.

I cannot conclude my speech without briefly turning to the contribution of the Liberal Democrats. Members who have come in late or who popped out during the debate might not be aware that the Liberal Democrats have made no contribution to it—mainly because not a single one has attended it. Perhaps that is only to be expected from a party that has no female MSPs or MPs; has never had a female leader, either here or in Westminster; and this year, in the most recent election, saw a well-respected, hard-working female MSP toppled from the top of the North East Scotland regional list, to be replaced by a man. I mean no offence to the member personally but that hardly screams equality. I do not want to kick a party that is down—much—but, given the motion, I find that unacceptable. I also find it unacceptable that, given what is a cross-party, collaborative approach, they have not shown up at all throughout the debate.

We must do more—and we can do more—to break down the barriers that still exist in all workplaces and for all genders. Education is key. Fostering an enthusiasm in girls for engineering, science and maths is key. Encouraging the private sector is key. Getting more male teachers to foster

and encourage the next generation is key. Making childcare more affordable is key. Positive discrimination and quotas are not, however, and a semantic point on the national living wage is not a reason not to support the Conservative amendment, as Jamie Hepburn and Alex Rowley suggest. The Scottish Government might not feel that the national living wage is enough but I am sure that it welcomes the increase, as craved by the motion—particularly because when it was introduced by the chancellor it was higher than what the SNP was proposing at the time. The chamber is calling for collaboration, so let us have a bit more of that and a bit less opportunism. Accordingly, I commend the Conservative amendment to the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): I call Angela Constance to wind up the debate. There is a little time in hand, so you have a little bit upwards of 10 minutes, Ms Constance.

17:18

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): You may live to regret that, Presiding Officer.

Thank you very much, Presiding Officer, and thank you to everybody who has contributed to this afternoon's debate. There have been some thoughtful and very worthy contributions, although I am somewhat perplexed that some of our colleagues and members on the Tory benches seem never to have heard of the glass ceiling. They fail to recognise that the underrepresentation of women in every aspect of our economy—and, indeed, civic life—is oppressive; it is an exclusion; and it is, quite simply, wrong.

Yes, we have our first woman First Minister—and I am absolutely positive that she will do far more for women than the first woman Prime Minister ever did. Yes, three of our party leaders are women. Yes, we have the first-ever 50:50 gender-balanced Scottish Government Cabinet. However, what we in this Parliament have to guard against, at all costs, is complacency, because having a few women at the top—particularly in this place—does not replace the women who are absent from our benches.

I was very proud to be one of the MSPs who signed up to the 50:50 campaign. As we progress through this session of Parliament, I look forward to introducing legislation that will provide for a 50:50 gender balance in public appointments to public sector boards. We will return to that issue.

The women who are here must guard against saying that, just because we have managed to get elected or to get into positions of power, surely other women can manage to do so, too. There are

very visible and invisible barriers that exist for women the length and breadth of the country, and it is beholden on those who have the privilege of holding an elected position—especially those of us who are ministers—to do everything that we can to knock down the glass ceiling.

We have had some thoughtful speeches. Gillian Martin and Rachael Hamilton reflected on their personal experience of maternity and pregnancy discrimination. I recall having to come into the Parliament when my son was only days old. That is most certainly not a boast—it was a matter of necessity, but it is also a matter of regret. The Parliament should always seek to lead and to set an example. That is why the Government, whether through me or Mr Hepburn, is absolutely determined to work hand in glove with the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Scotland, bearing in mind the plight of the 54,000 women in Scotland who, despite living in the 21st century, continue to experience discrimination related to being pregnant and giving birth, which should be the happiest time in a woman's life.

Our achievements as a Parliament and as a country have been reflected fairly in the debate, but there has also been an honest acknowledgement of what remains to be done. It is true that the gender pay gap for full-time work has decreased and is lower in Scotland than it is in the UK. The same is true of the overall gender pay gap figure. However, our comparisons should go further afield than our nearest friend and neighbour. The pay gap for the over-50s is particularly stubborn and persistent, and that perhaps relates to the premium that is attached to caring by women in particular. Pauline McNeill was quite right to say that we should look at that issue in more depth. When, in a former post, I chaired the strategic group on women and work, the trade unionists who were represented on that group were already deeply engaged in that area. We should remember that 40 per cent of families rely on help from grandparents to care for their children.

It is heartening that we have a high employment rate and low rates of unemployment and inactivity. Indeed, we have the second-highest employment rate for women in Europe. However, we must acknowledge that, over the year, female employment has decreased by 35,000 and that female economic inactivity has increased by 43,000. Therefore, when it comes to the economy, we are certainly not out of the woods yet. We should always scratch beneath the surface of the headline statistics. Research by the Scottish Government shows that countries that have pioneered the sort of policies that we are pursuing do not necessarily have the lowest pay gaps, so we must work even harder and ensure that all the arrows are flying in the right direction and that we

have a joined-up approach, joined-up government and joined-up civic Scotland.

