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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 1 March 2017

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

Portfolio Question Time

Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

European Commission (Meetings)

1. **David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met European Commission officials, and what was discussed. (S5O-00700)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Discussions between the European Commission and the Scottish Government take place regularly at ministerial and official level. Routine discussions have continued since the European Union referendum to ensure the effective continuation of EU-related business and to underline the Scottish Government's commitment to working with the European Commission. Only yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform attended the EU environment council in Brussels attended by the EU Commission.

David Stewart: The cabinet secretary will be well aware that the EU emissions trading scheme is the world's largest scheme for trading emissions allowances and is a key weapon in fighting climate change. At her next meeting with the European Commission—and, indeed, her next meeting with UK officials—will she raise the issue of the ETS, which raises billions of euros to help industry to innovate and invest in clean technologies, as it is essential that it remains a key part of the Scottish climate change plan?

Fiona Hyslop: The investment opportunities on clean technologies that can be afforded by partnership with colleagues across the EU are a vital factor when it comes to making sure that we can continue to have some kind of positive relationship with the EU. In relation to standards, that is clearly important in terms of climate justice and tackling climate change.

As far as meetings with the European Commission are concerned, I attend meetings of the education and culture council, in particular, and meetings in relation to the EU referendum. My colleagues in other portfolios, such as the energy portfolio and the climate change portfolio, would take forward matters such as those that the

member raises, but I will relay them to the relevant ministers.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): When the cabinet secretary—or whichever minister it is—meets the European Commission, is there any confusion on the part of the Commission? Does it ask why we have so many Europe ministers in the Scottish Government?

Fiona Hyslop: Every minister in this Government has responsibility for our international profile and for the economy. Whenever one of our ministers engages with the European Commission, they advance the economic cause and interests of Scotland.

I focus on the bilateral discussions with the EU capitals and the institutions. It is extremely important that we do not descend into the parochial, inward-looking approach that some members would like us to adopt; I hope that Neil Findlay is not one of them.

Historic Environment (Culture in Towns and Cities)

2. **George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the historic environment can promote culture in towns and cities. (S5O-00701)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The historic environment promotes culture in our towns and cities in many ways. It is intrinsic to our sense of place and our strong cultural identity. It tells the story of our shared past and offers creative inspiration. As the physical embodiment of our cultural traditions, a well-managed historic environment helps to present a positive image of Scotland around the globe and to attract United Kingdom and international visitors and investors. As the backdrop to our daily lives, it supports all forms of cultural activity by providing venues for a wide range of cultural events and meeting places for the many clubs and societies that are such a feature of Scotland's community life, from folk music to amateur dramatics and literary societies. In every way, the historic environment is at the heart of our flourishing and dynamic cultural life.

George Adam: The cabinet secretary will know that Paisley has a very high number of listed buildings. Does she agree that they are an important asset for the promotion of culture and that, although they present a challenge, they are one of the many strengths that Paisley has in seeking to be named as UK city of culture in 2021?

Fiona Hyslop: George Adam continues his campaign for the city of Paisley.

I recognise that Paisley has among the highest numbers of listed buildings in the country. Paisley abbey is one of the finest examples of medieval churches in Scotland. It also has a rich heritage of Victorian buildings, and the textile and economic history, not to mention the cultural connections of our country are well illustrated by the built environment heritage that has passed on from Coats & Clark's, for example. I think that building that into the bid is a very wise thing for the city of Paisley to do.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as the convener of the cross-party group on towns and town centres.

Given her roots, the cabinet secretary will be well aware of the significant and important cultural history of Ayr, which goes back to the 11th and 12th centuries and before. She will know the need to promote and raise awareness of the tourism potential that exists in Ayr, based on its cultural heritage. What contact has her office had with South Ayrshire Council about that in recent years, and is there help that she might be able to provide in future to support tourism, growth and cultural development in auld Ayr town centre?

Fiona Hyslop: I made a very important visit to South Ayrshire, about developing its cultural place partnership with Creative Scotland. A lot of that was about contemporary culture, but it then delved into the wider and deeper history of Ayr. I am very interested, in particular, in our most recent contact with Ayr, which was in relation to the archaeology that is being undertaken alongside the demolition of some of the buildings around the town centre. The story that that will tell of the medieval past of Ayr will be fascinating; it will help to enhance what is already a very strong story about Ayr's history and will attract visitors from near and far.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I welcome the preservation and enhancement of our historic urban environment, but the true measure of success for such projects in promoting cultural enrichment must surely take account of both the public's ability to access, share in and participate in cultural capital and also—and critically—a resulting and sustained long-tail dividend. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that that is the case?

Fiona Hyslop: I am very proud that, as part of the budget that was passed last week, and which was opposed by the Conservatives, we managed to maintain free access to our museums and galleries, which is very important. This week, we have received fantastic visitor attendance figures for our key attractions and, of the top six attractions, five had free access, which is very important—the other attraction being Edinburgh castle. A very important part of what we do is

make sure that people have access to their story, their buildings and their places.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland)

(Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware that both Historic Environment Scotland and Aberdeen City Council have recently pledged more than £1 million towards the revitalisation of landmark buildings in Union Street. Does she agree that that offers the potential for the transformation of Aberdeen city centre over the next five years, and that that is a model that other cities could follow?

Fiona Hyslop: I am very keen that, in some of the agreements that are being made, particularly in relation to city deals, heritage, tourism and culture are at the heart of them. The transformation of city centres—and, indeed, town centres—is very important indeed. The conservation area regeneration scheme, or CARS, projects and funding from Historic Environment Scotland have been very important and both Dalkeith and Kilmarnock have benefited from that.

On investment, I know that the music hall in Aberdeen, for example, which is something in which I have had a keen interest, has had support from Government agencies and that Creative Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland have been critical to providing some of that funding. We have worked very hard to deliver that, and I am delighted that there is also support from Aberdeen City Council.

Celtic Connections 2017

3. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how successful it considers Celtic Connections 2017 has been for Glasgow and Scotland. (S5O-00702)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Celtic Connections has grown since 1994. It is the largest winter music festival of its kind in the United Kingdom. In 2017, it hosted 2,375 artists, 800 hours of music on 26 stages throughout Glasgow. It sold 110,000 tickets and 80 per cent of shows were sold out, breaking all previous records.

An independent impact study conducted on behalf of Celtic Connections found that it generated over £7 million from visitors in Scotland, providing a benefit of over £4 million across Scotland. Successes and cultural highlights of 2017 included La Banda Europa, an “inspiring women” theme, a celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary and a very successful Brazilian music showcase.

John Mason: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and very much agree with the points that she makes.

Some people feel that the definition of “Celtic” has become wider and wider. Does the cabinet secretary think that that is a good thing—because it is very inclusive—or does the definition of Celtic music need to be narrower?

Fiona Hyslop: I am the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs. As far as decisions on the curatorial excellence of any cultural activity are concerned, I think that those are for the festivals, galleries and museums themselves. I will say that that internationalist outlook and particularly the fusion—whether it is of our own with Indian traditional music or, indeed, Brazilian music, as I have just mentioned—is very important. Next year will be the 25th anniversary of Celtic Connections and I am sure that John Mason and others will be delighted to know that the partner country for next year will be Ireland, which is about as Celtic as you can get.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): It has been well documented in the media that a T in the Park sister festival will take place in Glasgow this summer. What discussions has the Scottish Government had with the organisers and Police Scotland about managing the potential impact of antisocial behaviour on local residents?

Fiona Hyslop: That matter is not my responsibility. For any major festival, the authority concerned, which in this case will be Glasgow City Council, will take forward discussions with Transport Scotland and Police Scotland. It is very much part and parcel of our events management across Scotland that those agencies work together to deliver a great experience for people, and I am sure that the festival will be of great economic benefit to the city.

Freedom of Movement (Agriculture and Horticulture Workers)

4. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made in negotiations with the United Kingdom Government regarding the freedom of movement of agriculture and horticulture workers post-Brexit. (S5O-00703)

The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland’s Place in Europe (Michael Russell): We are aware that the UK’s forthcoming exit of the European Union has created significant uncertainty in the agriculture sector, and we need to ensure the continued protection of the rights of all workers who are employed in Scotland’s rural economy. Limiting free movement of people has the potential to seriously harm Scotland’s long-term economic future.

There have been discussions and exchanges with the UK Government on freedom of movement, including those in the joint ministerial

committee on European Union negotiations, which I attend alongside representatives of the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. Within those discussions, I have consistently raised the importance of freedom of movement to Scotland in contributing to sustainable economic growth, mitigating the effects of demographic change and enriching our culture and communities.

The First Minister has also repeatedly called on the Prime Minister to guarantee EU nationals’ right to remain in the UK. Unfortunately, despite our consistent representations to the UK Government on the issue, the Prime Minister still refuses to deliver that guarantee, despite having the power to do so. The Scottish Government appreciates the importance of obtaining a guaranteed right to remain for EU nationals and we will continue to strongly support it.

Graeme Dey: Why does this Tory Government seem so incapable of grasping the impact of that uncertainty on businesses, the economy and, just as important, the individuals concerned? Does it just not care?

Michael Russell: I would hesitate to speculate about the motivations of the present Tory Government; they are a mystery to most people. The Tory obsession with immigration and the Scottish Tories’ determination to become born-again Brexiteers are working against the interests of the rural sector, our economy and fair treatment of citizens of Europe who are living here. Surely it is time to reflect on that, and, having done so, to act.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

The minister will be aware that farmers north and south of the Tweed will be looking carefully at the issue of agriculture workers. Does he agree that the UK’s Brexit approach should be based on economic issues across sectors, and not geography?

Michael Russell: Peter Chapman is right to say that the economic focus is of great importance. The economic importance of migration and freedom of movement in Scotland is very great indeed. Were he to travel westwards to my constituency, Mr Chapman would see a constituency that is losing population from the rural area and has a shortage of labour, which needs to be replaced through European migration. It is anticipated that 90 per cent of the growth in population in Scotland in the next 20 years will come from European migration.

I would hope that Mr Chapman would stand up for the people who elected him—the people of Scotland—and stand up for Scotland. I keep

hoping for that from Scottish Tories, but I never see it.

Edinburgh International Festival (70th Anniversary)

5. Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to acknowledge and commemorate the role of the founding director of the Edinburgh International Festival, Rudolf Bing, in this its 70th anniversary year. (S5O-00704)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): In recognition of the 70th anniversary of the founding of Edinburgh's festivals, the Scottish Government is providing an additional £300,000 of funding through the Edinburgh festivals expo fund. Each festival will develop its own celebrations of the anniversary and its specific expo-funded projects. The Edinburgh International Festival announces its programme on 15 March, and it intends to mark the role of Rudolf Bing as the founding director in 1947.

Jackson Carlaw: Rudolph Bing was, of course, a Jew, and tonight in Edinburgh city chambers there will be a reception to commemorate and celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Jewish community in Edinburgh.

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the international shalom festival, which brings together Israelis of all religions for an evening of culture and performance at the Edinburgh festival. Because of the protest by a minority—but a vocal minority—last year, many venues are reluctant to host the shalom festival this year. In the light of that, what support can the Scottish Government give to ensure that the shalom festival is able to continue in the 70th anniversary year of the Edinburgh festival, which was founded by a Scottish Jew?

Fiona Hyslop: Every festival is responsible for how it supports those whom it invites. Some are curated and some are not. I am interested to see the details of the festival that the member is talking about and which of the festivals it is celebrated as part of. It is important that we send out a message to all communities that we are an inclusive and open society. In celebrating those who contribute today and have contributed in the past, we should be mindful that how we conduct ourselves will be understood across the world.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): The director of the Edinburgh International Festival previously stated that the "poisonous rhetoric" of Brexit talks could seriously damage the festival. Unfortunately, Jackson Carlaw's United Kingdom colleagues bear responsibility for that. Does the cabinet secretary

agree that the interests of our cultural and creative industries will be best served by protecting Scotland's strong relationship with the European Union?

Fiona Hyslop: Our festivals are testament to the importance of that international reach. Freedom of movement is vital to Scotland's cultural and creative industries and economic interests. The culture and creativity of those connections are irreplaceable and, if disruption to those connections—or even the threat of such disruption—causes harm to our cultural and creative life, the manifestation of that will not just be experienced today; it will be experienced by people for generations to come. That is how serious freedom of movement is to this country.

BBC Alba (Funding)

6. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in securing additional funding for BBC Alba. (S5O-00705)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government has made strong, clear and consistent representations to the BBC to secure additional funding for BBC Alba. On 22 February, the BBC announced that it will cover the £1.2 million cost of Gaelic programmes that BBC Alba has funded to date, which will release welcome funds for BBC Alba. Separately, the BBC will support weekend news coverage. We look forward to receiving further details from the BBC to understand more fully what the implications and benefits of the recent announcement will be. We will continue to press the BBC to deliver more for Gaelic broadcasting, so that we move towards parity with the resources that are afforded to S4C.

Angus MacDonald: I join the cabinet secretary in welcoming the extra £1.2 million for BBC Alba. That said, the cabinet secretary might be aware of concerns in the Gaelic community following last week's announcement that the creation of the new channel could have a detrimental impact on funding for BBC Alba. With the commitment that was given last week to up to 7.2 hours of fresh in-house programming for BBC Alba per week, the BBC investment that was announced falls well short of what BBC Alba needs to sustain its historic success and continue to be an effective contributor to the revitalisation of Gaelic.

The cabinet secretary has given a commitment to impress upon the BBC the need for an in-house contribution of 10 hours per week and I urge her to continue to do that.

Fiona Hyslop: The case for BBC Alba is well made. Indeed, it has been instructional in showing how BBC programme making can help to develop

and support the creative industries. We will have a debate later today on that very matter. However, it is essential that an in-house contribution of 10 hours per week is secured for BBC Alba. That is not what has been secured to date and we will continue to support it and make the case for it.

International Engagement (Links with Qatar)

7. **Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in developing links with Qatar. (S5O-00706)

The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan): The Scottish Government remains open to opportunities to engage with Qatar through diplomatic, economic, educational and cultural ties. In addition Scottish Development International's middle east office, which is based at the British embassy in Dubai, works closely with companies from countries in the Gulf region, including Qatar, that are looking to invest, relocate, partner or expand in Scotland.

Scotland has a strong and enduring commitment to securing democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world and, as a good global citizen, the Scottish Government takes that seriously when exploring links with any country. We expect all states to comply with international human rights law, and use our international engagement as an opportunity to promote respect for, and understanding of, human rights.

Neil Findlay: The Scottish Government previously dispatched the former First Minister and the current transport secretary to Qatar to build cultural links and to flog public service infrastructure to the Qatari sovereign wealth fund. What investments have been made in our public infrastructure and cultural sector by the Qataris while building workers lose their lives on world cup projects in Qatar?

Dr Allan: I will directly address the points that were made about human rights, as that is, quite legitimately, what the question that was asked is about. It is important to note that my distinguished predecessor, Humza Yousaf, who was mentioned by Neil Findlay, raised the specific issue of migrant worker rights with the ambassador of Qatar on 10 March 2015. He also met Amnesty International regarding Qatari human rights and received a briefing on the issue. Further, he raised similar issues at the festival of literature that took place in the United Arab Emirates in 2015.

On the specific issue of construction, I know that Humza Yousaf also spoke with the Qatari authorities about human rights and the world cup. Indeed, that is something that the Scottish Government has continued to keep an eye on.

Justice and the Law Officers

Police Scotland (Call Handling)

1. **Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent update report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland on call handling in Police Scotland. (S5O-00710)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government welcomes the publication of the HMICS update report on call handling and notes the considerable progress that has been made by Police Scotland since the November 2015 HMICS independent assurance review on the same subject. We expect the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland to give careful consideration to the findings of the update report and to continue to work closely with HMICS as it seeks to further strengthen its approach to police call handling.

Lewis Macdonald: Given that the report says that limited progress has been made in improving the functionality and accuracy of the gazetteer that is used by control room staff, and that nearly a quarter of all notable incidents arose because the wrong location was chosen by the service adviser, what further action will the cabinet secretary now take to address those issues? Will he, for example, reconsider at this stage his plans to close the control rooms in Aberdeen and Inverness, which can lead only to an increase in such incidents?

Michael Matheson: As the member will recognise, overall the report shows that good progress has been made by Police Scotland with regard to the way in which it is taking forward reforms around call handling. Only last week, when giving evidence to the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, the chief inspector of HMICS praised the work that had been taken forward by police call-handling staff and the service in relation to this area of reform.

The chief inspector of HMICS has identified an issue around the stability of the gazetteer system. There is a practical issue, which is that we have three emergency services that have, historically, all used separate gazetteer systems for the same purpose—the Scottish Ambulance Service has one, the Fire and Rescue Service has one and Police Scotland has one. One of the pieces of work that is being considered is the development of a single gazetteer system that would be used for all of our emergency services, which would ensure that it was as up to date as possible. We expect progress to continue to be made on that area of work.

Overall, following the assurance review, we are now in a situation in which, of the 30

recommendations, 16 have been discharged, 12 have been partially discharged and only two remain open.

On the issue around the intended changes in Aberdeen and Inverness, progress is being made around those pieces of work. The assurance review group met only yesterday to consider the on-going changes at Aberdeen, and further work will be taken forward on that over the coming weeks. It has been demonstrated that good progress is being made regarding the change and transfer in Aberdeen, and the SPA will consider the issue further at its next board meeting on 22 March.

I do not have good news for the member in relation to his call regarding the call centre changes in Aberdeen and Inverness. Obviously, the Inverness call centre is changing to another purpose under Police Scotland. I give the member an assurance that good progress is being made and that the assurance review work that I directed and expect HMICS to continue to make progress on will continue to be monitored.

Community Payback Orders (Completion Rate)

2. Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to improve the completion rate of community payback orders. (S5O-00711)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Delivering community payback orders and ensuring their completion is the responsibility of the relevant local authority. The “National Outcomes and Standards for Social Work Services in the Criminal Justice System” contain guidance on the procedures involved, and the action that social work case managers can take, in cases where the individual is failing to complete their order. Those actions can include returning the case to court.

The Government is committed to supporting local authorities in delivering robust community sentences. Funding for criminal justice social work remains at record levels. We also invested an additional £4 million in community services in 2016-17, and that additional funding continues in the Scottish budget for the coming year.

From 1 April, our new model for community justice will come into effect. Statutory community justice partners will jointly plan and deliver services to prevent further offending and support people who have offended to reintegrate into communities. A new public body, community justice Scotland, will provide national leadership on that and report to ministers on performance across Scotland. It will promote improvement in the delivery, and impact of, community justice

services, including prevention, early intervention and community sentences.

Peter Chapman: The fact is that nearly a third of orders were not completed in 2015-16 and completion rates have fallen for two years in a row. More needs to be done to reverse that worrying trend, especially as it has emerged that CPOs are being handed out for serious sex offences. Will the Government commit to an urgent review of the system of community payback orders to ensure that criminals do not start treating them with contempt?

Michael Matheson: Peter Chapman is clearly not aware that, in 2015, there was a full review of the way in which community payback orders were operating. That review, which was published, identified a broad degree of confidence about how community payback orders were being implemented. I will quote from it:

“Sheriffs appear to have broad confidence in CPOs in terms of monitoring of progress and appropriate use of breach.”

Therefore, there has already been a review of community payback orders.

Peter Chapman is obviously not aware that completion rates for community sentences have increased over recent years from around 62 per cent in 2006-07 to just over 68 per cent in the past year or so. We continue to consider what further measures can be taken to ensure that the benefits of CPOs are realised and we will always consider other measures that add value to them, including ensuring higher completion rates.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome much of what the cabinet secretary said. As he will be aware, the latest statistics show that offenders on community payback orders have the lowest levels of reoffending. By contrast, offenders who are serving sentences of less than three months have the highest rates of reoffending. On that basis, will he update the Parliament on when we will move to raise the minimum sentence to 12 months to reduce the levels of reoffending?

Michael Matheson: Liam McArthur makes an important point. The evidence demonstrates that community payback orders and community sentencing are much more effective than short-term prison sentences. It shows that someone who receives a community disposal is much less likely to reoffend than someone who receives a short-term sentence of six months or less. Actually, someone who receives a sentence of six months or less is almost twice as likely to reoffend as someone who completes a CPO.

As Liam McArthur will be aware, I am clear that we need to use the evidence, which demonstrates not only the benefits of CPOs in relation to reducing reoffending but the benefits that they

provide to local communities. The most recent annual report on CPO provision indicated that some 1.8 million hours of unpaid work were provided in local communities throughout Scotland through the scheme.

