



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Tuesday 14 March 2017**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 14 March 2017*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon. Our first item of business today is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is the Rev Jenny M Adams, minister of Duffus, Spynie and Hopeman church in Moray.

**The Rev Jenny M Adams (Minister of Duffus, Spynie and Hopeman Church, Moray):** Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I am a parish minister in a beautiful slice of Moray. There is variety in landscape, from beaches through farmland to forestry, with a neighbouring Royal Air Force base and a major town. There is diversity in the communities of fishing and farming, schools and armed forces, commuters and retirees. I enjoy great variety and diversity in my work, as do most ministers and as do you, as members of the Scottish Parliament and ministers. Most days, I deal with life and worship in the communities I serve, where I am welcomed into people's lives, particularly at beginnings and endings. I have responsibilities in presbytery, playing my part in governance and mutual support. There is national work in the Church of Scotland's panel on review and reform, trying to find out what God is doing in Scotland and join in.

So there is great variety and diversity of people, contexts and timescales, and a fair number of meetings. That may sound familiar, and you have a lot more folk to worry about. The variety and diversity are great. It is a privilege to be invited into people's lives and to help when we can, but there are challenges of time and priorities. Who can we give time to in a full diary? How do we balance looking to the future with getting through now? We need time with friends and family, and when do we enjoy fullness of life for body, mind and spirit?

Sometimes, it can be helpful to reflect on why we are doing what we are doing. I would talk of that as calling, although you could think of it as motivation—you may or may not give God a place in your vocation. However, I am guessing that none of you went into politics for convenient working hours and universal approval and that you did so to make a difference locally, nationally and globally.

When we do what we are drawn to do, serving those who we are called to serve and sharing our lives with those we are given to live and work with, even the difficult days can bring fulfilment. It does not mean that we do not do other duties, too, and it certainly includes life beyond work, but reconnecting with why can guide how we deal with the great variety and diversity of people and tasks that life and work bring us.

May your calling bring you fulfilment and make Scotland a better place for all.

## Topical Question Time

14:03

### Article 50

**1. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding triggering article 50. (S5T-00444)

**The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe (Michael Russell):** The Scottish Government has been pressing the UK Government since December last year to give serious consideration to the proposals that are outlined in "Scotland's Place in Europe" through the joint ministerial committee framework and via bilaterals with the UK Government. Despite a range of meetings and repeated requests for involvement, there has been no formal response to the Scottish Government's proposals; no consultation on the terms of the article 50 notification letter or clarity on the timing of when article 50 will be invoked; and no substantive discussion about what role the Scottish Government might take in the negotiations once article 50 has been triggered.

**Joan McAlpine:** Last July, the Prime Minister came to Scotland and promised that she would not trigger article 50 without first securing a UK-wide approach. In fact, she said:

"I'm willing to listen to options and I've been very clear ... today that I want the Scottish government to be fully engaged in our discussion."

From the minister's first-hand experience of the JMC discussions, can he say to what extent the UK Government has been willing to reach a position that fulfils that promise by the Prime Minister?

**Michael Russell:** Regrettably, I have seen no such willingness. The terms of reference of the joint ministerial committee (European Union negotiations) say that one of the purposes is to

"work collaboratively to ... seek to agree a UK approach to, and objectives for, Article 50 negotiations".

At no time has information been brought to the JMC that would allow us to do so. It is that frustration, among others, that gives the lie to any claim that there has been some attempt to engage. There has certainly been no attempt to do so with the Scottish Government, and I know that that has been the view of ministers of other devolved Administrations, too.

**Joan McAlpine:** Yesterday, the First Minister announced that the people of Scotland will get a choice on their future. They will decide what they

want and will not be told what they are getting by a Tory Government that has one member of Parliament in Scotland. How will the Scottish Government ensure that the will of this Parliament is respected if we seek a section 30 order from the UK Tory Government to give the people of Scotland their right to choose their future in a referendum?

**Michael Russell:** It will be for the Parliament to request a section 30 order and then it will be for the UK Government to respond. If the Parliament expresses that will, I find it difficult to believe that anybody who is a democrat and who believes in democratic decision making would—[*Interruption.*] I hear the Tories laughing at democracy—not for the first time in Scotland. I find it difficult to believe that, in a democracy, that would not be respected.

Of course, the precedent of the referendum in 2014 is that it should be for the Scottish Parliament to decide on such matters. That is absolutely correct. If the Scottish Parliament seeks a section 30 order, to try to thwart that will not, in any sense, be a democratic move.

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** Given that, yesterday, the First Minister jumped the gun by issuing uncalled for and unilateral demands for a second independence referendum to break Britain up, why should UK Government ministers now take Scottish ministers into their trust at all on the UK's Brexit negotiations?

**Michael Russell:** I hope that the UK Government is made of more thoughtful stuff than Mr Tomkins. A moment's consideration would make people realise—and there has been some difference of opinion on this—that the right way forward for Scotland is to ensure that the people have their say. The request from the First Minister and—if it is followed—by the Parliament, is very clear: to do so within the same timescale as the article 50 process as set out in the treaty. That is a fair thing to do, and it is fair to do it in a civilised and constructive fashion.