It would be remiss of me not to reiterate the calls for those local authorities that have not settled their equal pay claims to do so. It would also be remiss of me, particularly in the aftermath of Thursday's referendum result, not to acknowledge the EU's pivotal role in advancing women's equality. Equal pay, maternity leave, shared parental leave and anti-discrimination laws are just some of the rights and protections that are enshrined in EU law. Whatever happens in the coming months and years, I want people to be assured that this Scottish Government will always seek to uphold rights and protections that have done so much to progress women's equality.

As has been mentioned, the Government will accept the Labour Party amendment, which rightly recognises the negative impact on our economy of occupational segregation and indeed the underrepresentation of women in our economy, particularly with regard to STEM. As we all know, not many guarantees come with predicting the economic future, but the focus on STEM has to be—and is—a sure bet.

We also know that occupational segregation is a particularly wicked issue. No country in the world has solved it; however, some have done better in particular sectors, and we should cast our eyes far and wide to learn from the best international practice. Perhaps, though, we should unite tonight in being determined to make Scotland the first country to finally crack occupational segregation.

Solving, challenging and tackling inequality in the workplace is not only the right thing, but the smart thing to do for the future of our country and our economy. The Bank of Scotland has said:

“Being able to attract, develop, fully utilise and retain top female talent is highly important to us, and we recognise that companies with gender diverse senior management teams perform better.”

Gender diversity is therefore good for business. It also chimes with our inclusive growth agenda, which is very much at the heart of this Government's economic strategy. We want an economy that works for the common good.

We know that promoting economic growth and tackling inequality must be two sides of the same coin. As a result, we will continue to support and promote the real living wage—and we will therefore not support the Tory amendment, which for some is essentially a tinkering around with the national minimum wage. There is very strong evidence that the living wage is good for business, increases productivity and—most important—makes people feel valued in the workplace. For example, a nursery worker from West Lothian has said:

“The Living Wage also makes me feel more confident and valued whilst I'm working. I recognise that I'm appreciated for doing my job, and that even rubs off on the children I'm looking after.”

The real living wage is a societal good that we should all be campaigning for, supporting and advancing at every opportunity.

Many people have focused on the importance of STEM subjects. Briefly, I would suggest that we recognise that the number of Scottish Qualifications Authority exam passes by girls in STEM subjects has risen between 2007 and 2015 and that 48 per cent of passes in STEM subjects are by young women. There is, of course, more to do. We know that young women are well represented in biology but less so in physics, and we face a startling challenge in and around information and communications technology. We need to attract and encourage more women and indeed more young people into these productive sectors. They are the sectors of the future, and we and our economy will miss a trick if we cannot get more women into sectors that are crying out for them.

As I have said, we must ensure that all the arrows are flying in the right direction. We need a comprehensive response. In essence, my job is to join up the strategy and the dots between the early years and developing Scotland's young workforce, and to ensure that the gendered action plans that the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland are pursuing are having an impact on the ground. We are, of course, advancing early years and free childcare. That is the biggest infrastructure project that the Government has undertaken. Flexible working, which many members have mentioned, is absolutely crucial, as are the reporting of the pay gap and occupational segregation.

I will end by touching on the new powers that will come to the Parliament. It is important that we do not confuse social security powers that relate to disability and carers and benefits that exist to assist people with the additional cost of living with a disability with the limited employment programmes that are being devolved to the Parliament. Nonetheless, with the devolution of the work choice programme and the work programme, we will make different choices. There are indeed opportunities of having more gender-sensitive employability programmes, which Andy Wightman spoke of.

I am very proud of the fact that the Government has funded Scottish Women's Aid, which works in partnership with various local services, with an employment programme that supports women who have been financially dependent on an abusive partner and who have additional barriers into the workplace.

There are already examples of employability programmes that are targeted at the specific needs of women, but we will have to pursue that issue further. I know that Mr Hepburn will relish that task as he takes it forward.

Business Motion

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-00629, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 6 September 2016

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

Wednesday 7 September 2016

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

Thursday 8 September 2016

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

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:32

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S5M-00630, on variation of standing orders, motion S5M-00631, on substitution on committees, and motion S5M-00633, on membership of committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 8 September—

(i) in the first sentence of Rule 13.7.A1 “30 minutes” be replaced with “45 minutes”;

and

(ii) in Rule 13.6.2 “6” be replaced with “8”.

That the Parliament agrees the following nominated committee substitutes, as permitted under Rule 6.3A—

Scottish Greens

Economy, Jobs and Fair Work: Mark Ruskell

Education and Skills: Alison Johnstone

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform: Andy Wightman

European and External Relations: Andy Wightman

Finance: John Finnie

Health and Sport: Ross Greer

Justice: Patrick Harvie

Local Government and Communities: Patrick Harvie

Rural Economy and Connectivity: Mark Ruskell

Social Security: Ross Greer

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments: John Finnie

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the composition and membership of the European and External Relations Committee—

Remit: Set out in Rule 6.8

Number of members: 9

Membership: Jackson Carlaw, Rachael Hamilton, Ross Greer, Joan McAlpine, Bruce Crawford, Richard Lochhead, Lewis Macdonald, Ash Denham, Tavish Scott.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*].