I know that Liam McArthur has considerable interest in the presumption against short sentences, as I have. I intend to update Parliament on the matter in due course following some further work that is being carried out.

Sheriff Courts (Caution and Charge to Verdict Target)

3. Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that 30 per cent of sheriff courts are failing to reach the 26-week target from caution and charge to verdict. (S5O-00712)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing): I remind members of my entry in the register of interests, wherein they will see that I am a member of the Law Society of Scotland and hold a current practice certificate, although I am not currently practising.

The 26-week indicator from caution and charge to verdict covers activity by not only the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service but Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. When we compare the period from December 2014 to November 2015 with December 2015 to November 2016, we see that national performance has increased from 64.2 per cent to 66.1 per cent.

In recent years, the reporting and detection of crimes—in particular, domestic abuse and sexual offences—has increased, which reflects proactive policing and prosecution, and greater victim confidence in reporting crimes. Those cases have not only increased in volume but are more complex and often require more court time. That has placed additional pressure on the Crown, the courts and the wider justice system. We have responded, and continue to respond, to those pressures, and additional resources have been made available.

Adam Tomkins: I thank the minister for that answer, but the performance of almost half of Scotland's 40 sheriff courts is worse now than it was a year ago. That includes Glasgow and Strathkelvin sheriff court, where only 53.3 per cent of cases were concluded within the target 26-week period.

Solicitors who are working at the sharp end of our criminal justice system cite court closures as leading to a backlog of cases and an increase in the number of adjournments. Can the minister tell my constituents who are seeking access to justice

what action the Scottish Government is taking to remedy the situation?

Annabelle Ewing: The methodology that Adam Tomkins or his press office has applied in interpreting and analysing the actual statistics that have been collected by the independent Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service seems to be a wee bit less than robust, if I may say so. Rather than simply comparing a one-month static figure with another month in a different year, we should look at the figures year by year. If we do so, we see that there has been an overall improvement of 1.9 per cent between 2014-15 and 2015-16.

I do not agree with Adam Tomkins on adjournments and the possible effect of court closures. He should bear it in mind that the independent data that are collected by the SCTS show that, while there has been an increase in the overall number of cases, 5.6 per cent of cases were adjourned in 2015-16 and 6.3 per cent were adjourned in the previous year, which in fact represents a reduction.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The minister touched on the increased reporting and detection of crimes—in particular of domestic abuse and sexual offences. I welcome the funding that the First Minister announced through the violence against women funding stream, which will assist in the development of measures to tackle all forms of violence against women. Is that funding helping to improve domestic abuse court performance?

Annabelle Ewing: Ruth Maguire is right to highlight the additional funding that the Scottish Government has made available to deal specifically with the increased case load in domestic abuse. We have made available the sum of £2.4 million in 2015-16 and in 2016-17. That will be also be the case for 2017-18. We can see that the funding is having a significant impact on the timescale on which trials have been proceeding. There is currently an agreed period of 10 to 12 weeks, and the aim is to offer from April 2017 domestic abuse trials within eight to 10 weeks. We are, on the basis that 95 per cent of courts are already meeting that accelerated timescale, very optimistic that that will be achieved.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): In the light of the Justice Committee's inquiry into the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, including the many issues that we have heard about regarding performance and the serious concerns that have been raised, does the minister believe that a £4 million cut to the COPFS budget this year will improve and speed up access to justice?

Annabelle Ewing: I know that the Justice Committee has been looking into the operation of the Crown and Procurator Fiscal Service in great

depth. We await the committee's report coming in due course.

A number of figures have been bandied about at the committee; I say to members—Mary Fee knows this well—that the operation of the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service is ultimately a matter for the Lord President. The performance of the courts is monitored very carefully—I believe monthly—by the justice system planning group, which is a subgroup of the national justice board. We are seeing improvement, as I have indicated, in relation to domestic abuse and the general performance of summary criminal trials. That improvement is down to the great work that is being conducted by the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service.

Courts (Conclusion of Cases)

4. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the time taken to conclude cases in the courts. (S5O-00713)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing): As I stated in my earlier response to Adam Tomkins, the Scottish Government recognises that reporting and prosecution of certain categories of crime have increased. Criminal investigations have also become more complex, and that is reflected in the number of court cases proceeding to evidence-led trials: over the last five years, there has been a 38 per cent increase in evidence-led trials.

However, even allowing for that, the evidence shows an improving picture. As at January 2017, 95 per cent of sheriff courts were offering trials within the optimum time of 16 weeks, compared with only 50 per cent in April 2014. With the help of additional funding from the Scottish Government, the percentage of cases fully disposed within 20 weeks has increased from 58 per cent in 2014-15 to 67 per cent in 2016-17.

It is quite clear that improvement has been made, but there is always more that can be done.

Finlay Carson: Pressure on Scotland's courts is not a new issue. In 2015, Audit Scotland published a report highlighting the difficulties that they face, and the situation seems only to be getting worse. That is after the Scottish Government ignored warnings from Opposition parties and slashed the number of courts across the country, including closing Kirkcudbright sheriff court in my constituency.

Has the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service successfully implemented Audit Scotland's recommendations to improve Scotland's court system.

Annabelle Ewing: If Finlay Carson looks back at the *Official Report* of today's question time, he will see the various statistics that I have referred to that come from Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service data, which it collects and reviews monthly. He will see the improvements that have been made.

The member mentioned Kirkcudbright sheriff court. It was closed some three years ago. It is important to remember that the court was, at that time, dealing with an average of two summary criminal trials per month. Dumfries is now the receiving court, and there has been no impact on Dumfries sheriff court following the transfer of that business.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I refer members to my register of interests; I am a registered mental health nurse.

I am very interested in the time that it takes to conclude cases in court. I have a particular interest in drug courts. Will the minister advise on what the position is?

Annabelle Ewing: We have seen in Glasgow a very successful dedicated drug court. Across Scotland, we have been setting up problem-solving courts in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and, recently, in Forfar, to look at the bigger picture. Those courts look at the particular position of the individual, which varies from case to case. In those courts, the outcome for the individual is the important key determinant, rather than the actual time that is taken for proceedings at court.

Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 (Disabled Access)

5. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making with the implementation of section 179 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 regarding disabled access. (S5O-00714)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Section 179 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 requires individuals applying for a liquor premises licence to provide a disability access and facilities statement along with their application. The statement is to contain information about disabled access to the premises and facilities, and any other provision available to aid the use of the premises by disabled people. Failure to provide a statement is not a ground for refusing an application, but it means that the premises application would be incomplete and could not be considered by the licensing board.

The provision does not interfere with the existing duty under equality law to make reasonable adjustments to make sure that a disabled person

can use a service as close as it is reasonably possible to get to the standard that is usually offered to non-disabled people.

Section 179 cannot be commenced in isolation; it is also necessary to update secondary legislation to provide the necessary statutory forms, alongside providing guidance to applicants. We intend to complete that work within the remainder of this year.

Daniel Johnson: In 2010, an amendment to the legislation was passed, with cross-party support, following “Barred!”, which was a campaign run by Mark Cooper in association with Capability Scotland. The amendment was to ensure that licensed premises must provide the information that the cabinet secretary has outlined. Unfortunately, the Government has yet to commence the provision. It has stated that it would do so by the end of this session of Parliament, which would obviously mean a delay of more than a decade, so I welcome the cabinet secretary’s commitment today. Will he act without delay and ensure that the provision is commenced this year? Does he agree with me that, for many disabled people, a beer delayed is a beer denied?

Michael Matheson: It is important to recognise that, although there was cross-party support for the amendment, the provision does not require a licence holder to commit to any amendments or alterations to their premises; rather, the provision is about the factual information that must be provided at the time when an application for a liquor licence is being made.

As Daniel Johnson will recognise, a significant amount of new regulations on licensed premises have been introduced, including on licensing for scrap metal companies and air weapons. We have tried to take forward the legislation on a phased basis, in order to make sure that we manage the process for those who require to have a licence or to apply for a licence.

There are secondary legislation issues accompanying the provision; we will seek to make progress on it over this year. I will try to make sure that the work is taken forward as early as possible. At this stage, I cannot give the member a final date on when the process will be completed.

Scottish Funding Council Board (Abolition)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04286, in the name of Liz Smith, on the abolition of the Scottish funding council board. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. I call Liz Smith to speak to and to move the motion. You have eight minutes, please.

14:42

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Members are very well aware that a large part of the Education and Skills Committee’s recent work has been the scrutiny of Scotland’s education agencies. On 16 November 2016, it was the turn of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, and on 7 December 2016 we heard from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work about the proposed changes to the four agencies that deliver skills, enterprise and education functions, which includes the Scottish funding council. That day, Keith Brown set out the Scottish Government’s vision for Scotland’s economic strategy, part of which involved the proposed amalgamation of the four enterprise and skills agencies, so that there would be, in his words

“strengthened support for the nation’s economic ambitions”.

Mr Brown told us that the establishment of an overarching superboard was necessary in order to “effectively align the services that they deliver.”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee, 7 December 2016; c 2.*]

Mr Brown also confirmed no fewer than three times—to Johann Lamont, Daniel Johnson and me—that the individual boards of the current agencies would be abolished. John Swinney confirmed that statement on 2 February 2017 at the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, although he was careful to add that the abolition did not involve the SFC itself, something that had been a concern for our colleges and universities when the merger proposal was first announced.

We had it on record—from not one, but two cabinet secretaries—that the Scottish funding council board would be abolished. Not surprisingly, that raised further questions from the further and higher education sectors, and from MSPs, about the justification for the move and on what evidence the proposal was based.

We received from Mr Brown, in response to questioning from the convener of the Education and Skills Committee, Mr Dornan, a robust outline

of the reasons for having an overarching board. He said that it would provide much better strategic alignment of the delivery of skills, enterprise and education; a decluttering of the agency landscape; a simplification of the support networks; and the removal of the tensions between national and regional delivery. Those policy principles generally found favour with Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland, enterprise and business.

However, Mr Brown completely failed to address the other side of the coin. Why did this strategic alignment mean that the individual agency boards—each with their separate legal status—should be abolished? Where was the evidence for that part of the proposal?

My colleagues Tavish Scott and Johann Lamont asked Keith Brown for a list of the organisations that supported the replacement of the individual boards with a central board. After intense questioning and what appeared to be an inability to answer the question, it emerged that the only body that the cabinet secretary could name was Colleges Scotland; however, on further examination, it transpired that although Colleges Scotland could see merit in a strategic alignment of agency work, it had made no specific recommendation to abolish the SFC board.

Of course, as we know only too well from the 329 submissions to the consultation and from exchanges in the recent chamber debate on Highlands and Islands Enterprise, stakeholders made no such recommendation to abolish the boards. Indeed, I venture to suggest that a letter arrived on Mr Brown's desk from the current chairman of the Scottish funding council board, specifically advising against the board's abolition. The Scottish Government might like to confirm the existence of that letter, given that attempts via parliamentary questions have so far produced nothing but obfuscation.

We know now that what really happened was that before phase 1 had even begun, the Scottish Government made up its mind that the individual boards would be abolished and replaced by a central board. The hastily carried-out consultation last summer did not flag up any support for the idea, so all we got then was, "Don't worry—phase 2 will allow us to debate the best governance structure."

Unbelievably, ministers could not understand why MSPs and stakeholders were so concerned, but surely we were right to be. Indeed, Ross Greer made that point very strongly at the Education and Skills Committee when he questioned the logic of making up one's mind about what is going to happen and then hoping that enough evidence can be found to support it. Now, of course, we learn that Lorne Crerar is recommending that individual boards not be abolished at all, which is

definitely not what we were told by Messrs Swinney and Brown.

Now we have learned of the recommendation that the boards remain but that they be known as delivery boards, the implication being that the existing functions will change. Does that change in function now become the issue? What exactly would a delivery board do? In what respect will its powers differ—or, more likely, be reduced—from the powers of the existing boards? Specifically in respect of the SFC, will the board still be a statutory and legal entity? Will it have the powers to be a source of initiative and advice? Will it be able to challenge the Scottish Government—and indeed colleges and universities—as it does just now? Will the Parliament, not the new strategic board, have powers to allocate resources to the agencies? Finally, will the Scottish funding council continue to have functions way beyond enterprise and skills, such as its crucially important research function? Little of that is clear.

In his recommendations, Lorne Crerar states that his proposals will

"not diminish the responsibilities ... of each Agency",

but the term "delivery board" suggests that their responsibilities will certainly change, and Mr Crerar makes it clear that there will now be

"new, formal lines of accountability."

On that aspect, there is an issue about who will chair the overarching board and who will be accountable to ministers. Universities Scotland has made its view very clear indeed. In Andrea Nolan's letter of 13 December to Keith Brown, she says that there is a

"need for a statutory non-Ministerial body with responsibility for regulatory and funding issues affecting higher education".

She also made it very clear that that body should have a distinct "legal personality" completely separate from bodies

"with an 'enterprise and skills' remit".

The Scottish Government clearly believes that the new structure does not heighten the risk of Office for National Statistics reclassification, but others are less sure if the chair of the new board is, in fact, to be a minister. Likewise, the Scottish Government has made it very clear that no changes will undermine the higher education sector's autonomy but, again, cast-iron evidence is required to convince the sector that having a minister as chair of the new board will avoid any politically driven reshaping of the sector. That is exactly why the sector wants a firm guarantee that the Scottish funding council board would have the right to question and challenge ministers and institutions as it does now.

The long and short of it is that we have been left with some very considerable inconsistencies between what two cabinet secretaries have told separate committees, what stakeholders have advised and what Lorne Crerar is now recommending. It is not at all clear why, to have better strategic alignment, we have to unpick the governance structure of all four agencies. There was a complete absence of evidence from phase 1 to support the Scottish Government's intention and there is now real concern about where on earth the Scottish Government is going. That aspect of the whole debacle is causing the greatest concern.

In recommending better strategic realignment of enterprise and skills and education, the Scottish Government has got completely carried away with the theory and has not thought through what the practice will involve. That is exactly what it did when it meddled in university governance.

The message from the Parliament regarding the Scottish Government's treatment of Highlands and Islands Enterprise could hardly have been more clear at 5 o'clock on 18 January. To suffer one parliamentary defeat might be regarded as a misfortune; to suffer two would look like inexcusable carelessness.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the key role and legal status of the current Scottish Funding Council board with regard to the financial and strategic management of Scotland's colleges and universities; is deeply concerned by the Scottish Government's proposals to abolish the board, given the limited evidence and consultation on this proposal; notes the proposals in *The Crerar Review*, which recommend that the Scottish Government should retain the current board; demands that the Scottish Funding Council retains its important functions beyond enterprise and skills, and therefore believes that the Scottish Funding Council must not just be a "delivery board" but also have the powers to act on its own initiative and to challenge government as well as to challenge further and higher education institutions.

14:50

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I will use this debate to set out again why the Government is reviewing our enterprise and skills system and to set the record straight on our plans for the Scottish funding council. I am aware that there is concern and, indeed, some misunderstanding about the Government's intentions, so I welcome the opportunity to clarify our position.

I am always happy to work with members to explore constructive ideas about how we can support and maintain sustainable and inclusive economic growth, but the motion does not

promote that ambition, and it presents at best a partial view of the Government's position.

The motion also provides commentary on the Lorne Crerar report, which was published just last week. Liz Smith will be aware that the Government is reflecting on the detail of the proposals that Professor Crerar has outlined and the views of the ministerial review group and that have been expressed by wider interests in taking forward the development of the strategic board. We will continue to listen to members across the chamber through constructive discussion about the way forward, and Mr Brown has said that he will make a statement to Parliament on our next steps in the coming weeks.

I will begin by putting some important facts on the record. The aim of the enterprise and skills review is to take fresh action towards fulfilling our long-term ambitions to rank in the top quartile of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for productivity, equality, wellbeing and sustainability. Those ambitions are set out in "Scotland's Economic Strategy". We are clear that, through greater alignment of the work of the agencies, we will ensure that they share collective responsibility for making improvements to Scotland's economic performance.

The first phase of the review focused on how we can ensure that all our agencies are working together to support our businesses and users of our skills system. Respondents to the call for evidence said that there was a complex and cluttered landscape and that we needed clearer alignment of our services to deliver our national ambitions. That is why we will align the key agencies under a strategic Scotland-wide board while protecting local decision making, local management and local delivery.

In January, Mr Brown asked the chair of HIE, Professor Lorne Crerar, to lead discussions with the other agency chairs and interested ministerial review group members, and to set out a paper on the principles and a potential outline structure for a new strategic board. I thank the Scottish funding council and the other agencies for their helpful participation in that process.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): For clarity, was it possible for the Crerar report to come out with the view that an overarching board was not the right solution? Was the review free to make that choice or did it have to decide how, once the board was there, it would make that work?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Phase 1 of the enterprise and skills review is complete and the discussions that have followed that, in phase 2, are about how to enact phase 1. We have gone through phase 1 and are now in phase 2. The Crerar report was part of that process, which is

very much one for the stakeholders and the agencies to be able to take part in.

Liz Smith: Will the minister take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I want to make some more progress, but I would be happy to give way later on.

Professor Crerar's report has been published and we are grateful to him for producing it. We note that there has been considerable support for his views from stakeholders and a recognition that its focus on collaboration across the agencies is central to success. I highlight again that the report was published less than a week ago and sets out a number of proposals for the Government to consider. I invite members, in this debate and outwith it, to give their views to me and the rest of the Government, because we will go forward in a listening mode until the cabinet secretary makes his statement to Parliament. I want to hear those views.

Liz Smith: Was the minister surprised to have the recommendation from Lorne Crerar that the boards of the individual agencies should exist, as the Scottish Government told us that they would not?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Professor Crerar was asked to work with the other agency chairs to take forward work in phase 2. What he does within that and with the chairs is for him to answer for, but we are very grateful for the work that he and the other agencies have put in.

I can give members the full assurance that we recognise the value of the funding council as a national, strategic, arm's-length body providing knowledge and expertise on how we focus our investment across the college and university sectors. We will also ensure that any future model supports the Haldane principle that decisions about what to spend research funds on should be made by researchers rather than politicians.

Liz Smith raised concerns regarding ONS reclassification. Government officials have been in close dialogue with ONS officials over the recent period. They have reviewed the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016 and have been offered advice in relation to the enterprise and skills review. The ONS is satisfied that, on the basis of the information available, neither the 2016 act nor the review will impact on whether HE bodies in Scotland are public or private sector. I hope that that allays concerns that have been expressed by members in the chamber and by stakeholders.

I see the review as a real opportunity for the Scottish funding council not only to build on its successes, but to focus on driving improvements

in the future. The ambitions of the enterprise and skills review are not about the architecture of governance but about closer alignment and collaboration across the bodies to drive real improvements in outcomes. My focus for the future will be on working with the funding council to ensure that we have an absolute and effective focus on our ambitions for excellence and equity in education. In the meantime, the funding council is very much getting on with its important day job; indeed, just a few weeks ago, it issued its indicative allocations for colleges and universities for 2017-18.

We are reviewing our enterprise and skills system because Scotland is performing well but must do better. We will maintain a national strategic body that allocates funding independently of ministers to our colleges and universities, and for research. The reform and the setting of key local and national economic ambitions for all our agencies can help put Scotland among the top-performing OECD nations. I will work with MSPs from across the chamber and with stakeholders to achieve that goal.

I move amendment S5M-04286.1, to leave out from "key" to end and insert:

"role played by the Scottish Funding Council as the statutory national body with responsibility for funding for teaching and research in universities and colleges; welcomes the report by Professor Lorne Crerar on governance and notes the conclusions, which will be considered as part of phase two of the Scottish Government's Enterprise and Skills Review; agrees that the Haldane Principle, which says that decisions about what to spend research funds on should be made by researchers rather than politicians, must remain the foundation of research funding, and further agrees that there continues to be a need for a national body for further and higher education that works within this wider framework for enterprise and skills to allocate funding independently of the Scottish Ministers and to provide government with advice and challenge on issues relating to further and higher education."

14:57

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The Scottish Government's plans to create a superboard are unworkable and unclear, and will threaten the independence of our universities. The need to boost this country's productivity performance is critical. If we believe in a high-wage, high-skill economy, there is a vital need to focus on the enterprise agencies.