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

Decision Time

17:32

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are four questions to be put at decision time today. The first question is, that amendment S5M-00607.1, in the name of Annie Wells, which seeks to amend motion S5M-00607, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on gender and the workplace, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)

(SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-00607.2, in the name of Alex Rowley, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-00607, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government publication, *New Perspectives on the Gender Pay Gap*, which shows that the gender pay gap is lower than in the UK and has reduced substantially over the long term, recognises that a significant gap persists for some age groups, sectors and occupations and explores key drivers such as inequality of unpaid care, traditional social or employment attitudes and culture; notes the wide range of Scottish Government policies designed to help close the gap and benefit women in the workplace, including encouraging payment of the living wage, increasing free childcare, challenging pregnancy and maternity discrimination, addressing occupational segregation, working towards gender balance on boards and promoting family-friendly and flexible working; agrees with the establishment of an advisory council for women and girls; welcomes the addition to the National Performance Framework of the new national indicator tracking the gender pay gap over time; commends the work of the Strategic Group on Women and Work for helping bring this agenda forward across the various sectors of the Scottish economy; recognises that employment and industrial barriers faced by women have a negative impact on Scotland's economy with, for example, the Royal Society of Edinburgh explaining that the lack of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) jobs is a loss of a potential £170 million per annum to the Scottish economy, and believes that the Scottish Government must prioritise supporting women into senior management positions and industries where they are currently overlooked.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to put a single question on Parliamentary Bureau motions S5M-00630, S5M-00631 and S5M-00633. If any member objects, please say so now.

There being no objections, the next question is, that motions S5M-00630, S5M-00631 and S5M-00633, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 8 September—

(i) in the first sentence of Rule 13.7.A1 "30 minutes" be replaced with "45 minutes";

and

(ii) in Rule 13.6.2 “6” be replaced with “8”.

That the Parliament agrees the following nominated committee substitutes, as permitted under Rule 6.3A—

Scottish Greens

Economy, Jobs and Fair Work: Mark Ruskell

Education and Skills: Alison Johnstone

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform: Andy Wightman

European and External Relations: Andy Wightman

Finance: John Finnie

Health and Sport: Ross Greer

Justice: Patrick Harvie

Local Government and Communities: Patrick Harvie

Rural Economy and Connectivity: Mark Ruskell

Social Security: Ross Greer

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments: John Finnie

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the composition and membership of the European and External Relations Committee—

Remit: Set out in Rule 6.8

Number of members: 9

Membership: Jackson Carlaw, Rachael Hamilton, Ross Greer, Joan McAlpine, Bruce Crawford, Richard Lochhead, Lewis Macdonald, Ash Denham, Tavish Scott.

Srebrenica Genocide (21st Anniversary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business today is a members’ business debate on motion S5M-00007 in the name of Michael Russell, on commemorating the 21st anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put. I ask members to leave the chamber quietly.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that the 21st anniversary of the genocide at Srebrenica in Bosnia, in which over 8,000 Bosnians, mostly men and including many young men, were murdered, takes place in July 2016; understands that the United Kingdom’s Srebrenica Memorial Week organised by the charity, Remembering Srebrenica, will run from 10 to 17 July with the theme, 21: Coming of age – time to act; is mindful that many Bosnian young people did not have the chance to celebrate their coming of age as a result of the massacre and the war; considers that it has never been more important to engage with all young people and teach them that racial and religious hatred can lead to genocide, and hopes that the events of the commemoration will inspire people to challenge hatred of all types and work to create a more cohesive and tolerant society.

17:35

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I welcome to the gallery members of the UK charity Remembering Srebrenica, including one or two people who were in Srebrenica when Jenny Marra, Lesley Thomson, the then Solicitor General, and I visited last year.

On that sunny September afternoon, a group of us sat at the very beautiful Srebrenica-Potocari cemetery in Bosnia and Herzegovina, among the 6,377 graves, and listened—at times in tears—to Nura Begovic and Nedzad Avdic talk about genocide. They were talking about genocide not in the abstract, but in the personal: genocide that had changed their lives for ever. Nura is one of the mothers of Srebrenica, who have been one of the driving forces that have led to the kind of remembrance that we are having today. They are the mothers of sons, the wives of husbands, the sisters of brothers whose bodies, broken into parts and scattered at first across the countryside of Serbia and Bosnia, now lie in Potocari.

I do not have time today to go into the precise story of what happened in Srebrenica or in the Bosnian war. Suffice it to say that, on our continent, in the lifetime of everyone in this chamber, not only was genocide committed but we—the world—failed to stop it. It was not our only failure. We failed to intervene to lift the longest siege of modern times—the siege of the beautiful European city of Sarajevo, where thousands died and hundreds of thousands of people suffered

starvation and privation that is unimaginable to us here. We failed to halt the ambitions of a murderous dictator, who had planned such an event for years. However, at Srebrenica we failed, collectively, to protect a civilian population who had come to the international community for help in order to try to save their lives.

Twenty-one years ago next month, at Potocari, a few kilometres outside the village of Srebrenica, the Dutch United Nations force that was meant to be safeguarding the safe haven allowed itself to be overrun and in so doing created the opportunity for the Serbian army to eliminate almost the entire male population of the area—to ethnically cleanse the village.

That is the action, or inaction, for which the mothers wished to see legal culpability established. Theirs were voices that would not be silenced. Eventually they took the United Nations and then the Dutch Government to court for breach of their duty of care to the population that they were meant to be protecting. They also encouraged the international community to embark on a series of trials at the Hague which has led to a number of convictions for genocide and mass murder. We are talking about genocide and mass murder, on our continent, very much within our lifetimes, and carried out by people the victims regarded as friends and neighbours and inflicted on people among whom the killers had lived.

Nedžad was just a boy at the time; he was a son and a brother. The story that he told us in the sunshine that afternoon was almost too horrific to hear. That day he was taken to a school and kept in an upstairs classroom with his father and uncles while they heard the sounds of others being abused and murdered. Later he was taken from his family and driven in the back of a truck to a place where he dug a grave. Then he was shot and left to die under a pile of bodies. Although he was badly wounded, by a total accident he was found by another victim who was also wounded. In a perilous state they managed to survive—not over days, but over weeks—as they made their way through hostile countryside to safety. They were the only two who survived of the several hundred who were herded into the school rooms, and they were among the very few survivors out of the more than 8,000 who disappeared.

When the international community began to realise what had happened, the Serbian army took steps to cover their tracks. Mass graves were reopened and bodies broken up and taken to be reburied elsewhere. The task of finding, identifying and laying to rest those bodies has taken two decades. It is still going on. The total number of victims is more than 8,000, which means that more than a thousand gravestones are still to be

erected. The astonishing work of the International Commission on Missing Persons has resulted in an extraordinarily high number of positive identifications made while progressing an amazing range of new techniques for identification and DNA matching that are being used elsewhere. The commission's work has given closure to so many families—to so many mothers. It has ensured that justice can be done in terms of bearing witness to the massacre that took place.

Today's debate is about bearing witness, as is the work of Remembering Srebrenica and the involvement in that work of a wide range of individuals from across faith groups, civic Scotland and this and other Parliaments. It is mirrored by work in the other parts of the UK under the same charitable umbrella. That work is focused not just on the past, vital as that is, but on helping Bosnia and Herzegovina to move into the future.

Bearing witness means three things. It means going to see and being prepared to look and listen no matter how hard the experience. It means being willing to talk about those things in one's everyday setting, including here, and sharing the experiences of the visit as we are doing here today. It means resolving to campaign and to work for a world in which, by the awareness of past genocide, we are able to prevent such future tragedies.

In the world in which we live, in the surroundings in which we work, it is sometimes possible to believe that such things cannot happen, but they can. As Primo Levi, a Jew who saw at first hand the horror of the Holocaust observed, if it happened then it can happen now, if it can happen here it can happen anywhere, and if it happened to them it can happen to us. That is the message of Srebrenica. That is Nura's and Nedžad's message. It happened then, it happened there and it happened to them. It must never happen again, but to ensure that we remember, we must talk and we must witness. That is what we do this afternoon: remember and bear witness to every single one of those people on the 21st anniversary of their death—on the 21st anniversary of genocide in Europe.

17:42

Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): I thank Mike Russell for securing the debate and for his powerful contribution this evening. I alert members to my entry in the register of interests and the fact that I sit on Remembering Srebrenica's Scottish board, although I admit that I have been a rather sporadic attender of late.

As so often seems to be the case, this past week has been a tumultuous one for Scottish and UK politics. It would be easy, given the

circumstances, for those of us in this chamber to focus our energies inwards, to get caught up in the political bubble that surrounds us. This debate is a counterweight to that. It is a stark, timely and necessary reminder that our responsibilities go far beyond the here and now.

In less than a fortnight's time, the UK will mark Srebrenica memorial week, the 21st anniversary of modern Europe's darkest hour.

In July 1995, General Ratko Mladić and the Serbian forces under his command stormed the town of Srebrenica and embarked on a systematic campaign of mass murder. UN peacekeepers, monitoring what had been declared a safe zone, proved unable to live up to their name. Evil was allowed to flourish on a continent that had previously sworn "Never again." In all, 8,000 men and boys lost their lives. Women were subjected to the most horrific sexual violence. Families were wiped out and those of us looking on from afar had to reconcile ourselves to the fact that genocide had once again touched Europe's shores.