The "Enterprise and Skills Review: Report on Phase 1" is disappointing. It states its broad intent but fails to articulate what needs to change and has only one clear proposal, which is the creation of an overarching board to control all the agencies in enterprise, skills and tertiary education. The creation of that board would result in a body that would have unprecedented scope. Its budget

would be in the billions—larger than the combined governance budgets for the police, housing, social security, environment and culture. We have to ask how long the board's meetings would last for; some pretty strong coffee would certainly have to be served at them.

However, the serious question is whether a single board can truly provide governance and guidance to such diverse and important activities, ranging from regional development to academic learning, from scientific research to vocational education, and from industrial support to apprenticeships.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: I will do so in a moment.

It is clear that some of those activities are wholly within the domain of productivity and innovation. Of course universities' research and academic understanding contribute to productivity, but they have much wider impacts and benefits. Placing them in a governance structure that has a productivity focus could create a real risk that damage would be done that would not be easily reversed.

John Swinney: In the list of different economic activities that Mr Johnson outlined—which was a fair and representative summary of the issues that are involved—he has set out the dilemma for the Government: there are connections between all the different elements of policy to which Mr Johnson referred, and they all, as he admitted in relation to his exception on university research, contribute to productivity in the economy. The objective of the Government's review is to create greater alignment in that respect.

Daniel Johnson: I hope that I get a little time back.

I accept that those elements touch on productivity. However, the real issue for the universities is that, although they touch on productivity, the vast bulk of their scope lies well beyond the simple, narrow, teleological and utilitarian description that Mr Swinney set out.

The Crerar report, which was published last week by Kate Forbes and then, later, by the Scottish Government, is an attempt to clarify the solutions, but it simply raises more questions than it answers. For one thing, it seems to contradict the Deputy First Minister, who revealed in a parliamentary answer that the individual boards would be scrapped. According to Crerar, they should be retained as "delivery boards", whatever that means. It is hard to see how the new strategic body will streamline things at all. The creation of delivery boards, sub-committees and a new

superboard will mean that two additional layers of administration will be created.

The report suggests that the board could have the ability to set the budgets of the individual agencies. That would represent worrying obfuscation in what is already an obscure budget process—as we all know only too well from recent weeks. Parliament and the public must be able to scrutinise where public money is being spent.

The report also strongly suggests that the board should have a minister as chair; indeed, it contains a special boxed section that celebrates how well a ministerial chair has worked for the convention of the Highlands and Islands. The risk is that the proposal brings with it the prospect that the Office for National Statistics could reclassify universities as public bodies. I accept that the minister said that she has had assurances on that from the ONS, but I hope that, in his summation, the cabinet secretary will pledge to publish that evidence. That is vital, because we have been here before.

When the colleges were merged and new central structures were created, we were reassured that their independence would not be altered and that their ability to borrow and hold assets would remain unchanged, but we all know what happened. The impact on universities would be many times greater than the impact on colleges. Millions of pounds would be stripped from their balance sheets and their ability to lever in investment would be slashed.

Our universities are a success story. They help this country to punch well above its weight, they are outstanding at producing spin-out companies and they are many times more effective than universities in the rest of the UK in terms of their ability to attract research funding. Given that track record and strength, we have to ask several questions. What is the problem that the review is trying to fix? How are our universities impeding productivity and skills development? Most important, given their enduring contribution to Scotland, why put them at risk through this misguided and muddled reform of their governance?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. It is a short debate, as you know, and time is tight. I ask for speeches of four minutes, please.

15:02

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The task of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is

"to care for and develop the whole system of colleges and universities, and their connections with and contribution to Scotland's educational, social and cultural life."—[Official

Report, Education and Skills Committee, 16 November 2016; c 22.]

Those were the words of Dr John Kemp, the interim director of the SFC, to the Education and Skills Committee. It is a laudable, positive and forward-looking remit and one that surely has the backing of every member—indeed, of everyone who wishes to make our country once again a leader in education and academic achievement.

If that is the SFC's task, what of its governance? As Liz Smith said, we have had confirmation from two cabinet secretaries at two separate committees that the individual boards of the current agencies, including that of the SFC, will be abolished. At the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, all but confirmed that the SFC as an entity needs to tread carefully. The *Official Report* of the committee's meeting that day shows that Liz Smith said:

"So it is correct to say that there will be a new funding council model. Obviously, the board of the existing funding council is to go, so the argument would be that there would have to be a new body."

John Swinney replied:

"There will be changes to the arrangements under the proposals that have been set out today, yes."—[*Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee*, 2 February 2017; c 10.]

But why?

In his letter of 17 January, in which he asked Professor Crerar to chair a review of governance, the cabinet secretary stated that stronger governance

"could be best achieved by creating a single overarching Board to ensure robust oversight, evaluation and common targets which drive hard alignment between our Agencies."

However, there does not appear to be any evidence to support that statement. In the 329 submissions that were made to the consultation on the enterprise and skills review, not one stakeholder recommended that the boards be abolished. Under repeated questioning by the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, Mr Swinney could not point to a single piece of evidence that shows that abolition of the SFC board has been recommended as a solution to governance issues.

Professor Crerar has now recommended that the individual boards should not be abolished and that they should be renamed "delivery boards" under the direct control of a strategic board. Evidence that supports the likely achievement of a desired outcome should drive policy; one should not start with a policy and try to make the evidence fit it or—worse—simply assert a position without having robust evidence to support it.

I recall a debate in January in which fears were aired that the SFC's position as a non-departmental public body operating at arm's length was under threat, because the line between ministers and the SFC is increasingly blurred. Those fears came alongside fears for the independence of the SFC and our higher education establishments that were brought about by the suggested establishment of an overarching strategic board that would be under ministerial control. Universities Scotland could not have been clearer. It said:

"we need to make sure that universities are independent actors—that we are working in partnership with government, but we are still working as autonomous charities, that we are another force of initiative in society and not being brought in to a directive relationship from government."

Independence from Government could disappear as a result of the changes, and the SFC could become another arm of this ever-more-centralised state.

The independence of our higher education establishments should be sacrosanct, but the proposed changes would likely move us ever closer to direct Government control. It is clear that the Government decided long ago, in the absence of any evidence, that an overarching strategic board under ministerial control is the way forward. The Government should reflect on why it lost the vote on HIE on 18 January, and it should step back from the brink and think long and hard before it proceeds with the proposals. For that reason, I urge support for the motion.

15:06

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Is my microphone working? Hello? [*Interruption.*]

Members: Hello.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no need to say "Hello" back.

Please continue.

James Dornan: I am sorry, Presiding Officer. I did not want members to miss anything.

The role of the Scottish funding council, as was mentioned by Liz Smith, was explored in the Education and Skills Committee's evidence session in November 2016, including the importance of being able to demonstrate to key stakeholders such as universities and colleges where it performs a challenge function to Government. The discussion on that role highlighted the need for further clarity about the implications of the review on the Scottish funding council, given the proposal that the SFC board be replaced by an overarching body.

Having heard that evidence, the committee decided to invite the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work to explore the evidence base and to talk about the process that was followed by the Government in generating its phase 1 recommendations, and about the further work that was planned for phase 2. The committee wrote to the cabinet secretary after the meeting, seeking more information about which bodies had suggested the removal of the SFC board and its replacement with an overarching board. I know that that has been mentioned, and it has been said that there is no evidence of anyone suggesting such as thing. However, let us look at some of the consultation responses. Scottish Enterprise called for the creation of a Scottish strategic economic leadership board, Skills Development Scotland asked for a permanent national sustainable economic development board and the University of Strathclyde advocated for a strategic board at Scotland level to exercise strong leadership and to reinforce collaboration.

Liz Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

James Dornan: I have only four minutes, Ms Smith.

Colleges Scotland stated the need for “an overarching enterprise and skills board for Scotland”.

Those responses all suggest that they are not very happy with the way the system works at present, and that they are looking for a more joined-up way of thinking.

The Federation of Small Businesses, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Scottish local authorities economic development group, Universities Scotland and HIE all suggested that the current system is complex and requires greater co-ordination. I hope that we all agree that that is the aim behind what the Government is doing.

It is not about diluting the power to challenge of the institutions that form the further and higher education system, nor is it about dissolving the autonomy of Scotland’s universities. It is about focus and ensuring that all agencies work together in a co-ordinated fashion to deliver the top 20 per cent—

Liz Smith: I disagree with the statements that James Dornan made about the evidence, which was about greater collaboration. Where, however, is the evidence about abolition of the individual boards?

James Dornan: I mentioned that in my opening comments. They might not have asked for the board, but they clearly asked for an overarching joined-up way of thinking, which does not exist at present.

We have to remember that phase 1 has ended and we are now in phase 2, so for me the debate is too early. I believe that the debate has not been brought to Parliament for the purpose of trying to tease out more information than we have already received. Liz Smith gave the game away at the very end of her speech, when she basically said that the Scottish Government was defeated on HIE, and today is another opportunity to defeat the Government. A debate on an issue such as this should not be about defeating the Scottish Government; it should be about trying to get the information that members require, in the easiest way.

There are lots of issues in education that the Conservative Party could have debated today. I am surprised that it picked this one, because we are in the middle of a process. We should wait until we are near the end of that process and see what comes out of phase 2; the Crerar report was published last week and we are now in phase 2. Let us wait and see what happens. Then, if the Conservatives have things that they want to call the Government out on, they should feel free to do so. The Education and Skills Committee will certainly be doing the same.

15:10

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I say to the convener of the Education and Skills Committee that, although it is not the job of Opposition members simply to go after the Government, equally, it is not the job of Government back benchers to protect the Government regardless of what proposals it brings forward.

The fact is that the review of enterprise agencies and other bodies is an unhappy and unconvincing piece of work, which has been hampered from the beginning by lack of clarity about its purpose and the actions that would follow it. It would be charitable to say that it has been ill thought through. We should remember that the consultation on the review took place over one month during the summer, which is deeply unsatisfactory. No explanation has ever been given of the need for such a rush. There was no clarity about why, all of a sudden, the Government needed to do that so quickly and without bringing people with it. That has been a major problem.

No one disagrees that we want a stronger economy and that we want coherence, but the Government is conflating that desire with its set of proposals. We are not divided on wanting a stronger economy, alignment and all the rest of it, but we are dividing on the proposals that the Government has brought forward—allegedly, to tackle that problem. In evidence to the Education and Skills Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work spectacularly failed

even to explain what he is trying to do. I recommend the *Official Report* of that evidence as a bit of light reading for members. They will see a proposal being interrogated and a cabinet secretary unable to explain his purpose; he could not explain or justify the timing of the consultation and he could not provide any evidence of any group or body that had independently suggested the solution of an overarching board. People, of course, agree that there is a problem, but no one suggested that as the solution.

The cabinet secretary has also been unable to give any clarity about what would happen to the Scottish funding council. Indeed, he seemed rather vague about its role in relation to education, if not to enterprise. We all agree that decluttering is, in itself, a good thing, and that it is important that people talk to and work with each other. However, all the evidence tells us that we need decisions to be made as locally as possible. Local economic circumstances and pressures differ throughout the country. Our remote and rural areas are tackling the question of depopulation and the potential for use of the internet, while inner-city Glasgow has a very different set of problems. Therefore, why create the sense that there is only one model that fits our enterprise and skills agenda? To me, that is utter nonsense. Goodness me! Can people not simply talk to each other?

The reality is that the Scottish Government started at the end. It wanted an overarching board and, since then, all we have seen is post-hoc rationalisation to justify that. Now, in the face of pressure and concerns, the Government is shifting the argument. First, we were told that we are getting rid of all boards, and then we were told that we are not getting rid of them. First, we heard that HIE would have complete and utter control, but then we heard that it will not have complete and utter control because there will be an overarching board. Mr Dornan says that we are in the middle of a process, but the fact is that we have had phase 1, which said, without any evidence, what the Scottish Government wants, and phase 2 is about finding a way to implement that. That is not the way to take forward this work.

It is obvious that the legal responsibilities in relation to the funding council have not even been thought about. We recognise the need for co-ordination, but that is the job of Government; it is the Government's job to do cross-portfolio thinking and to ensure that people work together.

When the Government got rid of Communities Scotland in 2007, we lost all that expertise on housing that could have given the Government advice, information and skills regarding how a housing agency could develop our work. That was a loss. Removing the capability of these bodies to

speak powerfully to the Government—maybe not in public, but through giving advice, strategic understanding and their expertise—will, I genuinely believe, be a loss. I do not understand—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Ms Lamont. Could you please conclude?

Johann Lamont: I urge the Scottish Government to think again. If it does, I am sure that people across the board will support it.

15:15

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Back in January, I said that I was disappointed with the Government's pursuit of centralisation at any cost without providing the evidence. Two months later, nothing has changed. Concerns have been raised time and again, and they have come from across the political spectrum—from our partners in education, such as the University and College Union and Universities Scotland, and from experts such as the Royal Society of Edinburgh. What we are all concerned about is significant changes being made to the university sector without their implications being properly thought through or evidenced. Despite this being an area of acute and widely held concern, the Government has still not ruled out a minister chairing the new superboard, although today provides an opportunity for it to do so.

The aim of the reforms is clearly to focus the efforts of these bodies towards economic strategy, but the reforms also increase the Government's influence over and proximity to the bodies. It is worth noting that economic development is not the sole purpose of all four of the organisations.

The new report for the Government by Professor Crerar is welcome, but it continues the centralisation agenda and has done little to allay concerns. It calls for the new superboard to have clear authority to enforce change and for the transformation of the existing agency boards into mere conduits for delivery. The option of the superboard being chaired by a minister remains open. Why, when there are such significant concerns about the proposal, the Government cannot at least offer a gesture of good will by ruling out a ministerial chair is beyond me.

There are two key concerns about the impact that the reforms will have on Scottish universities, which focus on their not being classified as public bodies and their freedom to determine their own academic goals. With those concerns in mind, an increase in Government control over the funding council or at least a strong appearance of that would be irresponsible. I hear what the minister has said about the dialogue with the Office for National Statistics. However, bearing in mind that the Education and Skills Committee has asked for

that evidence repeatedly, it would be fantastic if we could see that as well. Such a reclassification could seriously harm the ability of Scottish universities to attract funding from, for example, charitable bodies—particularly those that are based down south. The Government is well aware of those concerns.

The Education and Skills Committee published a report in which it stated that the ability of the funding council to develop and initiate policy itself is key to its ability to function and that it is vital that universities are not reclassified as public bodies. However, both the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, in their appearances before the committee, were unable to provide anything approaching evidence of the effect that the superboard proposal could have on research funding. Nor was sufficient evidence produced to back up the supposed demand for such a centralised board, as members have mentioned. That brought into question not just the proposal but the process by which we have got to this point, which I will quickly touch on.

These Government reforms not only threaten the status and the funding of Scottish universities but raise the question of their purpose. Are Scottish universities to be simply another tool in our economic strategy? No—that is not the ethos that has underpinned the academic and intellectual freedom of our universities since the enlightenment. That was noted by the Education and Skills Committee in our report. Significant elements of the roles that the agencies fulfil are outwith the scope of the review, and the committee recommended that the Government quickly set out what impact the review will have on areas that are outwith its scope.

The issue of evidence is key. The Government has simply been unable to find it, and that is the nub of the issue with the process. At stage 1, the Government decided to embark on the route towards the superboard, giving itself no wriggle room to back out of it. However, there seems to be no evidence of what the effect will be on, for example, university research funding. That is apparently for phase 2. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills conceded in the committee that there are relevant policy considerations for phase 1 but that they were not evidenced in phase 1. To make a clear decision to pursue a policy without having first gathered evidence of its effects is not responsible. It is not acceptable, and the Greens are not prepared at this point to support it.

15:19

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank Liz Smith for bringing the debate to Parliament, not least because it gives us a chance to look at

the Crerar report and its implications. Last Thursday, in response to the points of order that had been made about the publication of the Crerar report, the Presiding Order ruled that the Government should respond. The first chance that the Government had to do so was yesterday, when it did not respond. Today, it has the chance to do so, albeit that it happens to be in Opposition time. Parliament will notice that the Government has not yet provided an opportunity for us to debate these matters in its own time.

The Crerar report needs careful examination, because it says some profound things about how we run our country. If the Government—this would apply to any Government—wishes to control from the centre, it should do the honest thing and just abolish the boards of the organisations in question, and indeed the organisations themselves, because the logic of what ministers may or may not want is to have those organisations in-house.

Members should read carefully what Crerar says. On the delivery boards—the word “delivery” is descriptive and very clear—he says that all board members will be required to

“Take direction from the Chair ensuring hard alignment with other Agencies and others to meet the aims and aspirations of the SB.”

The repurposed—that is not a word that I was ever taught in English at school—delivery boards

“should fulfil the functions described and ensure that the aims of the SB can be delivered effectively while also ensuring governance standards are maintained.”

It is crystal clear what will happen to the funding council if the Government implements the report. The funding council is not even mentioned until page 28 of a 31-page report, and no analysis is provided of the different functions that the organisations concerned undertake.

In the conclusions and recommendations section, the report says:

“Through the SB, there will be a direct accountability to Scottish Ministers for the collective responsibility of each Agency”.

How that is consistent with what ministers have said about the independence—academic and otherwise—of the funding council is quite beyond me. I listened very carefully to what Shirley-Anne Somerville said in her speech. She said that ministers are now reflecting on the Crerar report and that they will decide what they are going to do about it in the fullness of time. That means that, although they have the Crerar report, they could—as Liz Smith illustrated—go back to their original position of abolishing all four boards. That was not clear from what the minister said earlier.

We must be clear about the dangers that have been articulated by representatives of the university and college sector. Today, Universities Scotland has said:

“We seek recognition by the Scottish Government that the statutory body boards are sources of initiative, advice and challenge to government rather than just a channel for the ‘delivery’ of priorities set by Scottish Government or the Strategic Board.”

That is entirely inconsistent with the Crerar report—the Government cannot have it both ways. If it believes in the Crerar report, it should implement it, in which case the funding council board will not be worth having, nor will the board of HIE. Interestingly, none of us seems to defend Scottish Enterprise or Skills Development Scotland; I feel sorry for them, because they never get a mention in this context. The boards of the funding council and HIE will cease to exist, other than to do exactly what they are told to do by the Government minister and by the strategic board. That is the choice that we have, and Parliament should vote on that this afternoon.

15:23

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I remind members that I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

In 2014, Scotland was ranked 19th for productivity levels among OECD countries, which placed us only at the top of the third quartile. In 2013, Scotland was in exactly the same position. More of the same will not get the job done. We know that we need to modernise our approach to enterprise and skills development as we work to move our productivity into the top quartile of OECD nations.

Scotland has had great success in attracting investment and in helping companies to innovate, export and expand. Indeed, the Government is now investing £500 million through the Scottish growth fund. We know that we have real strength in our universities, five of which rank in the *Times Higher Education* world university rankings, but now is not a time for complacency. It is the time to ensure that we drive greater innovation to improve our productivity. Given that our universities receive almost £90 million of research funding a year from EU sources alone, that will be of particular importance in a post-Brexit era.

As the minister has outlined, the context for the debate stems from the enterprise and skills review. The results from the public call for evidence identified four key themes across the whole system. First, there is the “cluttered landscape” of the current system. Secondly, there is “difficulty in accessing support”. Thirdly, there is a perceived tension between national and regional

approaches. Lastly, there is a “lack of partnership working”.

However, Professor Crerar’s report is about how we ensure that all our agencies work together in a co-ordinated way to deliver the maximum impact for our economy. The lack of co-ordination was flagged up in the public consultation, and we see it in the governance review of education right now.

Many members who are in the chamber today spoke in the Education and Skills Committee’s recent debate on the role of Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, SDS and the funding council. Those agencies are rightly being held to account by the work of that committee, but let us not forget that the funding council benefited from more than £1.7 billion of Scottish Government funding last year. That is public money.

Of course, we need a national body to allocate funding to further education and higher education, and that has to be done independently of the Scottish ministers. Fundamentally, however, the establishment of an overarching board will not affect the autonomy of Scotland’s universities or how they are governed. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that academic freedom continues to be protected.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Gilruth: I am very short of time so, no, thank you.

Only four months ago, the Deputy First Minister said in the chamber:

“I can give that absolute cast-iron commitment to Parliament today: there will be no Government control of the universities.”—[*Official Report*, 23 November 2016; col 7.]

Furthermore, it was the SNP Government that strengthened the definition of academic freedom in the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016.

Let us reflect on where we are. The status quo is not working. Look at the OECD statistics. We need Scotland to be sector leading, and the current arrangements do not allow us to be.

It is also important to note that the enterprise and skills review is not just about governance; there are nine other action points that the review considers, including recognising national and regional differences, which Johann Lamont mentioned today; promoting an open and international economy; developing innovation; and how skills provision will drive economic success.

There is on-going dialogue between the Scottish Government and the funding council about the enterprise and skills review, but this is only phase

2 of the review. Like all members, I am sure, I very much look forward to hearing from the cabinet secretary when he returns to Parliament to update us all about what actions the Government intends to take forward.

15:27

Ross Thomson (North East Scotland) (Con):

It appears that, before phase 1 of the enterprise and skills review was even on the books, the Scottish Government had made up its mind. There is going to be a strategic alignment of the delivery of skills, enterprise and education. As has been confirmed by the Government and two of its cabinet secretaries—one of whom is missing this afternoon—that means the abolition of the funding council board, as well as the boards of the other agencies, and their replacement by a strategic board. That is a decision that has been taken without the evidence to justify it, so there is only one way to see it—as yet another centralising power grab by the Scottish Government.

There is a fundamental inconsistency at the heart of the Scottish Government's argument for abolishing the funding council board. As UCU Scotland has highlighted, we simply cannot, on one hand, acknowledge the need for the responsible autonomy and independence of universities, and the need for the funding council to be at arm's length from ministers, and then, in virtually the same breath, talk about the new superboard being chaired by a Government minister who has power to enforce his view on the funding council, creating the legitimate concern of a puppet board, at the mercy of the political will and whim of the Government.

I welcome the minister's update about classification. I am sure that, if she has that in writing, she will be happy to provide it to Parliament. There is a genuine concern that the proposed abolition of the funding council board risks the autonomy and the independence of our educational institutions. I am sure that the minister would agree that the reclassification of our universities to the public sector would be catastrophic for their capacity to attract investment to Scotland, and their financial sustainability more broadly.

At a meeting of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee on 2 February, the cabinet secretary refused to fully commit to dropping the reorganisation plans, even if they would risk reclassification. UCU Scotland has echoed this sentiment, stating:

"This is a very real concern, and we must ensure the arm's-length, non-departmental public body status of the SFC is retained in more than just name."

Therefore, I hope that, today, we will get that cast-iron guarantee from the Government, because it would be welcome.

In my view, the Scottish Government is taking a reckless and cavalier attitude to the autonomy and sustainability of our universities, which is both irresponsible and dangerous. Simply put, the proposals have significant implications for the ability of our universities to continue to provide the excellent, globally renowned education that they provide across Scotland.

As I mentioned earlier, the Scottish Government's proposal is devoid of any compelling basis in evidence. At the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, the cabinet secretary said that the enterprise and skills review is driven by

"the fact that ... the Scottish economy is not performing in the top quartile of the productivity assessments".—[*Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee*, 2 February 2017; c 8.]

However, it is abundantly clear from the work of both the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee and the Education and Skills Committee that the decisions that have been taken to abolish the funding council board and the other agency boards are totally lacking in tangible evidence. Ministers have, to date, completely failed to declare what evidence or advice they have received to support the abolition of the funding council board in its current form.

It is clear from the work of this Parliament that the Government's proposals are far from transparent. It is also clear that the Scottish Government's centralising reforms are unwanted, unnecessary and uncorroborated. I therefore urge members to support the motion in the name of Liz Smith.

15:31

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate and to support the amendment in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville. Listening to the proceedings and the wider conversation that has been provoked by the phase 1 report of the enterprise and skills review, I have been struck by the water-like habit of politics to find and amplify the smallest of fissures in our deliberations. Although I would never challenge the primacy of the dialectic in our discourse, we can make progress through debates such as this only if we resist the temptation to indulge in the narcissism of small differences.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Tom Arthur: I fear, however, that on the question of a strategic board—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please sit down, Ms Lamont.

Tom Arthur: If I had more time, I would take an intervention.

I fear, however, that on the question of a strategic board, that is exactly what some of the Opposition is in danger of doing. That would be a reckless approach at any time, but it is particularly reckless given the economic headwinds that we face as a consequence of Brexit and the importance of enterprise and skills to realising the Scottish Government's economic strategy. It is also disappointing because, in my opinion, an opportunity for consensus is being missed.

I believe, or at least I hope, that all parties in the chamber are united in support of the Government's vision of a Scotland that ranks

"among the top performing OECD nations for productivity, equality, sustainability and wellbeing."

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Tom Arthur: I am sorry; I do not have time.

Week after week, I hear entreaties from Opposition members for action by the Government to improve Scotland's economic performance. I therefore find it rather disheartening that when presented with substantive proposals for greater co-ordination and collaboration between Scotland's enterprise and skills agencies, the response of some of the Opposition has been one of dogmatic resistance to any change whatsoever.

Liz Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Tom Arthur: I am sorry; I do not have time.

It seems to me that the Conservatives, in lodging the motion for this afternoon's debate, have yet again become somewhat delirious as a result of the rarefied heights of second-party status and forgotten that Opposition should not be reduced to obstinacy. It is simply not credible, on any matter of policy, to demand a response from the Government, only to then reflexively reject any proposition that it puts forward.

I welcome the vision of greater collaboration and co-ordination between agencies that is set out in the phase 1 report of the enterprise and skills review, and I welcome the contribution that Professor Crerar's report makes to the second phase of the review. I recognise the importance of the role that the Scottish funding council plays and I welcome the Government's amendment, which recognises not only the fundamental importance of

the Haldane principle but the continuing need for a national body for further and higher education.

I believe that, although it is vital that we maximise the contribution that universities make towards the development of a highly skilled workforce, it is also important to remember the broader cultural and societal value that higher education generates. While studying music as an undergraduate and as a postgraduate, I experienced many well-meaning individuals question what economic relevance gaining such a skill set would bring. Indeed, it has become the norm for debates on music education across the United Kingdom and beyond to be framed in terms of utility rather than music's intrinsic value as an art.

Although it is imperative that our colleges and universities equip people with the skills to compete in a labour market that will become ever more competitive, particularly with the continuing advances in robotics and automation, it is equally important to remember that education can be an end in itself and not just a means. The approach set out by the Government in its amendment gets the balance right. We must maximise the use of the resources that are at our disposal to ensure that Scotland has the workforce to meet the challenges of tomorrow, and to ensure economic growth while preserving the independence of the national body for further and higher education. I urge—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, I am sorry. You must stop. You are overrunning your time.

15:35

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Liz Smith started today's debate by going back a little over the process that has brought us to today, but it might be worth stepping a little further back, to before the phase 1 review consultation. We are here today because of a paragraph in the SNP's manifesto that bore all the hallmarks of one that was inserted because of a late realisation that the manifesto said nothing about enterprise and skills and had better say something, so a review was put in. The SNP having done that, we found ourselves lumbered with the review, and now that we have had the review, it is incumbent on ministers to change something as a result. Thus it was that, without evidence and much to the surprise of many of those who were involved in the phase 1 review, we ended up with a proposal for an overarching superboard.

We have now moved on to the Crerar report, which is good in the sense that it insists that we keep the subsidiary boards, including the funding council. However, it appears to support the overarching superboard. As Johann Lamont

exposed rather neatly, Lorne Crerar was told that that was a given, and was asked to work on how the structure could be made to work. His answer is that the other boards would have to be reduced in status to delivery boards because it must be so. They would lose their capacity to take strategic decisions and perhaps some financial decisions, and would do the bidding of the overarching strategic board.

I believe that Professor Crerar believes that the overarching board should be chaired by a minister, although he pulls back from recommending that and examines the other possibilities.

The Crerar reports leaves us with the two major concerns that have been expressed since the beginning of the process with regard to the funding council. The first is the potential for a new degree of ministerial control to jeopardise the ONS classification of our universities sector. I heard what the minister said, and I heard the cast-iron guarantee from Jenny Gilruth, although I have to ask what position she is in to give it. Daniel Johnson is right to say that we have been here before, with colleges and with the Scottish Futures Trust. Cast-iron guarantees have been given about ONS classification that have turned out to be simply wrong.

Perhaps the more fundamental concern that we are still left with is about the degree to which the autonomy of our universities might be jeopardised. The minister talked about the Haldane principle, as does her amendment, but that is not enough. Autonomy is not just about research decisions being made by researchers. As a concept, academic and intellectual freedom is much wider and more important than that, and our universities must be able to exercise it without fear or favour.

Mr Scott is absolutely right. Hard alignment, as posited in the Crerar report, cannot mean anything except control by the overarching strategic board and loss of autonomy. The University and College Union Scotland sums it up very well in its briefing paper when it says that we cannot acknowledge the need for responsible autonomy of universities and for the SFC to be at arm's length and then talk about the new superboard being chaired by a minister and having the power to enforce its view.

The fundamental error is with the utilitarian understanding of our universities as bodies that are solely about driving productivity and economic growth. We do not support that, and the universities, students, academics and trade unions do not support it. The proposal is fundamentally flawed and the Government should think again.

15:40

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): It might help Parliament if, to try to address some of the issues that have underpinned the debate, I go through the policy process that the Government has undertaken. In doing so, I will cover some of the ground that I went over when I appeared before the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee some weeks ago.

The Government has considered the challenges in relation to the need to improve economic performance in Scotland, which Jenny Gilruth set out in her speech, and recognises that that economic performance is not what it should be. In her speech, Johann Lamont noted that we are all bound together by our desire to improve that economic performance. Therefore, at the start of phase 1, when we started to consider ways of improving it, we had to ask, "Why is that economic performance not what it should be?" When we consulted the ministerial review group and other interested parties, answers came back about the cluttered landscape, the need for partnership working and the requirement for us to ensure that there is more compatibility among the interventions that are taken forward by different aspects of the economic and skills development community. From that evidence, the Government came to the conclusion that the most appropriate way of ensuring that we get that greater coherence and alignment is to take forward the superboard proposals that were the summation of the phase 1 conclusions.

Liz Smith talked a lot about the evidence, and I have rehearsed the arguments with her. The Government conducted a policy analysis in coming to a conclusion about which approach was the right one to take. At the end of that process, the conclusion that we came to concerned the importance of securing greater alignment through the work of a superboard. That explains the process that the Government has gone through.

Iain Gray: I want to pursue the issue of the cluttered landscape. We have been assured that each of the individual agencies will continue to have delivery boards, but that there will be an overarching strategic superboard. Surely that will increase the clutter in the landscape, not decrease it.

John Swinney: It gives us the opportunity to reconcile some of the issues of overlap, duplication and clutter that emerge over time. With regard to the areas of responsibility, the journey that young people go on when they work through the education system can involve the Skills Development Scotland landscape, the college landscape, the university landscape and links to the wider business environment that involve either

Highlands and Islands Enterprise or Scottish Enterprise. That illustrates the areas of potential overlap and the need for greater coherence, and that is why the Government came to that conclusion.

The relevance of the issue is contained in the point that Daniel Johnson raised, which I responded to when I intervened on him earlier. Helpfully, he went through a range of the elements in the economic system that are key to driving productivity. Of course, they are the elements that concern the four agencies in relation to which the Government is committed to securing greater coherence and alignment.

Liz Smith: I do not think that anybody doubts what the cabinet secretary has just posited in relation to the need for collaboration and our economic ambitions. That is not the point. The point concerns the evidence for the abolition of the boards as part of that process. I ask again whether it is correct that the chairman of the Scottish funding council sent a letter to the Scottish Government advising that the Scottish funding council board should not be abolished.

John Swinney: We have involved the agencies in the dialogue around that particular question. It is helpful that Liz Smith made that intervention, because she said that everybody agrees about the necessity for coherence and alignment. Given that that is the case, it is strange that that does not make any appearance in the motion that Liz Smith has placed before Parliament today. Johann Lamont, Daniel Johnson, Liz Smith, Ross Greer and Tavish Scott have made a plea for coherence, but the issue does not make a single appearance in the motion.

In a sense, that validates some of the points that Tom Arthur made. The Opposition is prepared to address one particular element of the governance arrangements that it clearly does not like—I totally understand that it does not like that element—but without presenting a route that addresses the need for coherence to improve Scotland's economic performance. That is what the Government is trying to do. As the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science made clear in her opening speech, the Government will continue to engage in Parliament and Mr Brown will come back to Parliament with a further statement to set out the Government's intention in response to the issues.

15:45

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am grateful that the debate has occurred and that I have the chance to participate in it, not least because the Scottish Conservatives held a similar debate about HIE several weeks ago.

Although the SFC and an enterprise agency—HIE, for example—seek to do different things, there are some common themes: both benefit from specialist expertise on their boards and have been set up with a degree of independence from Government, which allows them to operate in a detached but constructive way. However, inexplicably, they are under threat as the tentacles of this centralising Government reach out to bring yet another local or specialist body under ministerial control.

I turn first to Professor Crerar's report, which emerged last week. In one sense, it is to be welcomed in so far as it recognises the value of the independent boards. However, the devil is truly in the detail. Many people have already commented on delivery boards and how we risk turning robust, arm's-length boards into simply an extension of Government. Universities Scotland says that that would be

“a detrimental change to their role”.

Professor Crerar notes that the chair of the strategic board could be ministerial or independent, but the language of his report implies that he would prefer a minister-led approach. In the view of many people, that would impair the board's independence. His report calls for

“real hard alignment of the Agencies' outcomes”

and says that

“The culture of collaboration must be embedded”.

However, it also says that agencies that do not conform to that culture should be challenged. That language all points to centralisation repackaged, so the Scottish Conservatives are sceptical indeed of the Crerar recommendations, notwithstanding the report's recognition of the principle of retaining independent boards.

I accept at face value what Keith Brown said yesterday about considering the report. I also accept that the report does not represent Government policy yet. However, many of us are fearful—and given the Scottish Government's record and centralising instincts, we have good reason to fear.

Such questions are not about party-political affiliation. They apply to any Government of whatever political stripe. Anyone who cares about the workings of democracy should mind about the issue. It is about how much Government should do—it goes to the heart of politics. How far should Government step forward and how far should it step back?

What is there to fear? Scrutiny of Government is a normal part of the political process.

John Swinney: Mr Cameron sets out an important analysis of the relationship between

Government, public bodies and public authority. However, there is another issue, which is about accountability. People such as Mr Cameron want to hold the Government accountable for Scotland's economic performance. Does he not understand that, if the Government believes that there are measures that it needs to take to strengthen that economic performance, it has a role and a right to take forward that agenda?

Donald Cameron: As the Opposition, it is our role to hold the Government to account. Ministers are answerable to Parliament. They appear in the chamber and in committees week in, week out. The boards have a similar role. As Universities Scotland says in its briefing:

"Governance structures need to preserve some independence from Government if they are to respect and protect university autonomy. The SFC must remain as a robust, arms-length body capable of providing challenge to both Government and higher education institutions."

I will address some of the contributions from members. Ross Thomson, Tavish Scott and Iain Gray spoke of the contradiction at the heart of the proposal. The Government cannot have it both ways: either it supports academic independence or, following Crerar, it goes down the route of centralisation.

Ross Greer spoke of the lack of evidence and rightly pointed out that the Crerar report is continuing centralisation.

Daniel Johnson spoke about the extra bureaucratic layers that Crerar proposes. Johann Lamont spoke powerfully about how the Scottish Government has started from the end and worked backwards. Tom Arthur was as thoughtful as ever, but it was interesting to hear his desire for consensus, his pleading for differences to be resolved and his rejection of dogma, given that I have sat through some pretty dogmatic and non-consensual speeches from him.

Liam Kerr, with his well-deserved reputation for optimism, gave a characteristically optimistic speech. He spoke about the SFC's policy remit and the ambition—which we all share—that Scotland's education system should flourish. James Dornan and Jenny Gilruth were right in so far as there is potentially a desire for partnership and streamlining, but it is a giant leap from there to an overarching board and either the neutering or the abolition of the existing independent boards.

I hope that the Government recognises the depth of feeling on this matter, because—yet again—the SNP faces a choice. Either it persists, in the face of widespread opposition, with this wrong-headed plan to impose central Government, or it steps back from the brink.

In the context of this debate, there is a deep irony in what the First Minister said in her speech

at the David Hume Institute last night. I warn the Government that it cannot accuse others of ignoring Scotland's voice when proposals such as those that relate to the SFC and HIE may potentially silence Scotland's local voices, be they the voices of our universities or those of our regional communities. It cannot allege that others will strip powers from this Parliament when at the very same time it might end up stripping powers from expert bodies such as the SFC. It cannot talk of a democratic deficit and then go on to do something that is as profoundly undemocratic as centralising, under ministerial control, bodies such as the SFC and HIE.

BBC Scotland Digital Channel

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04287, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on the new BBC Scotland digital channel. We are pushed for time, so I will be quite strict. I call Jackson Carlaw to speak to and move the motion—you have up to eight minutes, Mr Carlaw.

15:52

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): Last week, Lord Hall, the director general of the BBC, successfully achieved a feat that no chancellor or finance secretary has managed in the last 25 years of budgets—he produced a surprise that he had managed to keep secret. It caught some politicians, commentators and broadcasters flat-footed. It certainly bamboozled a Mr—let me get the name right—John Nicholson, who postures as the Scottish National Party’s culture spokesman, albeit that, I understand, he is a member of Parliament at Westminster. In the hours before the announcement, he rushed in where angels fear to tread and boomed that the BBC’s multimillion-pound investment demonstrated

“an extraordinary lack of ambition and commitment to Scotland.”

For the sake of clarification, I urge Fiona Hyslop, in her speech this afternoon, to confirm that, notwithstanding Mr Nicholson’s ambitions, she remains the SNP culture spokesman and that culture is indeed devolved to this Parliament. I assure her that the Conservative Party will fight, fight and fight again to prevent the seizing of control of Scottish culture by the SNP at Westminster—the most grievous assault on our powers in 20 years of devolution.

The surprise at the heart of Lord Hall’s announcement was the announcement of a new BBC Scotland digital channel from the autumn of 2018. However, the announcement also laid to rest the long-running discussion regarding a Scottish six. Last September, at the Edinburgh policy conference on the television market in Scotland, I made it clear that Scottish Conservatives were not opposed to such a broadcast in principle but that it faced various difficult challenges. First, there was the not inconsiderable fact that the public, in all published expressions of opinion, declared that they were content with the current national UK news broadcast at 6, with “Reporting Scotland” following on afterwards. Both those programmes are popular with viewers—indeed, “Reporting Scotland” is the most consistently watched Scottish news programme, even if some, like me, might prefer the “and finally” slot to commence a little later than 25 minutes to 7.

Secondly, the horrendous experience of experimenting with the national news at 6 a generation ago, with the programme “Sixty Minutes”, was an unmitigated failure with which Lord Hall himself was associated. That did huge reputational damage to the BBC, from which it took some time to recover; we simply cannot afford such a risk at present.

Thirdly, a Scottish six may well have reduced the coverage of Scottish news in the rest of the UK in the 6 o’clock news bulletin, which would inevitably have been detrimental to our interests.

Finally—this has been represented to me by many of my elderly constituents—for many people, the national news at 6 is their principal source of daily broadcasting news. Like all sensible people, they are tucked up in their beds with a good book by 10 o’clock.

While nationalists saw the whole issue through the prism—or even the prison—of evangelical arguments about independence, we and others judged it against the challenges that it would have presented. We speak on behalf of the vast majority of viewers across Scotland who fully support and welcome the decision of Lord Hall to maintain a national UK news broadcast at 6 o’clock. There will be no envelope with a second decision.

Presiding Officer, I should say at this point that we accept the Labour amendment to our motion, in the name of Lewis Macdonald. While I agree with the sentiment of the SNP amendment, what it removes from the motion plays entirely to the SNP’s neuroses and prejudices in a small-minded and churlish manner. I regret it, as will the overwhelming majority of viewers who support the sentiments that the amendment seeks to dismiss. In any event, given that the Labour amendment encapsulates the sentiments of Fiona Hyslop’s amendment, perhaps even yet she will feel able to withdraw.

The new BBC Scotland digital channel represents a huge commitment to and opportunity for Scotland. We all welcome the new employment opportunities that will be created, in particular, the 80 new journalism posts arising from the central programme in the new channel’s schedule: an international news hour from Scotland at 9 o’clock, when the largest prospective viewer audience is available. The new channel will broadcast daily from 7 o’clock to midnight, with a programme schedule of which 60 per cent, some 1,000 hours, will be new commissions. With £19 million of new money, together with the existing BBC2 opt-out funding, some £30 million—all of which will be invested in programming—is an equivalent sum to the current BBC4 budget that produces just 750 hours of new programming.