Twenty-one years on, those young Bosnians would have been entering adulthood—starting families, building careers—with all the hope, fear and excitement that that particular journey brings. Consequently, Remembering Srebrenica has chosen the phrase "Coming of age" to mark this year's commemorations. It is a tribute to the thousands murdered in cold blood before they had the opportunity to make their mark on the world.

That senseless loss and terrible waste of potential stalks Bosnia to this day and it is right that members from across the chamber have travelled to Bosnia to see at first hand the work that is being done to piece society there back together. I strongly encourage new members to make the trip should the opportunity arise. I know how moving Mike Russell, Jenny Marra, Jim Wallace and others found their journey to Srebrenica, just as I did.

Since my visit last February, I have been continually struck by the strong links that bind our two nations, which were forged in Bosnia's hour of need. Scots manned aid trucks that brought relief to Sarajevo when it was under siege; we as a country welcomed refugees who were fleeing the conflict; and forensic scientists from Scotland went to help to connect bones to names and enabled families to say a proper goodbye.

In return, Bosnians have set up home in this country. As someone who has had the privilege of representing our largest city and now the capital, I know the important contribution that the Bosnian diaspora makes to Scotland.

In honour of those links, the First Minister spoke at the St Giles service last year that was organised by Remembering Srebrenica and led by the

moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This year's commemorations will take place on Friday 15 July at Cathcart old parish church; members are free to attend and I encourage anyone who can to do so.

Before then, Scotland and Bosnia will meet in a rather different setting—we will face off in Glasgow as part of the football homeless world cup. The game will have its competitive edge, but I hope that the occasion will provide some opportunity for us to reflect on the shared ties between our two peoples.

That common spirit must shine through. What transpired in Srebrenica will always be a dark stain on our continent but, instead of ducking that truth, we must face it head on and learn from it. That means tackling prejudice where we see it, standing up to hatred and showing our young people that there is a better way.

We must never be complacent and simply presume that such atrocities have been confined to history. When I look around the world and think of Christians in the middle east or Muslims in Myanmar, it is clear that intolerance persists. We must find our voice, stand together and—in memory of the 8,000 who were lost 21 years ago—continue to fight to make the world a better place. Then and only then may the horrors of Srebrenica be put to rest.

17:47

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Like others, I thank Mike Russell for gaining time for this important debate. The subject is very hard. It is difficult to accept that we are talking about something that happened as recently as 21 years ago, which is within the lifetime of all the members who are in the chamber. It is 21 years since the Srebrenica genocide. In the life of the human race, that is hardly a heartbeat—it is just yesterday.

Many of those who died were young men and women and, tragically, they were not the only ones. As I revisit eyewitness accounts, photos and newspaper articles, I see the horror, the terror and the sorrow. I see families—people like us who sought to live.

The Balkans were a crucible of the first world war and experienced significant difficulties throughout the 20th century that culminated in what happened with the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. The push for democratic reform after the end of the Soviet Union was met with oppression and civil war burst out all over the region.

Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo cascaded into chaos as Milošević orchestrated his

campaign. The media in the area portrayed families of other ethnicities as rapists or violent killers; the media condoned and indeed encouraged violence towards them. The venom that was kindled incited hatred that caused perhaps 140,000 deaths and certainly ruined millions of lives. In another context, Margo MacDonald said, "The living shall envy the dead." Perhaps that was how many of those who survived felt.

Srebrenica was emblematic of the ethnic hatred that Slobodan Milošević and Ratko Mladić stirred up. In Srebrenica, they conjured terror and murder that were aimed squarely at the Bosniak Muslim population. It was a programme of ethnic cleansing.

In a witness account, one woman recounted how she left Srebrenica to find safety, only to be raped upon arrival in Tisca. Another survivor recounted the harrowing tale of the death of young boys and a 14-year-old rape victim. She said:

"They took some boys who were about ten or eleven. We never saw them again. Everyone was in a panic, trying to hide their boys. While this was going on, the girl slipped off to the side, took a scarf, tied it around her neck and hanged herself ... By the time we found her she was dead."

The events were fuelled by a vicious campaign of xenophobia. Thousands upon thousands died, millions were displaced and the use of sexualised violence and torture was commonplace. A tragic capacity for hatred and racism lives in the human race.

We must remember all those who died, and support those who survived. There is nothing so toxic to civilization as violence and nothing so toxic to the spirit as hatred. Today, the lessons are as important as ever. When Senator Robert F Kennedy, who himself met a violent end, talked about the disease of violence in our civilization, he said:

"We must recognize that this short life can neither be ennobled or enriched by hatred or revenge. Our lives on this planet are too short and the work to be done too great to let this spirit flourish any longer in our land."

I will conclude by going back 100 years and quoting a little bit of poetry by W B Yeats that was written at the time of the first world war:

"The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

17:51

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): It is perhaps a prescient time to be having this debate on the 21st anniversary of the horrific genocide that took place in Srebrenica. We live in a very uncertain world, in which not a week seems to

pass without reports of another terror attack, such as yesterday's in Ankara, and conflicts continue to rage with human devastation in Syria and Iraq. Here at home, emotions rage too, as the economically dispossessed rail against the system and the reverberations threaten the very stability of Europe.