We expect the BBC to make a success of BBC Scotland and to ensure that its funding model is both robust and appropriate. That will be a judgment reached over the next few years. All that is, without doubt, genuinely exciting for broadcasting in Scotland and a huge opportunity for the creative film and television arts in our country.

However, our motion argues that this is also the moment for the Scottish Government, and all of us, to ask whether we are currently structured to make a success of the opportunity and whether we currently have adequate and competitive studio capacity. There is little point in creating opportunities for new drama and comedy if we are unable to film them due to an absence of studio capacity and then to find, to our dismay, that the new broadcasting hours in Scotland are being filled with programmes made elsewhere.

I am afraid that we are simply not yet a thoroughbred at the races. We may well enjoy a wonderfully diverse and talented independent film and television sector in Scotland, and many award-winning documentaries and popular household name television programmes are produced by it. However, access to the networks has been problematic, and the sector has worked in the face of historical indifference to the television industry in general from Scottish Enterprise, and from Creative Scotland with regard to television, while also acting together with a raft of unco-ordinated involvement from other agencies. While Creative Scotland is now engaging, the reality is that Northern Ireland Screen is regarded as a model of Government, enterprise and creative arts co-operation and it is stealing a march on Scotland.

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Is the member aware that the public spend for the Northern Ireland film commission was £10.6 million for 2014-15 and the latest figures for Scotland are £24 million?

Jackson Carlaw: The cabinet secretary misses the point. It is the co-ordination between the various agencies that is leading to an opportunity for the independent sector to be fully involved in the opportunities that are made available by the extra screen hours that are there.

The recent history that we have to overcome in Scotland is one of a so-called lift and shift era, where productions travelled to Scotland on a sort of busman's holiday, bringing all their needs with them, but leaving lock, stock and barrel when the production finished. It did not leave a creative footprint in Scotland that nurtured and fulfilled the talent opportunities, on which we need to see the Government take a lead, developing.

We see, for example, that the next international movie in Marvel's Avengers series is to be filmed on location here in Scotland, which is a notable achievement. However, the lack of studio and production facilities means that on a movie with a stellar budget—all of which could have been spent in Scotland—the interior film and production work will be completed in Atlanta instead.

I know that planning applications are pending. I also hear rumours of Scottish ministers working on announcements for their party conference, ahead of Parliament. It is important that we create the right studio capacity—that we do not try to force the industry into empty Government property that is currently seeking a purpose, but green-light urgently proposals that will transform our opportunity and our creative arts with it.

This is an exciting time for broadcasting in Scotland. We have a once-in-a-generational opportunity for film and television creative arts. It must serve and advantage all parts of Scotland not just in film and television, but in radio. However, that opportunity presents challenges of its own: to the BBC to make good on its promise; to the Scottish Government to create a competitive investment model; and to Government and industry together to identify and develop world-leading studio capacity in Scotland to create a Scottish Hollywood to complement Scotland's Holyrood.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the decision of the Director-General of the BBC, Lord Hall, to maintain a national UK news bulletin at 6pm on BBC 1; supports the announcement of a new daily BBC Scotland digital channel from Autumn 2018, which demonstrates the willingness and ability of the BBC to both respond positively and adapt to the broadcasting needs of a devolved Scotland within the UK; notes that the schedule will include an international news hour at its core, together with three hours of comedy, drama and documentary programming; understands that 60% of the schedule will be new commissioning; calls on the BBC to ensure that the new channel is adequately resourced and reflects the traditions and culture of all regions in Scotland; believes that the Scottish Ministers should reinvigorate the structural relationships between Scottish Enterprise, Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government to promote opportunities for the creative arts in film and television generally and the independent sector in particular, and considers that there is a need to act to ensure that, in light of the burgeoning growth in the film and digital television sector and the new studio capacity being developed elsewhere in the UK, new studio capacity is urgently identified and developed in Scotland.

16:00

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate following the BBC's announcement last week. As those in the chamber are aware, the Scottish Government negotiated a role for itself during the

development of the new charter and influenced the shape of its content to include support for Scotland's creative economy.

Last week's announcement demonstrates that our role in the charter is having an impact. In the past year, I have met Tony Hall, director general of the BBC, four times on the case for Scotland and the need to reflect, to represent and to serve the nations and the regions. I welcome Scotland's new channel, because it responds to calls that we have made for some time—as long ago as the Scottish Broadcasting Commission and, more recently, in our widely supported position on the BBC charter. Although the increased investment in journalism and wider production in Scotland is overdue, the move is very positive.

It is welcome that the Conservatives now approve of the proposal. When the First Minister called for a separate channel at the Edinburgh television festival as recently as 2015, Liz Smith of the Conservatives said that she was out of touch and that millions of pounds of licence fee funds should not be diverted to pay for the new channel. That road to Damascus moment is heartening, particularly when considered alongside the spectacular U-turn from Jackson Carlaw who, in 2013, called for the licence fee to be abolished and for the BBC to make its own way—that is, for it to be privatised.

In 2009, the Scottish Broadcasting Commission estimated that the cost of funding a similar channel to the one that has been proposed would be about £75 million a year. That figure is more than double the £30 million that has been announced for the channel. When I raised the matter with Lord Hall last week, he said that the new channel could draw on the BBC's wider resources. He said that he expects the channel to be fresh and different; he also stressed that the channel is wholly the entity of BBC Scotland. Therefore, it is critical that the channel has commissioning and editorial independence and that it is properly resourced.

It is disappointing not to have a Scottish six, but I expect the Scottish nine to deliver. Quality journalism is key to delivering the best for Scotland, and the BBC's investment in 80 new journalism jobs is great news. It confirms what we knew all along: Scotland has the talent and the skills to produce an hour-long news and current affairs programme covering issues from home and abroad.

The channel's launch is 18 months away. Between now and then—and, indeed, after that time—the BBC as a whole must invest in quality news programming and deliver relevant content to the people of Scotland as we move through Brexit, the triggering of article 50 and beyond.

We must keep matters in perspective. Last week's announcement means that, by 2019-20, the BBC will spend in Scotland 68 per cent of the licence fee raised in Scotland. That is less than the 74 per cent in Northern Ireland and the 95 per cent in Wales that was spent in 2015-16, and it is only 5 per cent up on the amount raised in Scotland that has been spent in Scotland from 2013.

Lord Hall was reluctant to agree to the screen sector leadership group's recommendation for the BBC to spend 100 per cent, arguing that the coherence of the BBC would be threatened. I disagree. The BBC must put Scotland on an equal footing with other devolved nations. Only last week, I was interviewed by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. Denmark, with a population of 5.7 million people, has six channels, quality news and, as we know very well, drama.

However, we must seize the opportunities that are presented to us by last week's announcement if we are to deliver on our wider ambitions for screen. In seeking to amend the motion, I am quite happy to keep the challenges that it sets out, and nothing in our amendment should cause the Conservatives any difficulty.

Spend on screen in Scotland is increasing. In 2015, we saw record levels of film and TV production spend of more than £52 million, which is more than double the spend in 2007. The Scottish Government and its bodies are investing more than ever; as I have said, the figure in 2014-15 was £24 million. On top of that, we now have the new £3 million production growth fund, which was launched in 2015 and seeks to stimulate growth in production by providing incentives for major productions to come to Scotland—for example, we have seen "The Wife" with Glenn Close and "Churchill" starring Brian Cox shooting in Scotland—and by encouraging Scottish producers such as Brian Coffey to anchor their productions here.

We are also establishing a dedicated screen unit to reinvigorate the structural relationship between Creative Scotland and Scottish Enterprise, which is what I understand the motion is asking for. We are also making progress on the studio and on studio production space; indeed, the expansion of Wardpark studios, with its additional stages, is in train and will lead to a world-class film and TV studio facility.

However, I must reiterate that we are not procuring a film studio. This must be private sector led, and we are continuing to develop our screen infrastructure to deliver on a range of options, including not only purpose-built facilities but full-time conversions such as Wardpark and build space such as the Pyramids and the Pelamis building in Leith. Of course, the Pentlands

proposal for a mixed-use development including a film studio, an energy centre and a hotel is sensitive and complex and is due for decision shortly.

There is certainly more to cover than six minutes can allow but, in closing, I must emphasise that the role of the Government and the Parliament in our collective scrutiny, our debates and our negotiation has been instrumental in making progress with the BBC. However, this is only the start, and that is why, reflecting that consensual basis, our amendment keeps the meaning of the original motion, which I agree with. I hope that the Parliament can continue to work together to achieve more success for the screen industries in Scotland.

I move amendment S5M-04287.3, to leave out from “maintain” to second “UK” and insert:

“create a new BBC Scotland TV channel from Autumn 2018, to invest in 80 new journalist posts and to increase funding for BBC Alba; believes that the BBC must have editorial and commissioning independence to determine its output”.

16:07

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Public service broadcasting has seldom been more important than at this time of change, when journalistic integrity is under attack from many different directions here and around the world. We need the institutions of a free society more than ever. Public service broadcasters need to be unafraid of those in power, to be willing to ask hard questions and to be free to do their job, and that puts an obligation on politicians, too.

Our starting point in debating the BBC should be that no party and no Government should tell a public service broadcaster what to say or how to say it. Instead, we should seek to build a consensus that protects journalistic freedoms. What the BBC offered last week was the basis for such a consensus and it is disappointing that it has not been wholly welcomed accordingly.

For too long, we have endured a sterile argument about whether to replace the “Six O’Clock News” and “Reporting Scotland” with a Scottish six or to keep the status quo; indeed, the argument became a proxy for the independence debate. Tony Hall has cut through all that with the proposal for a new channel with its own 9 o’clock news, which will allow viewers to choose whether to watch an hour-long national and international news programme on BBC Scotland or to stick with half an hour from London and half an hour from Glasgow on BBC One.

Those who have made the case for a Scottish perspective on world news should welcome the BBC’s proposal on its merits, instead of

responding to it in terms of the wider constitutional debate. An hour-long programme at peak viewing time, with access to BBC correspondents around the world and no direct competition on the BBC or anywhere else, offers a choice that viewers have not had before. The case for a Scottish six has therefore fallen, not because it lacked merit, but because the BBC has come up with something better, and the challenge now is to move on from the old arguments, get behind the new channel and make it work.

That is what our amendment seeks to do. Eighty new journalist posts in Scotland is good news, especially at a time when newspaper journalism is under pressure. They can help refresh the whole media and creative sector, so long as new investment is made and new jobs are created right across Scotland, not just at Pacific Quay. Donalda MacKinnon, director of BBC Scotland, committed last week at the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee to strengthening production centres “beyond Glasgow”, while Ken MacQuarrie, director of nations and regions, promised:

“This investment will be spread across the whole of Scotland ... the whole of the nation and all of its regions”.— [*Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee*, 23 February 2017; c 6.]

Those commitments build on an earlier promise of BBC funding to support 20 local reporters in other people’s news outlets across Scotland.

Our amendment seeks to build on all those commitments by calling for new investment not just in the new channel, but across news, radio and television factual content and online services, and for that investment

“to be distributed equitably across Scotland”.

Existing production centres already make many excellent programmes, as Mr MacQuarrie acknowledged with reference to Aberdeen. BBC studios from Shetland to the Borders can say the same, and many of Scotland’s independent production companies are also based a long way from Pacific Quay. None of that must be put at risk, and programme content must reflect the whole country—the nation and all its regions—rather than simply Scotland as seen from the central belt.

BBC Alba is a key part of that. Supporting indigenous languages is the job of all public service broadcasters, not just the BBC. MG Alba, which is the BBC’s partner, aspires to increase original content to 10 hours a week. The additional funding that was confirmed last week is welcome, and it should mean an increase in that from the current 4.2 hours a week to 7.2 hours a week. That is good progress, particularly on Gaelic

weekend news, but being halfway there also means that there is still more to do.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I commend BBC Alba for the work that it has done over the past few years. We talk about the Scottish six, but it has offered the Scottish eight for the past few years, and it provides excellent news coverage in Scotland.

Lewis Macdonald: Indeed. A Scottish eight in Gaelic that is complemented by a Scottish nine in English will be progress in the right direction.

Finally, viewers should be able to find public service channels via electronic programme guides. That is particularly important for BBC Alba, but it will matter for the new BBC Scotland channel, too. Ofcom has a duty to ensure that public service channels are easy to find by ensuring that they have prominent places on those guides. There is an opportunity to extend that remit to reflect changing technologies through the Digital Economy Bill at Westminster. I hope that all parties in the Scottish Parliament agree that that opportunity should not be missed.

In all those respects, we can help to ensure that the new channel can be a success.

I move amendment S5M-04287.4, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the announcement by the BBC that the creation of a new channel in Scotland will lead to an additional 80 journalist posts, as well as other additional staff; calls for the new investment and jobs in news, radio, TV factual and online services to be distributed equitably across Scotland, reflecting the skills and expertise at existing production centres and ensuring that the country is better reflected to itself and to the wider world; welcomes additional funding for BBC Alba, and calls for appropriate prominence to be given to public service broadcasters, such as BBC Alba and the new BBC Scotland, in electronic programme guides across all providers.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. There should be very strict four-minute speeches, please.

16:12

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted that the Scottish Conservatives have brought this debate to the Parliament and given us the opportunity to discuss a new and exciting opportunity for Scottish programming.

The investment is the biggest in broadcast content in Scotland in over 20 years. As we have heard, last week the BBC announced a new TV channel for Scotland with an integrated television news programme and major investments in network programming. That announcement was in response to audiences who have expressed the view that they want to see more of their lives reflected on BBC Scotland in programmes such as

“The River”, which is based in the Scottish Borders. The BBC is well aware of the perception that BBC Scotland currently struggles to do that because the fantastic Scotland-based content has sometimes been eclipsed by equal surrounding content. The new channel offers a distinct service that will allow Scottish content to stand alone and shine brightly.

The director general of the BBC, Lord Hall, detailed to me that, because of the way that the new channel will be funded, it will have the opportunity and ability to take risks, to be at the forefront of Scottish content, and to be edgy and ground breaking in commissioning.

In total, an additional £20 million will be invested in the new initiative. The channel will broadcast every evening to educate and entertain, and there will be an hour-long news programme that will be edited in and presented from Scotland. The BBC has promised to create 80 new jobs in journalism, which will be spread across the whole of Scotland. I look forward to hearing from the BBC and discussing with it how those new roles will build on the existing BBC Scotland apprentice programme and link with the BBC’s UK-wide journalism trainee scheme to ensure that the best young talents from Scotland can grow their skills in the industry.

The channel will be Scottish and will broadcast 1,000 hours, 750 of which will be original. That is a huge step in the right direction and will offer something that Scotland has never seen before. That is a big commitment both in ambition and financially, and a lot of hard work will be required to make it happen. However, I have full confidence that it will be a success.

It has been promised that that success will be shared. Last week, as Lewis Macdonald said, the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee heard from Ken MacQuarrie about how the service would cover the whole of Scotland, every region and every community, to

“ensure that every part of the country benefits from the investment”.—[*Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee*, 23 February 2017; c 6.]

That objective is at the forefront of the minds of those in the BBC.

It is crucial to recognise that it is not just a Scottish service that is independent of the wider BBC. Lord Hall has made it clear that the service will be fully supported by the whole BBC. For example, the hour-long news programme at 9 o’clock will build on the already strong running of the 6.30 pm news programme “Reporting Scotland”, which, as Jackson Carlaw said, is the most watched news programme in Scotland. The 9 o’clock news programme will benefit from the global and UK journalistic and editorial resources of the BBC. Significantly, the 9 pm slot will not

compete with any other terrestrial news programmes and will present an alternative to the usual drama that is on offer at that time. The programme will present viewers with news from a Scottish perspective through informed, insightful and original Scottish journalism.

The new channel will also be available online and on iPlayer in high definition in Scotland and across the UK. It is important that the digital service is fully available to viewers, especially socially disadvantaged people and viewers living in rural areas. Incidentally, Ofcom's latest "Connected Nations" report indicates that only 46 per cent of rural properties in Scotland currently have access to superfast broadband. We look forward to the first phase of the Scottish Government's roll-out of digital infrastructure, which aims to provide access to high-speed fibre broadband to Scottish premises by March 2018, in time for the launch of the BBC's new channel.

I would like to close with—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you must conclude, Ms Hamilton.

Rachael Hamilton: —the words of Ken MacQuarrie—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you must conclude.

Rachael Hamilton: In Scotland, there is now an opportunity for us to come together and let—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I point out that the time by which members overrun will be taken off their fellow party members' speeches, because we really are tight for time.

16:16

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): The airwaves were buzzing last week with the news that Scotland will have a daily BBC channel from August next year, although I wonder whether the father of television, John Logie Baird, would be rejoicing, 90 years on from his invention, that we are where we are. Of course the new channel is a step in the right direction, but it is long overdue. Our cabinet secretary should be applauded for her work in helping it to come to fruition.

As a former journalist, I welcome the fact that the new channel will create 80 new posts for an hour-long news and current affairs programme, with editorial control over content. I agree with Lewis Macdonald's comments about that. The new channel will also be a chance to showcase Scotland's amazing array of national talent in the arts and the media and to encourage future generations to contribute to our rich culture.

Scotland's new channel is being funded to the tune of £30 million, but that falls well short of the proportionate share being spent in Northern Ireland and Wales. Last year, 55 per cent of licence fee funds raised in Scotland were spent on Scottish network content. In stark contrast, 95 per cent of licence fee funds raised in Wales were spent in Wales, and the comparable figure for Northern Ireland was 74 per cent.

Rachael Hamilton: Does Rona Mackay agree that, through the new investment and distribution costs, the spend in Scotland will rise to 80 per cent?

Rona Mackay: I have not figured that out, but would the member welcome the new channel being run on a shoestring? I do not think that that is what we want.

The Scottish broadcasting commission estimated in 2008 that a new channel would cost around £75 million—members can do the maths. It is also worth noting that in Catalonia, which has a population that is just larger than Scotland's, the public broadcaster's annual budget is £293 million and it broadcasts six television channels and four radio stations. It should be remembered that the BBC raises £320 million from licence fees in Scotland—members can come to their own conclusions about those figures. Evidently, we have some way to go, but I hope that the new channel is the start of a flourishing broadcasting future in Scotland. We should all wish it well.

It is not easy to outline in a four-minute speech the wider issue of Scotland's rich and incredible culture, from inventors who changed the world, such as doctors, scientists and engineers, to actors, composers, film producers, comedians, musicians and all the rest.

I look back in anger when I think about what has been done to our Scottish culture over the decades. The lack of Scottish history taught during my time at school still saddens me. I learned more about the battle of Hastings and Oliver Cromwell than I did about the battle of Bannockburn or the Highland clearances. Then there were the generations of children who were belted for not speaking the Queen's English. Imagine children being denied the right to speak in their mother tongue because it was too Scottish. Thankfully, that has changed and our beautiful Scots language and Gaelic are back on the school curriculum. However, as my colleague Angus MacDonald outlined during portfolio questions earlier, the commitment to invest £1.2 million in BBC Alba falls short of the commitment of 10 hours per week commitment that the channel needs to ensure that it can build on its success.

I will conclude on an optimistic note. I am delighted that the Scottish Government is

investing in Wardpark Studios in Cumbernauld, which is home to the fantastic “Outlander” and is soon to produce the new Avengers film “Infinity War”.

The reawakening of our culture has been hard fought for, but I am glad that we are at last making some progress with the new TV channel. The nation of Scotland has contributed so much to the world culturally and it has so much more to give.

16:20

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I think that we all have criticisms to make of the BBC. Whether our criticism of choice is about the schedule, programmes, the licence fee or whatever, the BBC is not short of critics. I have serious concerns at times about some of the political coverage, but I fear what our TV would become if we did not have the BBC. I would be appalled to see us go down the route of TV in the United States, with a series of adverts interspersed with low-grade garbage on many channels.

Here, over the decades, the BBC has set the standard in drama with “Boys from the Blackstuff”, “Play for Today” and “Tutti Frutti”; in comedy with “Porridge”, “Rab C Nesbitt” and “Still Game”; in children’s shows with “Grange Hill” and “Balamory”; and in sport with “Sportscene”, the open golf and the Olympics. I have probably just given away my viewing schedule. The BBC consistently delivers high-quality programmes with excellent value, presenting and creativity.

Whether the BBC news output is from London, Cardiff, Belfast, Glasgow or any of the regions it, too, is of high quality. I do not always agree with the content and I often think that the reporters can be more establishment commentators than straight news reporters, but it is undeniable that BBC output has a positive impact on the quality of the output of other channels.

Of course, politically, the Tories would privatise the BBC in a heartbeat if they thought that they could get away with it, but they know that public opinion would kill that stone dead, no matter Mr Carlaw’s previous wishes.

Over the past five years, nationalists have used the BBC as a political whipping boy. Who can forget the demonstrations outside the BBC studios in 2014? We have also heard repeatedly that the burning issue in every household in Scotland is not low pay, the state of the NHS, social care or the loss of thousands of council jobs and services, but whether we can have a Scottish 6 o’clock news. Not a single person has ever come to my surgery, sent me an email or written me a letter saying that life would just be so much better if only we had a Scottish 6 o’clock news.

The Minister for International Development and Europe (Dr Alasdair Allan): Does the member not consider that, whether it is at 6 o’clock or 9 o’clock, one of the benefits of a Scottish news programme would be its coverage of some of the very issues on which his constituents come to him, so that they are not deprived of that information?

Neil Findlay: Absolutely. That is why I welcome the news that we are getting not only the 9 o’clock news, but a whole channel. I thought that the minister would be ecstatic about that. I just wish that members on his benches were as exercised and angry about their Government’s starving of local government, about health and educational inequality and about the social care crisis as they were about a 6 o’clock news, but I will not hold my breath.

TV viewing has changed. We can watch TV live, on playback or on demand and across a range of platforms, and many people already access STV news and BBC news along with many other news options. Figures show that an increasing amount of viewing falls outside the normal, standard measurement because people are watching across many platforms. If people are interested in consuming more Scottish news, they will watch it when it is convenient for them.

Presiding Officer, £20 million of new investment in not just a news show but a whole channel is excellent, especially at a time when Scottish journalism desperately needs it. I have not seen the parliamentary press pack so happy for many years. Can I say—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. You must close, please.

Neil Findlay: I echo the NUJ, which has welcomed it as a “shot in the arm.”

16:24

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Mr Findlay has just reminded me to declare an interest as a member of the NUJ.

The thing that I found most disappointing about Jackson Carlaw’s opening speech—he knows what I am going to say—was that he did not manage to work in a single “Doctor Who” reference. I expected better. I thought that we would at least be told that the Scottish independence movement was the enemy of the world or that a Scottish six would take us to the edge of destruction, but there was nothing and I know that Mr Carlaw can do better than that.

However, I welcome his motion and I strongly agree with the bulk of it. It welcomes the announcement from the BBC, it calls for adequate resources and it makes some serious points about

the relationship between Creative Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government, many of which echo conclusions in the report into the creative industries that was produced in the previous parliamentary session by the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. I know that the cabinet secretary contributed to those discussions.

I even agree with Jackson Carlaw's motion that the BBC's "willingness and ability" to adapt to

"the broadcasting needs of a devolved Scotland within the UK"

has been and is being shown by the announcement. I am sure that he can understand that those of us who do not see that as the only constitutional future for Scotland would like to somewhat broaden out the argument. I want to be sure that the BBC has a strong and vibrant future, regardless of the constitutional settlement that we eventually arrive at, which is why I am glad that the SNP amendment does not go down the Government's earlier route of calling for a Scottish broadcasting service and the break-up of the BBC.

I hope that the SNP is moving away from that policy for the longer term because, even if Scotland were to vote for independence at some future point, the argument for retaining the BBC as a multination broadcaster is a strong one. That would not only ensure a genuine, inbuilt incentive for the corporation to take its different audiences and jurisdictions seriously, but act as a double-lock protection for the principle of a public service broadcaster that is funded by the licence fee, protecting it from the kind of attacks that, as Mr Findlay said, happen from time to time from a range of political perspectives. Those attacks need to be defended against.

I grew up with my dad coming home every evening from his job as a film editor at the BBC. From an early age, I was instilled with a belief that, even when the BBC is—rightly—subject to criticism of aspects of the way in which it is run, it is greater than the sum of its parts. It will continue to provide an important service for the future if we protect the principle of a public service broadcaster that is paid for by the licence fee.

In Scotland, we also need to make the case for a reasonable share of our licence fee being spent here. I do not want to put a figure on that or to say that the BBC's announcement has not gone far enough, but it needs to be adequate to build up the screen industry in Scotland and to regain some of the ground that we have lost over the years and decades in the level of screen production here.

However, we can do that without breaking up the biggest news-gathering machine on the planet and without undervaluing—or placing inadequate emphasis on—our contribution to UK-level

production, whether that is "Doctor Who" for Mr Carlaw and myself, the BBC's natural history output or its wide range of drama and documentary output.

16:28

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank Jackson Carlaw for bringing the debate to Parliament today, although I thought that it was ever so slightly ungallant of him to begin by suggesting that John Nicholson was more important than Fiona Hyslop. What slightly worries me about the new 9 pm television news is that that might be the kind of thing that becomes a regular news item on the programme. We will have to encourage Brian Taylor and his colleagues not to do that.

Fiona Hyslop began by declaring that she expected the 9 pm news to deliver, and I am sure that that is true for all of us. However, I also want to make sure that the programme, and public sector broadcasters more generally, can deliver without Government interference from Edinburgh or London, with fewer politicians phoning up to complain and with less social media abuse of journalists. If we could move forward with what was announced by Lord Hall last week in a new spirit, that would be to the benefit of news journalism in this country and at large.

Lewis Macdonald mentioned public service broadcasting. At a time when the President of the United States has banned the BBC and others from reporting things that he does not like by excluding them from White House briefings, journalism is under threat, so we must recognise the importance of editorial independence and work darned hard to ensure that it happens.

I will pick up on two points that a number of colleagues across the chamber have made. The first is on the percentage of the licence fee money that is spent here, which Patrick Harvie, most recently, referred to. His point that it should be a reasonable share is reasonable, but Tony Hall answered the point at the meeting of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee last week and gave assurances on it. Those will never be enough for some, but he explained at length what has already been happening. However, it is important to remember that viewers in Scotland also benefit from other aspects of the BBC, whether the World Service, coverage of the Olympics and the Commonwealth games or "Match of the Day"—I know that that is not a great source of comfort to Joan McAlpine but, for those of us who are football fans, it certainly is a big plus of the BBC's coverage.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Tavish Scott: If I must.

Joan McAlpine: I just want to put on record the fact that I do not have a downer on “Match of the Day”; the point that I made in committee was just that the £60 million that is spent on it is double the amount that will be spent on the new channel. I have absolutely nothing against “Match of the Day”. [*Interruption.*]

Tavish Scott: As others have said, it is £60 million very well spent indeed. If Joan McAlpine wants to have a debate about that in front of people in Scotland, I think that those of us on the side of “Match of the Day” will probably win, albeit that my delight in seeing Alan Shearer removed from the programme now and again would be considerable.

The second important point that I want to mention is on international news gathering. There are Scots all across the BBC, whether that be James Cook, who was on the red carpet at the Oscars the other night—or the other morning, as I saw him on “Breakfast”—or Quentin Sommerville, providing unbelievably strong news coverage from Iraq and other areas of that war-torn part of the world. All of that is part of the international news coverage and gathering that Lord Hall mentioned last week in the context of what will now appear on BBC Scotland.

I have two other points. First, on the point about BBC Scotland getting only £30 million investment when Blair Jenkins’s proposals some years back were for £60 million to £75 million, we must not omit to take into account the £10 million that Blair Jenkins wanted to spend on setting up the channel in the first place and the £10 million that he wanted to spend on the online and interactive parts of a new channel. If we are going to compare, it is important that we compare apples with apples. The figures are not quite as they have been mentioned.

The cabinet secretary and others have made much of commissioning; indeed, I have seen Fiona Hyslop on telly talking about that in recent days. The important point about commissioning is to have quality.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, Mr Scott.

Tavish Scott: There are, of course, excellent independent film companies and organisations in Scotland, but commissioning must always be based on quality.

16:32

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): There is much to be welcomed in last week’s announcement from the BBC, as members of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External

Relations Committee stated at the time. No one could disagree with the announcement of £30 million of investment and 80 additional journalism jobs. The increased investment in journalism and wider production in Scotland is long overdue, as Rachael Hamilton indicated when she talked about it being the biggest investment in the BBC in Scotland in 20 years.

Neil Findlay: I cannot help but think that, had the cabinet secretary or the First Minister stated last week that the announcement was terrible news, every one of the SNP back benchers would have been making a completely different speech today, or would they still have said that it is really good news?

Stuart McMillan: The first two minutes of Neil Findlay’s speech earlier were quite good, but then he reverted to type. I do not know what Mr Findlay has been reading, but he should check the *Official Report* of the committee meeting last Thursday, when every SNP member welcomed the announcement.

The investment in journalism and other areas of broadcasting is very much welcomed and much needed, because Scotland’s news landscape has not adequately evolved alongside devolution. That point was raised at the committee last week. As we all know, with devolution, the problem for the BBC has been that the news broadcast from London sometimes leads with stories that have no direct relevance in Scotland. That is understandable but, as has been said, the SNP has long called for a new TV channel for Scotland that can make better use of the wealth of production and journalistic talent in Scotland. The extra £19 million of investment, the 80 new jobs and the prospect of more home-grown drama are excellent news for Scottish broadcasting.

I agree with Tavish Scott that the important thing has to be the quality of what is being presented. The investment underlines the fact that Scotland has the talent and skills to produce an hour-long news and current affairs programme covering issues from home and around the world. Many journalists will want to work abroad or in London for network news, but would it not be tremendous if someone felt that they did not need to leave Scotland to progress? The new Scottish TV channel will be capable of nurturing talent and will be truly reflective of Scotland’s current diversity. It is also a massive step in the right direction, as Rachael Hamilton and Rona Mackay said. The longer-term test will come when the channel gets under way, next year.

The BBC has recognised that Scotland is changing and that it needs to change, too. Following the Smith commission’s recommendations, the fact that the BBC is laying its reports in the Scottish Parliament and coming

to the Scottish Parliament indicates that it is willing to consider that aspect of the changing nature of devolution.

The success of the new channel and its investment will depend on how it is implemented and whether it can be delivered with genuine ambition and innovation. There are legitimate concerns about how far the £30 million of additional funding can go, and there is the issue of BBC Alba. The additional £1.2 million for BBC Alba is welcome, but it still does not put the channel on a par with S4C in Wales. I raised that point last week. There is also the concern that if the news programme, which will run from 9 till 10, does not establish itself quickly with the audience, unfortunately the whole channel might not gain the full support of the public.

There is huge potential in the announcement. It is an exciting and vibrant time for broadcasting in Scotland. However, in 2018, people will be watching the new channel closely to see whether it passes one simple test: do the programmes reflect Scotland as it really is?

16:36

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in today's debate on a new BBC Scotland digital channel, not least because it affords me an early opportunity to pitch the idea of "Real Housewives of Dumfriesshire" to BBC commissioning bosses. With yourself in the chair, Deputy Presiding Officer, it feels a bit like "Dragon's Den" here.

Members: Oh!

Oliver Mundell: I hope that you will accept that comment in the lighthearted sense in which it was intended.

All joking aside, I believe that the proposal is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to expand and enhance the range of television programming that is on offer. It represents a real step change in the BBC's approach to the new-found realities of devolution and will allow for distinctive and culturally relevant programming across Scotland, bringing with it new jobs and helping to ensure that we retain important skills in Scotland, which will give our young people and the next generation greater possibilities than have existed before in the industry. At the same time, it will ensure that viewers in Scotland will have the maximum choice and continue to benefit from UK-wide news and television.

The announcement is all the more welcome and positive—indeed, it is remarkable—because of the increasingly politicised climate in which the BBC has to operate. Sadly, despite the robust mechanisms that are in place, we continue to see

the impartiality of the service called into question. Most disappointing is the fact that we frequently hear accusations being made regarding the integrity of its journalists. In that context, I very much welcome the bold approach that the BBC has taken. I believe that it has got the balance just about right.

In that context, too, I am disappointed, but not surprised, by the reaction that we have seen from some SNP members who continue to suggest that, when it comes to television in Scotland, there is only one acceptable option: their own. That approach undermines the significance of the benefits that the new channel will bring to our nation. I am also dismayed that the Scottish Government felt the need to amend the motion in the name of Jackson Carlaw in order to make a pretty petty point about its own view of the importance of the United Kingdom. Calling into question the channel's funding before it has even had an opportunity to get up and running smacks of political opportunism.

For Patrick Harvie's benefit, I make the point that whereas some SNP members are almost suggesting that the new BBC Scotland channel will be the size of a TARDIS—in other words, very small—it will in fact be like a TARDIS in the sense that the proposed investment will allow for a massive expansion of the programming on offer from BBC Scotland.

I turn to the views of my South Scotland colleague Joan McAlpine on "Match of the Day". I understand that she is not saying that the programme should be pulled, but the idea that somehow a new channel in Scotland should be benchmarked against a football programme that is broadcast across the whole UK is the wrong argument to make, and it points to the fact that the Scottish Government and many people within the SNP continue to miss the genuine opportunities that we are considering.

I hope, now that the announcement has been made, that all parties in Parliament will get behind the proposal and ensure that we get Scotland-wide coverage that captures the interests of all our communities, from the border regions to the islands.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Mundell would do well to remember that dragons never forget.

The final speaker in the open debate will be Joan McAlpine.

16:41

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I agree with much of the Conservative motion. In the previous session, I was a member of the

Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, which looked at the creative industries, and the Education and Culture Committee, and I am now a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee. They have all done a lot of work to get us to where we are. I agree that the screen agencies—Scottish Enterprise and Creative Scotland—should work together, and I welcome the work that the cabinet secretary has done to make that happen, as well as what she has done in getting in place an extremely important aspect of the BBC charter, which is the public purpose of sustaining and growing the creative industries in the nations and regions. That is extremely important in terms of growing our creative industries, and the fact that we have got there is a tribute to her and to Parliament's committees.

I supported the idea of a Scottish six. The Conservatives say that we need to move on from that, so I am not quite sure why the issue is mentioned in their motion. We are all moving on from it. I think that the new channel presents a fantastic opportunity to move ahead and to get to where the creative industries are asking us to get to in relation to spend in Scotland. When the director general of the BBC gave evidence to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee last week, he agreed that we are at a starting point with the new channel, so those who say that we are being churlish by raising the issue of funding are missing that point.

The creation of 80 new journalist posts is welcome, and I was pleased to hear the BBC say that there will be more jobs once the director of the new channel is in place and he or she decides what shape the new channel will take. At that point, we will find out whether the rest of the money is to be spent on new jobs. If original news is to be funded to that extent and funding for the BBC opt-outs is to be taken in, we must ask where the rest of the funds will come from.

Comparing the funding for the new channel with the funding for BBC 4 is fair enough. BBC 4 is one of my favourite channels on the BBC, but it relies on quite a lot of archive material from one of the best archives in the world. We need to keep a watching eye on the spend for new creative programmes such as drama programmes, which are very expensive to produce.

I welcome the new channel, but it is not just the SNP who are making the point about funding. The creative industries themselves are making it. I will read out a bit of feedback that the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee got from an independent producer who has been campaigning for an increase in spend from the licence fee, because anybody who has been a member of any of the committees that I

have mentioned would recognise that the question of the amount of licence fee that we get to spend is of significant concern to the creative industries in Scotland. Following the committee's evidence session last week, the producer wrote:

"It's been a good couple of days; real positive change but also clear sighted, cross party pressure for a better still return on investment. Thank you ... for all that you did today. So many of us are grateful to you for your engagement and the results delivered already. I hope that your Committee can keep the pressure on."

I say to the people who say that it is wrong for us to raise the issue of resources that it is really important that we do so. John McCormick, who is the head of the screen sector leadership group, has also raised the issue of licence fee spend in his report, and he is a former head of BBC Scotland, so it is not just an SNP issue.

I want to finish quickly, by saying that I totally support the BBC's efforts to influence the Westminster Parliament's Digital Economy Bill, which is currently in the House of Lords. The BBC wants to ensure that electronic programme guides give prominence to public service channels. That is supposed to happen just now, but I know through my previous efforts to get prominence for local TV that that does not always work out, in practice. With the new channel coming on stream, it simply cannot be allowed to happen—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close.

Joan McAlpine: It simply cannot be allowed to happen that people find it difficult to find the new channel. It has to be right at the top of the programme guide—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close now, Ms McAlpine.

Joan McAlpine: I support that suggestion. Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. Alex Rowley has four minutes, please.

16:45

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): In closing the debate on behalf of the Labour Party, I say that there has been a really good discussion today.

Jackson Carlaw spoke about John Nicholson's comments when the announcement was made. I was in the unfortunate situation of not having heard the announcement before I heard John Nicholson's comments, and I thought to myself, "What have they announced?" So it was a great surprise to me—and a welcome one—when I actually heard the announcement. Although Mr Nicholson has perhaps been put back in his box,

sadly, the SNP amendment suggests that it is not willing to embrace and welcome the opportunity.

I note that Patrick Harvie said that he would not, even if he were to get his wish for an independent Scotland, want to break up the BBC. He was right to say that: unfortunately, I do not think that the SNP is willing to come to that point.

Rona Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Rowley: I have only four minutes. I am sorry.

The SNP's position is disappointing, but we need to look at where the opportunity is and how we can get the maximum benefits for Scotland, right across the creative industries, from the announcement. That will be the important point as we go forward.

Joan McAlpine made the point that it is right to continue to argue for resources. Similarly, Rona Mackay talked about the licence fee. I agree that we should continue to make the case for resources. I only wish that Joan McAlpine and others would not attack the Labour Party when we keep making the case for local government resources that are being cut time and again.

I agree that, when the new channel is up and running, and if it needs more resources, we as a Parliament should be more than willing to make the case for resources. As Lewis Macdonald said, the 80 new journalist posts are very welcome for Scotland. That is a good thing. At a time when media empires such as the Murdoch empire are trying to go for world domination, if we did not have the BBC, we would have to create it, in order to ensure unbiased reporting around the world. Therefore, it is a good thing that we are going to get those journalists.

In moving on from the idea of the Scottish six, we will get an even better opportunity for Scotland than there would have been from a Scottish six. Therefore it is not just about moving on; it is about saying that there is a real opportunity that we must now embrace. We should also be looking at digital and other areas.

In response to the points that Jackson Carlaw made about studio capacity and so on, the cabinet secretary ran very quickly through a whole range of things that are happening. I will take the time to read it later. I could not quite follow her at the speed that she went at, but it sounded as though a lot of things are happening.

In summing up, the important thing to ask is where the overall strategy in Scotland is. In the summer, I was in Derry, in Northern Ireland, and I went along to the cinema and watched "Bobby Sands: 66 Days", which is a very good film documentary. At the end, it said that it had been

produced by BBC Northern Ireland. Just a few months ago, in Scotland, we had shown on the BBC the independent production "The Council", which highlighted what it is like every day for people who work in local authorities and deliver important services. So, I agree that we can produce programmes in Scotland and create opportunities in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, Mr Rowley.

Alex Rowley: I hope that the Government will grab this opportunity to invest and to put in place a strategy to make the best of it.

16:49

Fiona Hyslop: I am glad that we are seeing changes from the BBC and I am glad that we have had the opportunity to debate them so soon after the announcement. I thank Jackson Carlaw for bringing the debate in that spirit.

Years of hard work, debate and discussion publicly and internally in the BBC have brought us to this moment. As Rona Mackay said, there is now a tangible opportunity for the BBC in Scotland to deliver more and to deliver better, as a key driver in the creative growth and sustainability of our cultural sector, for the benefit of our economy, society and democracy. The will of the BBC is needed to deliver that, and the will of our public bodies to deliver together strategically and in partnership is needed to help with that.

In many ways, the BBC is playing catch-up. It is notable that STV has already taken the lead by planning an hour-long Scotland at 7, which will be an international and domestic news programme. Reflecting on Kate Forbes's intervention, I point out that in 18 months we will be able to watch news on BBC UK at 6, on STV at 7, on BBC Alba at 8, on BBC Scotland at 9 and on ITN at 10.

Jackson Carlaw: As the cabinet secretary knows, the crucial difference is that the BBC programme will be networked across the whole of Scotland. The STV programme will be available only on Freeview in the cities where STV has achieved a city contract. The STV's news programme will not be nationally networked, but the BBC's will be.

Fiona Hyslop: In terms of content, of what we can deliver and of journalistic standards and opportunities to reflect the news to Scotland through a Scottish lens, STV is to be congratulated for what it is doing.