It is 21 years since the genocide in Bosnia. I was lucky enough to go to Bosnia last September as part of a delegation from Scotland that was led by the Very Rev Lorna Hood. I had anticipated the trip with a mixture of intrigue and dread—dread because I knew that I would be deeply affected by what I heard and saw there. Ruth Davidson had warned me of the emotional impact that it would have, and she was right.

I thank Michael Russell for securing this important debate and I thank him and the people in the public gallery for their companionship. As you know, Presiding Officer, and as President Michael Higgins told us earlier today, when bearing witness it is very important to be in the company of supportive and morally empathetic people.

I had not anticipated the incredible enjoyment that I would get from the trip. Bosnia is a beautiful country with beautiful people. It is a fragile place, but perhaps more beautiful for its fragility.

Michael Higgins said to us this afternoon that we often seem to walk by conflict. During the trip to Sarajevo, I found myself wondering what I was doing that summer, when 8,000 men were slaughtered by the Serb army in the hills of Srebrenica. I was preparing to start university that summer. I was 17 years old, working in a shop in Dundee. I had finished school and had a place at one of this country's finest universities. I had all the opportunities in the world, while young men my age were marched in columns through the hills of Srebrenica, executed and had their bodies scattered in many locations.

This morning, as I thought about this debate, I cast my mind back to what I took away from that trip. My key conclusion—and one that we have discussed in this Parliament—was that the future economic prosperity of Bosnia, that still-fragile country, rested on the future of the European Union. We had had lunch with the British ambassador, who had left me under no illusion about EU candidate status being Bosnia's greatest hope of swiftly building a future for the country's economy, in which 60 per cent of people are currently unemployed. I then turned my mind to the Brexit vote less than a week ago, when I think that people were attracted to voting leave because they continued to feel dispossessed, economically insecure, isolated and helpless and were prepared to take the risk.

In the Parliament today, President Michael Higgins reminded members of the moral responsibility on us all to prevent instability, war and atrocity, and to foster peace and cultural understanding in our communities. It was a salient and indeed prescient message, which does not seem overly straightforward in times of turmoil.

President Higgins took us back to the first principles of public service and politics, as does this debate. We must promote peace, stability and prosperity, and we must do all that we can to prevent the anger and sense of dispossession and grievance that can lead to tension, conflict and, ultimately, war and genocide. Mike Russell was right to remind us today that atrocities can happen anywhere.

In that spirit, I commend the board of Remembering Srebrenica for its work and I rededicate myself to supporting the charity's work. There is nothing more important than promoting peace, bearing witness and doing everything in our power to prevent the horror of Srebrenica from ever happening again.

17:56

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I have never been to Srebrenica. In the winter of 1995, I was in Bosnia on an aid convoy with the Scottish charity Edinburgh Direct Aid, which was led by the inspirational Denis Rutovitz. I was in Mostar, Sarajevo, Tuzla and the recently besieged eastern Bosnian town of Goražde, which, had the Dayton agreement not been enforced in the weeks following the massacre at Srebrenica, would no doubt have suffered the same fate as its neighbour.

Memories of my two days in Goražde are etched in my mind. I remember the 4ft-deep trench that provided some protection from snipers for children as they moved between the town centre and their school. I remember walking through the town and my eyes adjusting to the complete darkness of the night sky in the absence of street or house lighting. I marvelled at the ingenious solution to the problem of generating electricity for essential use, by the local hospital for example: dozens of washing machine motors were strung across the River Drina and turned into mini-generators that were driven by the river's flow, connected to the shore by makeshift cables. I saw how close the recently vacated Serb sniper positions were—a few hundred meters from the town centre, perched on the hills above.

I have been back to Bosnia in more recent times. In my previous career, one of the most fulfilling projects in which I was involved was the building of a factory in the north of the country to provide employment opportunities for people

whose recent experiences were unimaginable to us. To this day, Bosnia bears the scars of war. Houses that were selected and destroyed on the basis of their owners' ethnicity still stand in ruins. Bullet holes mark the walls of municipal buildings.

The Bosnian war of 1992 to 1995 was one of the most shameful periods of European history. It saw the worst massacre since the Holocaust and the deaths of 200,000 people, the vast majority of them Muslim. Prior to the war, Sarajevo was a bustling, modern European city. It hosted the 1984 winter Olympics—the Torvill and Dean Olympics. It was a melting pot, with mixed marriages between those of different faiths and no faith. There was the rich diversity of a centuries-old, white indigenous Muslim community in the heart of Europe—people who were ethnically and visually no different from their Christian neighbours. That co-existence was anathema to the purveyors of hate who perpetrated the war. That is a timeless lesson for us all.

The massacre of 8,000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica was one of the most high-profile atrocities of the war. It led to the eventual realisation among western powers that the policy of appeasing the ethnic cleansers would not succeed. The Dayton agreement, enforced by NATO troops, came shortly thereafter.

However, let us not forget the siege of Sarajevo, which was longer than the siege of Leningrad, with its 10,000 deaths, mostly by sniper fire as civilians went about their daily lives. Nor should we forget the ethnic cleansing in countless towns and villages.

We must also not forget the shameful behaviour of the UK Government at the time, which focused on international powerplays rather than on the unfolding humanitarian crisis and resisted calls to allow even defensive materials to be provided to the Bosnian forces. Significant numbers of deaths of Bosnian soldiers defending their communities were due to head injuries caused by the simple lack of helmets. That was a tacit green light to the forces of Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić as they prepared to overrun the eastern enclaves, the so-called safe areas, which were supposedly under the protection of the UN and the great powers but were, in reality, a death trap for their inhabitants.

Europe has come a long way from the nightmare that engulfed the continent some 70 years ago. When I was younger, we believed that lessons had been learned. The events of the Bosnian war proved that belief wrong. We must never forget the ease with which modern, civilised societies can descend into the worst of atrocities. We must always understand and guard against the ethnic hatred that ends so easily in nightmares like Srebrenica.

18:00

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North)

(SNP): I congratulate Mike Russell on giving the Parliament an opportunity to commemorate these appalling atrocities. Whether in four minutes, four days or four weeks, it is impossible to do justice to the magnitude of the suffering caused by the massacre to generations of Bosniaks. It is worth remembering that Bosniak men, women and children were not only murdered but starved to death, denied water and medical supplies, raped, viciously harmed, ignored and dehumanised.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia estimates that between 25,000 and 30,000 women and children were forcibly removed from Srebrenica. Buses that were meant to remove them from the UN base in Potocari to Muslim territory never reached their destination.

Perhaps the most shocking fact about the massacre is that, as other speakers pointed out, it was able to be carried out in 1995 in Europe. It was a televised war, and UN protection force—UNPROFOR—troops were in Srebrenica when the atrocities took place. The world was watching. How could it have happened? As then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said in 2005 at the 10 year commemoration of the atrocities:

“we made serious errors of judgement, rooted in a philosophy of impartiality and non-violence which, however admirable, was unsuited to the conflict in Bosnia. That is why, as I also wrote, ‘the tragedy of Srebrenica will haunt our history forever.’”

Make no mistake: what happened in July 1995 was a decision of the Bosnian Serb Administration and army to eradicate Muslim Bosniaks from eastern Bosnia. The magnitude of what happened was shaped by a variety of ill-considered decisions on the side of those who were supposed to protect the Bosniak people.

Bosnian Serb forces had regularly cut off food, water and medical supplies since 1992 but, after Srebrenica was declared a safe area by the UN Security Council in 1993, the threat of its being overrun by surrounding Bosnian Serb forces was deemed averted and the world’s attention shifted to Sarajevo. The town was demilitarised, and UNPROFOR soldiers were put in place to protect the enclave. However, after criticism from UN Security Council members, the original request of 37,000 troops for six safe areas across Bosnia was downscaled to 7,600.

There was more to what unfolded than simply a series of unfortunate assessments, as there are strong indications that significant loss of Bosniak lives in Srebrenica may have been accepted beforehand, although nobody knew or wanted to know what would actually transpire. Western Governments and the UN were aware of directive 7, issued by Bosnian Serb leader Radovan

Karadžić three months before the massacre, which ordered

“combat operations”

to

“create an unbearable situation of total insecurity, with no hope of further survival or life for the inhabitants of Srebrenica or Žepa.”

Over the years, it has emerged that, during discussions between western diplomats and Bosnian Serb military leader Mladic, it was repeatedly implied that three enclaves, including Srebrenica, would be sacrificed.

Last year, *The Observer* reported that it had independently verified records that the UK and US Governments were aware of the impending massacre from early June, but failed to inform the Dutch Government, while Dutch UNPROFOR troops were guarding the safe area. Furthermore, reports coming from the base indicating the takeover early in July were pretty much dismissed. There were misunderstandings and administrative cock-ups in the arrangement of air strikes and, on 11 July, about 400 peacekeepers were left to defend an enclave without a humanitarian corridor that was bursting at the seams with 20,000 to 25,000 Bosniaks.

Only a year earlier, the failure of UN troops to intervene in Rwanda had contributed to the genocide of the Tutsi minority. At Srebrenica, UN soldiers again stood aside. Could they have stopped the massacre? Possibly not, yet a warning of dire consequences for the perpetrators—let alone intervention—would surely have mitigated and disrupted it. Would the Serbs really have carried out such slaughter knowing that they would have to fight a UN that could call up well-equipped NATO reinforcements?