Some of the important themes in the debate have been about the importance of public service broadcasting, which a number of members raised, and its quality. The editorial independence that Tavish Scott and Lewis Macdonald mentioned is

absolutely critical, which is why we refer to it in our amendment.

The point about EPG that was made echoed Jackson Carlaw's point: if we want quality news—or, indeed, quality drama or other broadcasting content—it has to be accessible. It is important that we take that forward in our on-going scrutiny of what will be involved.

In the debate, we have not had much time to think about commissioning, which was a big issue for this Parliament's committees in previous sessions. The additional £20 million-worth of network commissioning for Scotland is welcome, but we have yet to pin down what it means, as Tony Hall acknowledged. When I spoke to him, he also acknowledged the fact that, with the new channel, the spend in Scotland of the Scottish licence fee will be closer to 68 per cent. I say that in response to what Rachael Hamilton said.

We have not talked about radio. There is an opportunity for two stations, which we have called for: one for speech and one for music. They would be welcomed.

On Lewis Macdonald's point about BBC Alba, I say that we still have a journey to go on and we still need details following last week's announcement, but we should press for 10 hours of original production. That will be very important. The funding that is coming from the BBC to cover the £1.2 million-worth of Gaelic programmes that have previously been funded by BBC Alba is also very welcome.

We have much to look forward to. There are great expectations of the channel and of the wider sector. The role of the independent production sector has been scrutinised by Parliament. We have opportunities with the channel and with new commissioning.

Members should remember the skills that we have; we have great talent in Scotland. The fact that we will have 80 new journalist jobs is very much to be welcomed. In terms of attracting and being able to sustain film and high-end television production, it is the skills of our talented crew that bring people here. In all the discussions that I have had with the BBC, I have impressed on it the fact that, as part of its strategic role, it has a responsibility not just to use existing talent but to grow and develop our creative industries in partnership with them.

I have just received the screen sector leadership group's report. I recommend it to members who have not read it—especially Alex Rowley, who will find it very interesting, in particular in relation to film strategy. We will respond to it more fully in due course. The report has been produced by well-respected leaders in the industry, and it provides a considered direction for all our

agencies and the industry to follow. We ask the BBC to follow its recommendations, as well.

The opportunities for the creative industries and the screen sector are strong. Together, the public sector and private industry interests can realise the ambitions of our sectors, precisely as Patrick Harvie set out—in a way that helps us to realise our full potential as a free nation. I urge members to act as they have done—collectively and consensually. I hope that they can support our amendment, so that we on all sides of the chamber can take forward the spirit today's debate.

16:54

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):

Although it is not current, I ought to declare an interest for the purposes of today's debate, in that I worked for more than a decade in the television industry at the BBC and in the independent production sector.

When one thinks of culture, perhaps nothing is more ingrained in our country's fabric than the BBC. It is not just a landmark institution, nor is it just an iconic brand. Those three squares represent a world-renowned source of news. It is an entertainer, an informer and a producer. The BBC brings us everything from the Olympics to Wimbledon, from angling to "The Archers", and from Elgar to Eurovision.

Its evolution has seen it grow from the early days of analogue black and white to the digital transformation that today sees 290 million requests a month to the iPlayer and 18.3 million downloads of stories from the CBeebies Storytime app. That evolution is how the BBC has survived many decades of increased commercial competition, and we are now in the latest chapter of its evolution, which means a brand-new, multi-platform, peak-time, dedicated Scottish TV channel.

I would expect a tailor-made BBC channel for Scotland to be unequivocally and warmly welcomed by all in the chamber, and I am pleased that there have been some positive contributions today. However, for some, more is never enough. I will address some of the critique later, but I will first focus on some of the positives.

The 80 new jobs that the new channel will create were welcomed by a number of members, including Rona Mackay and Stuart McMillan, although they highlighted that the posts should be spread across Scotland. That is a fair point. My colleague Rachael Hamilton asked how the new roles will build on the existing BBC Scotland apprenticeship programme and link with the BBC's UK-wide journalism trainee scheme. I am sure that the BBC will reflect on those issues.

The cabinet secretary said that the Scottish nine must deliver, and I agree. The problem that we have with the Government's amendment is that it pretty much removes from our motion any reference to the UK.

Lewis Macdonald made the valid point that we should judge the new channel on its merits and not on the wider constitutional debate or on old arguments about the BBC. We are happy to support his amendment and that sentiment.

Neil Findlay made a curious point about the privatisation of the BBC, but failed to mention that it was a renewed BBC charter under a Conservative Government that enshrined a publicly funded public broadcasting service through the licence fee model.

Patrick Harvie showed renewed enthusiasm for the BBC, but he, too, made a curious point. His was about retaining the BBC in a hypothetical independent Scotland, although he completely missed the point about how it would be funded.

Stuart McMillan made some interesting points about the career opportunities that the new channel might create. I was one of those people who headed to London for a career in TV because there were no such opportunities in Scotland at the time.

Stuart McMillan: Mr Greene felt that he had to go because of a lack of opportunities in Scotland. My point is that it will be good that people feel that they want to stay here because of the increased opportunities in Scotland.

Jamie Greene: There is nothing there that I would disagree with. I thank the member for making that point.

Some really good points were made about how the BBC should deliver on the promise that it made last week, and I have no doubt that the Parliament will hold the BBC to account. However, there are some logistical issues to resolve, such as the matter of PSB prominence in the EPG, which can only really be achieved through Ofcom regulation and is already causing the owners of various TV platforms to twitch nervously.

Oliver Mundell highlighted that members who raised the parochial argument about the portion of licence fee money that is raised in Scotland versus what is spent in Scotland are missing the point entirely. The BBC raises £320 million in Scotland through the licence fee, but a Scottish viewer or listener has access to more than £3.5 billion-worth of BBC infrastructure and content, including £2.2 billion-worth on TV and £600 million-worth on radio, online content and so on—I could go on. In fact, 86 per cent of all the content that is consumed in Scotland is UK-wide network content because that is what consumers want.

I know that this will be hard for some in the chamber to believe, but most people at home right now in Scotland are watching not our proceedings but "Flog It!" on BBC One. Members might be pleased to know that, at 5.15, "Pointless" is coming on—and no, that is not another Government debate on Brexit.

The critics asked the BBC to respond to the needs and demands of a modern, devolved Scotland. It responded. They asked for a Scottish six and they got a Scottish channel. They asked for an hour of news and they got 1,825 hours of content. They asked for more money for BBC Alba and they got a 20 per cent increase in its funding. They asked for more money for content and another £20 million is being added for Scottish content. The reality is that, as a family of nations, we collectively share resources and talent, and consumers across the UK benefit from that.

In closing, I ask the chamber to collectively and unanimously welcome the news of a new BBC channel and support our motion.

Business Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-04327, 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 7 March 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Debate: International Women's Day
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 8 March 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions Education and Skills
followed by Scottish Labour Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 9 March 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.45 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2017
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Biodiversity
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 14 March 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

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

Wednesday 15 March 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions Health and Sport
Followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 March 2017

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

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S5M-04328 and S5M-04329, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Sale of Tobacco (Registration of Moveable Structures and Fixed Penalty Notices) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 (Independent Clinic) Amendment Order 2017 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-04286.1, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04286, in the name of Liz Smith, on the abolition of the Scottish funding council board, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-04286, in the name of Liz Smith, on the abolition of the Scottish funding council board, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)

Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the key role and legal status of the current Scottish Funding Council board with regard to the financial and strategic management of Scotland's colleges and universities; is deeply concerned by the Scottish Government's proposals to abolish the board, given the limited evidence and consultation on this proposal; notes the proposals in *The Crerar Review*, which recommend that the Scottish Government should retain the current board; demands that the Scottish Funding Council retains its important functions beyond enterprise and skills, and therefore believes that the Scottish Funding Council must not just be a "delivery board" but also have the powers to act on its own initiative and to challenge government as well as to challenge further and higher education institutions.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-04287.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04287, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on the new BBC Scotland digital channel, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 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)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)

Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 73, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-04287.4, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04287, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on the new BBC Scotland digital channel, as amended, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-04287, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on the new BBC Scotland digital channel, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the decision of the Director-General of the BBC, Lord Hall, to create a new BBC Scotland TV channel from Autumn 2018, to invest in 80 new journalist posts and to increase funding for BBC Alba; believes that the BBC must have editorial and commissioning independence to determine its output; notes that the schedule will include an international news hour at its core, together with three hours of comedy, drama and documentary programming; understands that 60% of the schedule will be new commissioning; calls on the BBC to ensure that the new channel is adequately resourced and reflects the traditions and culture of all regions in Scotland; believes that the Scottish Ministers should reinvigorate the structural relationships between Scottish Enterprise, Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government to promote opportunities for the creative arts in film and television generally and the independent sector in particular; considers that there is a need to act to ensure that, in light

of the burgeoning growth in the film and digital television sector and the new studio capacity being developed elsewhere in the UK, new studio capacity is urgently identified and developed in Scotland; welcomes the announcement by the BBC that the creation of a new channel in Scotland will lead to an additional 80 journalist posts, as well as other additional staff; calls for the new investment and jobs in news, radio, TV factual and online services to be distributed equitably across Scotland, reflecting the skills and expertise at existing production centres and ensuring that the country is better reflected to itself and to the wider world; welcomes additional funding for BBC Alba, and calls for appropriate prominence to be given to public service broadcasters, such as BBC Alba and the new BBC Scotland, in electronic programme guides across all providers.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-04328, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Sale of Tobacco (Registration of Moveable Structures and Fixed Penalty Notices) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-04329, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 (Independent Clinic) Amendment Order 2017 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will take a few moments for members to change seats before we move to members' business.

Safe Drive, Stay Alive Project

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I remind members that they do not cross the floor of the chamber when the Parliament is still in session. The gentleman concerned has left, but I will remind him. If anybody had an idea to copy him, they need not bother.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-04086, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on the—

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) *rose—*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are too keen, Mr Stewart—I could not resist that. You are getting your space.

The motion is on the safe drive, stay alive project. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the Safe Drive, Stay Alive project, which has been actively educating teenagers and young adults on the seriousness of complacency, recklessness or dangerous activity behind the wheel; understands that, during the last 11 years, around 40,000 young people from across Forth Valley have attended these events, which are specially crafted and engineered to contribute towards a real reduction in the number of youngsters killed or who have had life-changing injuries in road traffic accidents in the area; believes that, despite these tremendous successes, the project, which has been in Scotland since 2006 and is diligently organised by the Central Safe Drive Group, remains under threat due to ongoing funding issues; notes that all three Central Scotland councils previously funded the show, which it understands costs around £23,000 to put on, however this funding is no longer available due to cuts to local government budgets, with the project experiencing great difficulty in raising funds for 2018; further notes that the Safe Drive, Stay Alive roadshows present to their mainly young audiences the harrowing reality of dangerous driving and the lasting impact that it can have on people, their families and communities; welcomes that members of the emergency services give presentations in their own time based on their personal experiences, and that some of those who have had their lives completely changed after being involved in road accidents also come forward and share their experiences and how they are dealing with debilitating injuries from day to day; understands that the Central Safe Drive Group says that in the years that the project has been running, road deaths in the 16 to 25 age group dropped from an average of 11 between 2006 and 2008 to an astonishing zero count during 2014-15; considers that it is important to maintain zero deaths, and notes the view that active assistance is necessary in any way possible to help sustain the survival of what it sees as this excellent project into the future.

17:07

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity to

lead this members' business debate and extremely grateful for the cross-party support that my motion on the safe drive, stay alive project has received. The debate gives us the opportunity to acknowledge the wonderful work that has taken place and to consider the challenges that the project faces.

I am delighted that some of the people who are involved with the project have been able to join us in the public gallery. I acknowledge the attendance of Melanie Mitchell, who is the local community champion for Tesco in Alloa, and Alan Faulds, who is the local area liaison officer for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. In addition, I thank in particular my Mid Scotland and Fife colleagues Mark Ruskell and Alex Rowley; the MSP for Clackmannanshire and Dunblane, Keith Brown; and Iain Smith from the *Alloa & Hillfoots Advertiser*. They have all been supportive, have actively campaigned on the project and have been involved in a petition for the cause.

Like its counterparts throughout Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, the safe drive, stay alive project in Mid Scotland and Fife aims to educate teenagers and young adults about the potential severity of the consequences of risky, reckless or dangerous driving. It has attracted around 40,000 young people in the past 11 years.

I first attended one of the project's events in Forfar when I was a member of the Tayside joint police board. When I left the event, I felt in shock. It was a harrowing experience and it provided a punchy, hard-hitting answer to the issue. The hard-hitting nature of the project is what makes it so effective. Each event has contributions from many people who have been affected by a car accident. Some, such as those who work for the emergency services, have to deal with the implications of dangerous driving too often, and we should all commend and be grateful for their life-saving work.

How individuals who have been involved in an accident or who have lost someone close to them have dealt with their situation is very much played out on stage. A car accident can be life changing for someone and can turn their world upside down. The inclusion of real people who recount real experiences of severe injury or loss makes the young people who attend those events think about the potential consequences of their reckless driving.

The safe drive, stay alive project has, since its introduction in Scotland in 2006, been a real success. From 2006 to 2008, an average of 11 people between the ages of 16 and 25 died in driving accidents. In 2014-15, the figure had dropped staggeringly to zero—none, nil. That is an outstanding achievement, and it highlights the

importance of ensuring that young people take away the right messages about driving safely.

We recognise that organising an event of this nature costs money. The regional campaign has a budget of about £23,000 to put on the event and, in the past, it has received funding from the three local authorities in the former Central Scotland regional council area. That funding is now in jeopardy, and there have been some discussions about how we progress the campaign at a time when councils are looking at their budgets and reducing some of their input.

This is not the first time that the future of the safe drive, stay alive project has been brought into doubt. I had some experience of that back in Perth and Kinross, when we found that the campaign was struggling to find funds and to hold events, and simply to survive. As a member of the local community safety committee and the community planning partnership, I was instrumental in helping the campaign to find an alternative venue that was less expensive to ensure that we could continue our involvement with the project.

I recently found out that Stirling Council is very supportive of the project and will continue to provide funding. I welcome that, as the council is putting its money where its mouth is. At a budget meeting in Falkirk last week, councillors rubber-stamped costs towards running a week-long road safety awareness campaign. That council has always valued the event as a tangible way of showing young people the dangers that they face and which can affect their community. However, there have been some issues with Clackmannanshire Council, which has had a few of its own troubles in recent times. We have to keep a watchful eye on what is happening in that council area, because we need to ensure that it fits in and completes the jigsaw.

I hope that the debate highlights the importance of this project in the lives of our young people. It is essential that we all work together across the chamber to ensure that this important project, and the opportunities that it offers to young people, will continue across the region that I represent and throughout Scotland. We must do all that we can to maintain, sustain and retain this invaluable lesson in road safety.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to all those who have attended, supported, participated in and funded this life-saving project. To all the families who have suffered the loss of a loved one or whose loved one has suffered life-changing injuries, I offer my heartfelt condolences.

Working together, we can achieve much more, and I look forward to seeing this outstanding project continue in the years to come.

17:13

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I thank Alexander Stewart for securing the debate, which is aimed at preserving the important and effective safe drive, stay alive educational programme. I want to take a few minutes to tell members about this initiative, which is essential to Fife's efforts to reduce traffic-related fatalities and to educate young people about road safety in my constituency of Kirkcaldy. The safe drive, stay alive project is an annual community roadshow that delivers thought-provoking messages to thousands of young drivers by demonstrating in realistic terms the lethal consequences should they fail to understand and accept their responsibilities when getting behind the wheel.

In my constituency, the show runs for one week annually in late autumn at the Rothes halls theatre. However, its impact spans far beyond that of the average theatre performance. In the show, members of emergency services share stories of horrific traffic accidents and suggest how they might have been prevented. Victims of debilitating road-related injuries speak about how their lives changed in an instance, after just a few moments of carelessness. Bereaved individuals share their loss and implore students to think about their actions behind the wheel. Young people are provided with a framework for safe driving, and experts share tips about how to be aware on the road.

Road safety awareness can be a tricky subject to navigate in an educational setting. Safe drive, stay alive does a tremendous job of balancing the tragic nature of road-related collisions with what can be done to prevent them. After seeing the physical and emotional damage that is done by road-related collisions, students depart from the event understanding the harrowing effects of dangerous driving and committed to preventing reckless driving.

The central safe drive team marked its 10th year and 100th show in Stirling this month. Since the show was founded by central safe drive, more than 40,000 school pupils from across Forth valley have seen it. The results speak for themselves. The expertly crafted event has contributed to a decrease of 43 per cent in Fife's road casualties since 2006. In 2006, there were 1,056 road-related injuries; in 2012, there were 549. In the same time period, there has been a 65 per cent decrease in fatalities: in 2006 there were 20, and in 2012 there were seven. That downward trend in fatalities and accidents has continued across Fife up until 2015.

Aside from the reduction in the number of bereaved and grieving families, the reduction in the number of road collision injuries and deaths has resulted in a lower demand for the emergency services and for money spent dealing with a road

traffic casualty or fatality. Safe drive, stay alive has contributed to financial savings in the region of £45 million.

For its tangible impact and extraordinary production, the safe drive, stay alive project won the most effective road safety, traffic management and enforcement project at the 2012 Scottish transport awards. Last year saw safe drive, stay alive central win a prestigious emergency services special award from Central FM for its contribution to reducing the number of road casualties among 16 to 25-year-olds. The show has been adapted by other community safety partnerships throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom. It is supported overwhelmingly by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Extremely robust external evaluations of safe drive, stay alive were undertaken in 2011 and 2012 by NHS Fife, and those evaluations identified an immediate change in the attitudes of attendees to safe driving. The 2011 evaluation, which was completed by 538 attendees, demonstrated a decrease in speeding and an increase in seat-belt use, with almost 85 per cent reporting that they always wear a seat belt.

This amazing approach to road safety education—an accessible and specially engineered programme that has proved effective in its aim of reducing traffic-related injury and death—will be eliminated without some kind of aid. A petition calling for the programme's continuation is circulating in Central Scotland and has many signatures, including those of many members of the Scottish Parliament from many different parties. If the programme is not supported, thousands of pupils will lose the opportunity to learn vital road safety lessons, and our roads will suffer.

I acknowledge and praise the work that safe drive, stay alive has done in my constituency and beyond. It is imperative that we maintain the project for its potential to make a difference in my constituency and across wider Scotland. It is up to us to ensure that safe drive, stay alive gets the resources that it needs to continue serving our constituencies.

In conclusion, Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was just thinking that. You never look up, you never look at the clock.

David Torrance: I thank Alexander Stewart once again for securing this debate today, and I thank all who have supported the motion and continue to support the amazing work of safe drive, stay alive.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not the way to do it, because I will stop you anyway, even if you do not look up.

17:18

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Alexander Stewart on securing the debate. I am particularly pleased to speak in this debate, because just more than 31 years ago, at around 9.30 in the evening, I was, following a terrible head-on car accident, standing shivering in the icy darkness at the side of the A702 near Biggar with—members do not need the details; they can all see the scar running the full length of my forehead.

Any project that educates any driver, let alone teenagers and young adults, on complacency, recklessness or dangerous activity behind the wheel and, of course, the outcomes and impacts of that behaviour, must be supported.

We have a noticeable and persistent problem of young drivers being involved in a high proportion of accidents on our roads. Road Safety Scotland statistics show that, despite their accounting for only 10 per cent of licence holders, young drivers are involved in more than 20 per cent of accidents. In 2015, those accidents included 162 deaths, 1,500 serious injuries and more than 10,000 casualties.

Members will, by now, expect me to talk about North East Scotland. I am sad to say that in this debate I need to do so more than ever, because according to last year's "Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2015: A National Statistics Publication", the roads in the north-east were the most dangerous in Scotland.

The A956 in Aberdeen is ranked as Britain's fourth most hazardous road. Aberdeenshire and Moray had 429 reported injuries, accidents and casualties, of which 189 casualties were deemed to have been "serious". Studies have shown that there were more fatal accidents in Aberdeenshire in 2015 than there were anywhere else in Scotland. That is terrifying, because behind every statistic are real people, real families and real lives.

We are faced with a monumental challenge to reduce casualties and to encourage sensible road behaviour. The solution must be to educate our younger generations to use our roads more safely. Projects such as safe drive, stay alive are vital means by which to achieve that. That project is a collaboration across Scotland among local authorities, the emergency services and businesses, that targets younger generations in order to underline to them the consequences of reckless driving. The events deliver hard-hitting truths and first-hand accounts from emergency

services workers, survivors and relatives of people who have been involved in road accidents. They communicate the traumatic and harrowing aftermath that such accidents cause families, friends and Scottish society as a whole. I must flag up that members of our hard-pressed emergency services give those presentations in their own time, based on their personal experiences.