UN inaction was nothing less than shameful; clearly, nothing had been learned from Rwanda. Bosniak men were turned away from the enclave towards a near-certain death; men and boys outside were singled out; men and boys who attempted to flee to Bosnian-controlled areas were attacked—and so unfolded the massacre that we commemorate today. The question always remained to what extent that massacre and other crimes against humanity could have been prevented, although it cannot be emphasised enough that war crimes like that happen because of those who choose to commit them.

Twenty-one years on, those who ordered that atrocity have been convicted of war crimes or are mostly dead. The survivors of the atrocity and their families continue their lives as best they can. The states that constituted the former Yugoslav republic have gone their separate ways. Nevertheless, the importance of commemorating

the event, and acknowledging that we could have done things differently, can never be overstated.

18:06

The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan): I thank Mike Russell for securing this important debate and for sharing his experience of his visit to Srebrenica. He has shown clearly the impact that such visits can have.

As Mr Stevenson observed, for most of us in this chamber, Srebrenica remains fresh in the memory—the darkest moment of a war on this continent that, as others have observed, we watched unfold on our television screens. For our children and young people, 21 years is a generation ago and a part of history that they may know little about.

More than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys had their lives taken from them in the cruellest ways imaginable, but the genocide at Srebrenica did not just take their lives. It shattered the lives of thousands more people: their families, friends and whole communities.

The genocide was described by the United Nations as the worst crime in Europe since the second world war. The horror of Srebrenica is not just that so many people were brutally killed in the prime of their lives, but that it happened when they were under international protection. As Mike Russell said, that is a tragedy that could and should have been prevented. It represents a failure of the international community. It is fair to say that it shames us all.

I pay tribute to the work of Remembering Srebrenica, which works tirelessly to keep the memory of Srebrenica alive in the UK, and to its Scottish board under the leadership of the Very Rev Dr Lorna Hood. Whether it is the development of education packs for teachers, the holding of commemorative events or visits to learn at first hand about the genocide, Remembering Srebrenica ensures that the horror of the genocide is not forgotten.

The Scottish Government is proud to support the work of Remembering Srebrenica. Indeed, I had the immense privilege of launching Remembering Srebrenica's Scottish education pack in Edinburgh at Portobello high school last November. The lesson pack is a vital tool in helping our children and young people to understand and learn from the genocide at Srebrenica.

Today we take a moment to remember the Scots who went to the aid of Bosnia, during and since the war. Edinburgh Direct Aid delivered more than 2,000 tonnes of aid during the war.

Christine Witcutt, an Edinburgh Direct Aid volunteer, was killed by sniper fire in 1993; her name lives on in the Christine Witcutt Centre in Sarajevo, which provides much-needed day care for disabled children. Following the war, Adam Boys was instrumental in setting up the International Commission on Missing Persons, which used DNA identification technology to reunite thousands of families with the remains of their loved ones.

It is as important as it has ever been that we, and our children and young people, understand the consequences of hatred. Srebrenica showed us what can happen when politicians encourage the growth of hatred and division. We, as politicians, have to understand that our rhetoric has consequences. Recent events, including some quite close to home, have shown us the terrible consequences of stirring up suspicion and mistrust. They have shown us—if we were in any doubt—that if people are fed poison and bile, sometimes they will respond, and in the most terrible ways. We cannot just say, "Well, it was only words, and I didn't mean it like that". We should all take seriously the idea that our words can lead to actions, and we must be conscious of that.

At times, I have been horrified to see the demonisation of people who have simply exercised their rights—rights that, for now, we all share—to travel and work in another country. We have also seen the demonisation of people who are fleeing war and terror, who want only a place of safety where they can live in peace.

If we think back to just a generation ago, the people who were making that journey in search of refuge were escaping the war in Bosnia. Some of them found a home in Scotland, where they are now well-established and valued members of our communities. We are now welcoming refugees from Syria, over 800 of whom have so far joined our communities under the Syrian resettlement programme.

If I am permitted to do so, I will talk about what might be called a formative experience of my own. In 1992, as a very young student, I went with an aid lorry to the Croatian town of Osijek, which was then full of refugees from the horrors of Vukovar. The town was being subjected to aerial attack almost daily; it is not an experience I will readily forget.

We must learn the lessons of the past, which sadly are still being repeated today. They show us why we must not just pay lip service to equality, but why we must live by the principles of equality and tolerance, and why we must strive to eliminate prejudice, discrimination and hate crime, wherever we see it.

On 11 July, the genocide at Srebrenica will be remembered in commemorations around the world, but the lessons it teaches us are with us every day. As other members have said, they were pointed to very directly in the speech from Uachtarán na hÉireann, Michael D Higgins. We must remember the lessons that he taught us today and we must remember those who lost their lives, those who never got the chance to come of age, and those whose lives can never be the same again. We say, "Never again" and now, more than ever, we must pledge to ensure that we mean what we say.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is unusual for me to be in the chair at a members' business debate so I commend all the speakers in this extremely interesting debate on a highly sensitive and tragic subject.

Meeting closed at 18:12.

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

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