Does safe drive, stay alive deliver a solution? The fact that there have been 40,000 attendees in 11 years suggests that it does. As is highlighted in the motion and by Alexander Stewart,

"road deaths in the 16 to 25 age group dropped from an average of 11 between 2006 and 2008 to ... zero ... during 2014-15".

I responded to my own crash by passing the Institute of Advanced Motorists—now IAM Roadsmart—test when I was 18, to ensure that I was driving as safely and responsibly as possible. However, that option is not open or attractive to everyone. The safe drive, stay alive project—and others like it—potentially is. We must continue to support such projects.

Last year, the Minister for Transport and the Islands launched his "Strategic Road Safety Plan 2016", in which he emphasised the Scottish Government's conviction that

"one life lost on Scotland's roads is one too many"

and further expressed the view that the "ultimate future" is

"a future where no one is killed"

on our roads. I agree.

Only this morning, I was discussing with the Association of British Insurers its support for programmes that support young driver safety. The safe drive, stay alive project is under threat from cuts to local Government budgets. As is highlighted in the motion, the project experienced

"great difficulty in raising funds for 2018".

It appears that it requires a mere £23,000 to keep going. I very much hope that Mackay's magic money tree that we heard so much about last week might bear just one more gift this year.

17:23

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I, too, thank Alexander Stewart for securing the debate. Mark Ruskell and I also lodged similar motions. We did so because we both support the fantastic work and the achievements of the central safe drive group and, specifically, the safe drive, stay alive road show.

I appreciate the time that is given by staff from Police Scotland, the Scottish Ambulance Service, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the

national health service, and all the volunteers who contribute to the campaign and the events. They aim to inform and educate young people across the Forth valley and, in so doing, to reduce the number of road traffic accidents involving young people and ensure that fewer young people are killed or left with life-changing injuries.

I had the absolute privilege of attending a safe drive, stay alive event in February at the MacRobert arts centre in Stirling. The event was planned and delivered with the intention of achieving maximum engagement from the young people in the audience. Although as a councillor I had been involved in getting the funding for the safe drive, stay alive campaign in Fife, I had never attended such an event before. It started with a disc jockey, a lot of music, a big fireman bouncing up and down on the stage and lots of people dancing—including, eventually, me, as part of the audience. There was a really good feel to the event, and I could see why it was so attractive to young people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Is there any footage of this?

Alex Rowley: I hope not. [*Laughter.*] It was a great event—it was lively and really good. However, when we sat down and the show was about to begin, a young girl sitting next to me passed me a box of handkerchiefs. I thought, “Right—okay”, took a hankie out and passed the box along. I was then caught up in the very powerful delivery of a hard-hitting message. At times, the auditorium was completely silent. People could not fail to have been moved by the stories that were being told: for example, the real-life contributions from survivors Jennifer Howie and David Galloway, who, as young people, experienced life-changing injuries, and from members of families who, tragically, had lost loved ones and were there to tell the story. Each of those people had to come to terms with the shocking and cruel reality that too often follows a few moments of carelessness either behind the wheel or as a passenger in a car.

Evidence suggests that the central safe drive group’s approach is having a real impact. As Alexander Stewart said, over the past 11 years, 40,000 young people have attended annual events. In the years that the project has been running, road deaths in the 16 to 25 age group have dropped from an average of 11 between 2006 and 2008 to an astonishing zero count in 2014-15. That is a fantastic achievement, so we need to recognise all the hard work that the volunteers have put in.

Concern has been expressed about funding. I have written to the three councils in the area, all of which have—I have to say—come back to me with very positive responses, stating their commitment

to future funding. That is important. I have also written to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, and I hope to hear back from them. After all, we need co-ordination to ensure that the hard-working group is not having to run around trying to get funding. I understand that the last bit of funding was eventually put in place in the form of a grant from an organisation in England.

Once again, I thank everyone who is involved in the project. There seems to be a commitment from the local authorities: if we can get a similar commitment from the others whom I have mentioned, we can work through the safety partnership to highlight the problems. We can all work together on that.

In any case, we need to secure funding for what is an amazing show. I congratulate everyone who is involved in it.

17:27

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): First, I declare an interest as a councillor in Stirling.

I thank Alexander Stewart for lodging the motion for debate. It was important for at least one of the three motions on safe drive, stay alive to be debated, and I appreciate the efforts that the member has made in securing this time. I also thank the families who have contributed to the programme over the many years for which it has been running, and the volunteers, particularly from the emergency services, who have contributed to the events and—as I understand it—the fundraising, too. Their efforts have been hugely important.

I was not able to attend this year’s event, but I attended what I think was the first event a decade ago. I will certainly never forget how moving the testimonies were. The energy and buzz of the first part of the event captured the young people’s attention—although I do not think that we had a raving Alex Rowley at it—but when it came to exploring the real impact of road accidents, there were deeply thoughtful faces and, in some cases, tears.

The event reminded me of two experiences that I had when I was at school. The first was the time when a classmate of mine at primary school was killed while out on his bike one evening, and I remember the sense of sheer disbelief and grief that we all felt the next day. There was also the time in high school when a group of local teenagers died in a tragic high-speed crash on the streets of Edinburgh. The fact that those teenagers, who had so much to look forward to, had lost their lives so tragically and carelessly on

our roads sent shock waves across the city at the time.

I know that more than 40,000 young people, who have come from every school in Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling, have attended the central safe drive group's safe drive, stay alive events over the past 10 years. Recently, I was in Alloa discussing the funding issue on the street and collecting signatures for the *Alloa Advertiser* petition and I was really pleased to meet people who still strongly remembered safe drive, stay alive from their school days and the contribution that it made to their awareness of road safety. They had seen just a tiny glimpse of the pain and anguish that road accidents cause, but that had been enough to make them think about not just the tragic consequences, but how to take better care of their own lives and the lives of those around them by driving responsibly.

Mentioning money in such a debate is awkward, because a life is invaluable, but the continuation of the ground-breaking approach comes down to the need for investment and the realisation that, alongside the incalculable tragedy of every fatal road accident, there is a cost to wider society that is estimated at around £1.2 million. The Christie commission urged us all to spend on preventative action, and I can think of no better example of that approach than spending on safe drive, stay alive. We are not talking about large amounts of money—we are talking about tens of thousands of pounds rather than hundreds of thousands of pounds—but small cuts to services that are delivered by external partners can often pass through unscrutinised by councils.

There is no single action that we can take to make our streets safer. Members might be aware that I intend to consult on a member's bill to change the default restricted road speed limit from 30mph to 20mph. Clackmannanshire Council has already largely delivered that although, sadly, Falkirk Council and Stirling Council have not. It is clear that, through education and regulation working together, we can make our streets safer and reduce the risk of accidents and collisions.

As Alexander Stewart has already outlined, it is heartening that, in 2014-15, there were no road deaths of young people aged between 16 and 25 in Clackmannanshire. We need to ensure that that figure stays at zero.

Safe drive, stay alive is an exemplar project that deserves to be built on and given longer-term funding security. I hope that all the councils and other agencies will work together to deliver that funding.

17:32

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): I thank my colleague Alexander Stewart not only for bringing this debate to the chamber, but for the work that he has been doing along with other colleagues to encourage local authority funding for the safe drive, stay alive project.

The campaign employs emotive and hard-hitting techniques that are designed to make young people sit up and take notice of the dangers of reckless and dangerous driving. It ensures that young people can listen to those who have had to go through the ordeal of a serious road accident, whether they are emergency workers—such as the attending paramedic or the nurse who treated the victims of a crash—who talk about the sacrifices that they make, or the survivors of accidents, or the surviving relatives of those who lost their lives.

The streets ahead Edinburgh young drivers event, which is a similar event, has been running for six years. It employs similar tactics, including various interactive tools, to get messages across to young drivers in innovative ways. I am pleased that preparations for this year's event are now in full swing.

I pay tribute to all the people who have been involved in setting up those campaigns, as well as to those who attend them to convey their experiences, to whom I have referred. We owe it to those people to say thank you to them, but we owe them not just that: we should also say "Enough is enough." We must strive for a day when road accidents no longer ruin the lives of so many people.

The litmus test of a campaign that is designed to change behaviour or to mould behaviour before a young driver takes to the wheel for the first time is: does it work? In that regard, it seems that shock and awe works. The figures that have already been referred to and are pointed to in the motion relating to the success of the safe drive, stay alive campaign since it was introduced in Scotland are quite remarkable. Other members have already referred to them, so I will not repeat them. However, the greatest mistake would be to rest on our laurels, as a split-second diversion of attention can have far-reaching and disastrous consequences. That is the very nature of a road traffic accident. Likewise, with the campaign: it would be as grave a mistake to take our eye off the campaign as it would be to take our eye of the road.

It is my understanding that funding was initially cut for the safe drive, stay alive campaign within Forth valley. Indeed, that might still happen in some areas of the region although, as I mentioned earlier, the work of my colleague Alexander

Stewart and others has helped to raise awareness of the need for continued funding. To use the example of my region of Lothian, figures revealed in December that West Lothian fares particularly badly in winter driving conditions. Department for Transport figures tell us that West Lothian is ranked fourth highest of 206 areas for the number of injuries and deaths related to winter conditions. We all know how dangerous country roads can be if care is not taken. I am aware from a recent response to a written question that Transport Scotland is working to try to ensure the safety of trunk roads in West Lothian and is offering safe driving leaflets. That is the very least that can be expected to try to reduce the number of accidents, but it takes more than leaflets to change behaviour, and safe driving campaigns play a vital role.

Until there are no accidents on our roads, there will still be too many. I hope that this debate shows us what can be done through campaigns such as safe drive, stay alive. I thank everyone involved in that campaign and in others around Scotland.

17:36

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I, too, thank Alexander Stewart for lodging the motion for this debate. I note that other members have lodged motions on the safe drive, stay alive events, but it is right that those extremely hard-hitting events, which have such an impact on young people, are highlighted in this way tonight in Parliament.

I have not been to one of the safe drive, stay alive events, but I was first made aware of them some time ago by a friend from Coatbridge who heard about them from a work colleague. As his daughter and her friend were new drivers, he took them to an event in Stirling. As with many young drivers, the girls had an air of confidence on the way there and questioned the need to travel through to Stirling to be informed of stuff that they knew already. However, the journey home was, of course, quite a different matter. Not only were the girls completely stunned and subdued by the impact of the show, but my friend was, too. He felt that he had benefited greatly from being reminded of the necessity for safe driving.

As Alex Rowley said, the events start with a party atmosphere, with the young people being encouraged to dance about to loud music and wave glowsticks in the air. However, at the Stirling event they were soon shocked into complete silence when it was made clear that the number of bright and shiny glowsticks related to the number of young people who had suffered fatal or severe injuries from driving incidents in the local area. In particular, the compelling story that was told by a father about his son's life-changing injuries and

the thought-provoking, realistic video demonstrations were invaluable lessons for the many young people taking part in the event. My friend was so impressed by the event that, two years later, he took his younger daughter and her friend to the safe drive, stay alive event in Stirling after they passed their driving tests.

I have no doubt about the success of the events, which are also held in Aberdeen, Fife and Tayside, as we have heard. The organisers in Tayside firmly believe that since the safe drive, stay alive events started in 2006, they have contributed to the 43 per cent reduction in road accident casualties in the area. Other areas that have the events have also recorded a reduction in traffic incidents. The projects have rightly earned a number of local and UK awards, which demonstrates their effectiveness. However, accident statistics are still worrying. In 2015, there were 2,007 recorded accidents in Scotland involving drivers under the age of 25; sadly, 36 of those were fatal, according to figures from the Scottish Parliament information centre. Like Alexander Stewart, I send condolences to the families who have lost loved ones.

Nowadays, getting a car after they have passed their driving test appears to be a rite of passage for many young people, and it is a practice that is on the increase. Many might see having a car as something of a luxury, but it is often a necessity for young people, especially in more rural areas where they can be let down by poor public transport and therefore need a car to travel to work or for leisure activities or study. Of course, as the amount of traffic increases, so do the risks.

I certainly hope that the safe drive, stay alive events continue in the areas that they currently operate in, but I would like them to be extended to other areas of Scotland. I look forward to hearing the minister's comments on that. I am aware, too, that a different driver safety scheme was announced this week for Ayrshire, and I hope that that project is also successful.

I offer my support and thanks to the community safety groups, the NHS, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, which not only take part and make the events so outstanding, but have to deal with such tragic incidents—sadly—too often. I also thank Alexander Stewart for bringing the debate to the chamber and the other members who have lodged motions on the subject.

17:40

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Mr Stewart on securing this evening's debate, which is on a very important issue, and I commend him for highlighting the

importance of partnership working in this area. The community safety partnerships that have come together involve the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other authorities that are looking to reduce accidents on the roads, and I welcome some of those partners to the public gallery this evening.

I attended a safe drive, stay alive event many years ago—I suspect that the project has moved on from the event that I saw—in Aberdeenshire. It was one of my first exposures to this kind of project work, and I remember the impact that it had on me and how powerful the event was. The evaluation that has taken place shows how good the project is, and it will certainly be valuable as we consider how to take the issues forward.

As convener of the cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness, I work hard with organisations including the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and Brake. We know so much about the dangers for young people and we also have some information about why the statistics are so bad. We know that young drivers are 10 times more likely to be involved in an accident and that they are more at risk because of the combination of youth and inexperience. Their inexperience means that they are less likely to spot hazards, which means that they are more at risk of having an accident. The ability to recognise hazards can come only from experience of driving. The other factors include overconfidence, which has already been mentioned this evening. Poor assessment of hazards can make young people more likely to overtake or to take a bend too fast.

The prevalence of risk taking is one of the areas that I find most fascinating in the accident prevention arena. We know that brains do not mature until people are well into their 20s, and research shows that risk-taking behaviour occurs because the frontal lobe of the brain has not fully developed. That means that our young people are inherently more at risk, and it is incumbent on us to do everything that we can to make them safer.

I commend some of the other initiatives that are out there. Mark Ruskell mentioned the twenty's plenty campaign, which has greatly reduced accidents in my area, North Lanarkshire.

I also commend the Government for taking leadership on the matter. Transport Scotland's vision is:

“A steady reduction in the numbers of those killed and those seriously injured, with the ultimate vision of a future where no one is killed on Scotland's roads and the injury rate is much reduced.”

I think that we would all sign up to that.

I am glad that the mid-term review of the road safety framework, which was published in 2016,

focuses particularly on young drivers aged 17 to 25.

I also commend to everyone in the chamber some of the work that has been done by Dr Sarah Jones of Cardiff University, who presented to the CPG on accident prevention and safety awareness on graduated licences. That can be a controversial issue, but she highlighted that exuberance, risk taking, peer pressure and sensation and thrill seeking all contribute to young people being more in danger. She also said that the psychomotor skills, hazard perception, judgment and decision making of young people are known to put them more in danger. I commend her work and ask people to look into the real value of graduated licences.

Once again, I thank the safe drive, stay alive project for teaching our young people life skills.

17:44

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): I thank Alexander Stewart for lodging the motion, and the members who lodged similar motions, and I congratulate them for their cross-party approach to the issue. My experience shows that the more cross-party a campaign is, the more likely it is to succeed. I wish them luck and success.

As Alexander Stewart did, I welcome to the gallery Alan Faulds and Melanie Mitchell, who are involved in the campaign in various ways, and I congratulate the *Alloa Advertiser* for its contribution to this important members' business debate. I read a number of its articles in advance of the debate.

There have been excellent speeches from members from around the chamber. From the Government's perspective, I will reiterate a couple of points. As members have mentioned, we are committed, through “Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2020”, to achieving safer road travel. The framework sets out a very ambitious vision of a time when there are no fatalities on Scotland's roads. Liam Kerr mentioned my statement, and those of previous transport ministers, that one fatality is one too many. It is an ambitious target, but I want to live in a Scotland in which it is realised.

Underpinning the vision are very challenging casualty reduction targets, so I have been pleased to see that, at the 2015 milestone point, we remain on track to achieve the targets. Fatalities were reduced by 42 per cent from the 2004-2008 baseline. However, 168 people were killed on our roads in 2015, so there is no room for complacency or, as Gordon Lindhurst said, for resting on our laurels. I give him the assurance that we are certainly not doing that.

During 2015, my predecessor Derek Mackay instigated a mid-term review of the progress that had been made under the road safety framework and the approach to be taken. The mid-term review identified a pre-driver outcome as a key priority. A pre-driver outcome aims to improve knowledge and instil positive attitudes and safer behaviours in individuals before they start driving.

We know the vital role that prevention can play: the safe drive, stay alive project is one of 12 pre-driver interventions that are currently being run in Scotland that aim to contribute to that outcome. We heard from members from around the chamber about other interventions. Almost every member who has been to a safe drive, stay alive event mentioned the phrase “hard-hitting”; it is very important that the events are powerful. Those hard-hitting and thought-provoking accounts of real-life collisions and their outcomes—Alex Rowley mentioned presentations from people who have sustained life-altering injuries—can, no doubt, have a very positive effect on attitudes, knowledge and skills, and can reduce risk.

I thank all those who have been involved in the safe drive, stay alive project, the details of which we have heard from members. We are committed to using such interventions, which help us to meet the aims of the road safety framework. That said, the image of Alex Rowley dancing has given me second thoughts about the campaign. I say that only in jest.

Partnership working is at the heart of everything that we do as a Government, and it is key to supporting the delivery of the framework targets. I was pleased to hear from Alex Rowley about the correspondence that he has had with local authorities that suggests or alludes to the fact that they are examining their funding commitments to the project, and I have no doubt that the other members who lodged motions have also put pressure on local authorities in that regard. We are all aware of the pressures on Government and on local government; Liam Kerr mentioned Derek Mackay’s infamous magic money tree. I remind Liam Kerr that, due to the recent budget negotiations, there is an additional £160 million going to local authorities. That is £1.4 million for Clackmannanshire Council, £4.5 million for Falkirk Council and £2.8 million for Stirling Council, of un-ring-fenced funds. I am not making that point flippantly; I just want to put it on the record. I understand that local authorities are wrestling with many budgetary pressures.

In October 2015, we commissioned an evaluation of safe drive, stay alive. The review aimed to explore the extent to which that intervention and similar interventions contribute to the specific commitments in our road safety framework. The review was qualitative in nature, and the report concluded that, based on the

perceptions that were expressed in the study, there was a positive impact on attitudes of young people to road safety messages. Therefore, in that sense, the intervention supports the aims of the road safety framework.

However, the report further concluded that, although the interventions ultimately aim to change driver behaviour, the small scale and limited nature of the study that was conducted meant that we need more evaluative evidence to explore the long-term behavioural changes that are required in driving practices in order for us to achieve the framework targets. We are currently gathering further evidence on the effectiveness of pre-driver interventions. That work is focusing not just on safe drive, stay alive but on the broad spectrum of interventions. We have commissioned—we will work closely with it—the Transport Research Laboratory to do a project that seeks to get a better understanding of pre-driver interventions. Safe drive, stay alive will be part of that. The report is due in spring, so I will not pre-empt it. Members will, no doubt, be interested in it.

We are never complacent about road safety and we have a raft of measures on it. Because of the restrictions on time, I will not go through them all, but members will be aware that we have lowered drink-drive limits and introduced guidance on 20mph speed limits. I have met Mark Ruskell to discuss the bill that he intends to introduce on that. The Government and I are keeping an open mind on it and we will look at the matter with great interest. We also have high-profile publicity campaigns and ambitious engineering initiatives, including those on the A9.

For many years, the Scottish Government has been pressing the UK Government to introduce a graduated driver licence scheme. I think that Liam Kerr mentioned that in relation to his meeting with the Association of British Insurers. Clare Adamson and one or two other members also mentioned the issue. The Scottish Government has been pressing the UK Government to introduce that or to devolve the powers to us to do so. It is disappointing that we have not seen any movement on that, but I will keep making the request. It seems as though that message has cross-party support, to an extent.

We will continue to work closely with local authorities and our road safety partners to improve safety on our roads and to equip young people to be safe and responsible drivers for the future. We hope that that will allow us to get to the point at which there are no fatalities on our roads. I thank Alexander Stewart and the other members who have participated in this excellent debate.

Meeting closed at 17:52.

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