As a member of the JMC(EN), I do not feel that I have been taken into the UK Government's confidence on any occasion, but I will be quite happy if it chooses to take me into its confidence now.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The minister will recall that, last month, he told a House of Commons select committee that the so-called article 50 letter should remain at the top of the agenda for discussion, including

"the way in which that letter will make mention of the devolved administrations and their requirements, including that of differentiation".

Does he not recognise that it is the First Minister who has taken all those issues off the top of the agenda this week in order to launch her campaign

for Scotland to leave the UK even before the article 50 letter has been sent? Will he tell us what was so pressing for Nicola Sturgeon that she needed to say what she did yesterday without having heard the response for which he says he has been pressing for all these months?

**Michael Russell:** Two considerations need to be taken into account. First—the First Minister said this, but I will repeat the point as a member of the JMC(EN)—I have no idea when the article 50 letter will be lodged. I have no idea what is in it. We know that there are 17 possible days—actually 16, as the commitment is not to do it on 25 March. Speaking as a member of the JMC(EN), I think that the fact that I do not know when it is going to happen and have not had any discussion of any sort about what is in the letter rather indicates that there is not a seriousness of purpose, even on the question of how long the letter should be, which has been the subject of debate.

Secondly, what the First Minister did yesterday shows her leadership in this matter from the very beginning in being absolutely clear that we will bring the maximum certainty that we can bring. Unfortunately, it is not within our gift to wish away the foolishness of the Tories in the matter nor to wish away the way in which the Scottish Tories are not listening to the people of Scotland but listening only to themselves and to London, but it is within our gift to ensure that the period of uncertainty is kept to a minimum and to do this within the window of the article 50 process. The First Minister showed leadership yesterday. If only there was leadership in the chamber from the Tories and Labour, we might be in a different position.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** Does the Scottish Government want to see an independent Scotland as a full member of the European Union?

**Michael Russell:** The Scottish Government's position on that matter has not changed; it continues to be the same as it has been. As the First Minister said yesterday, our policy has been to seek full membership of the European Union. She said:

“Obviously we are in different circumstances now ... But on this issue, as on all of the many other issues that people will want to consider in advance of a choice ... we will set out our proposition in advance of that choice so that it is an informed choice.”

Mike Rumbles knows perfectly well that I have been a long-term proponent of the benefits of EU membership. Perhaps if that issue had been pursued with more vigour by the Liberal party among others, we would not be in the unhappy position that we are in now.

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** The minister will be aware that, last week, the Parliament's Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee published a report that concluded that

“a bespoke solution for Scotland must be considered before ... Article 50 is triggered.”

Does he agree that it is unacceptable for the UK Government to continue to be so stubbornly averse to respecting the views of the Scottish Parliament at every turn; that, so far, Theresa May has failed to treat Scotland as an equal partner; and that, if anyone is guilty of “tunnel vision”, it is the UK Prime Minister?

**Michael Russell:** I could not disagree with that thesis. The reality is that the “tunnel vision” has come from the Prime Minister, who has not, I am afraid, facilitated the possibility of an agreement on a compromise position.

I have read the committee's report, which we will debate in the chamber tomorrow. Suffice it to say that the conclusions that the committee reached are not dissimilar to those that the Scottish Government has reached. A differential solution was possible and it is much to be regretted that there has been a refusal to engage with the Scottish Government—for example, on the issue of migration. Last week, the Prime Minister's spokesperson unilaterally ruled out such a solution while a high-level group of civil servants was still discussing migration issues. In other words, we were not negotiating; there was an ex cathedra pronouncement from Downing Street, which was meant to settle the matter. I am afraid that it does not.

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** The minister demands that the Westminster Government respects a resolution in the Scottish Parliament although, of course, the Scottish Government now routinely ignores those. Given that the First Minister has said that she will disavow and campaign against any agreement that is reached on the terms of withdrawal from the European Union, why should the Governments of Wales, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, Gibraltar or the rest of the UK have any confidence in the participation of Scottish Government ministers, whose sole objective now is to campaign for independence and not for the best terms for Scotland out of the European Union?

**Michael Russell:** I find myself in agreement with many of the things that ministers from other Administrations have said about the process. I think that, most recently, the Welsh minister indicated in his evidence to the House of Commons committee that the JMC(EN) was less

well organised than St Fagans community council. That conforms with my views.

The reality is that we can work together to try to continue to make some progress, because the issues are serious. This is a serious moment. If Jackson Carlaw is suggesting that there should be an exclusion of one part of these islands from any further discussion, that would send a very interesting message to the European Union. That is not the observing of due process; that is saying, "Take it or lump it." That, of course, has been the Prime Minister's view up until now.

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** Will the minister remind members what mandate the Government has to give people in Scotland the right to choose between a damaging hard Tory Brexit and becoming an independent country?

**Michael Russell:** I am sure that the Scottish Tories do not wish to remember last year's election in which they did so badly—it is why we are sitting here, with double the number of seats, and they are sitting there.

The manifesto on which Mr McKee and I—indeed, all the members on the SNP side of the chamber—stood contains these words:

"the Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum ... if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will."

That is very clear.

I remind the Scottish Tories that we are sitting here and they are sitting there. We stood on that mandate.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** If Scotland were to leave the EU as part of the UK and, at a future date, seek to rejoin the EU—whether as part of the UK or not—will the minister and the Government give a 100 per cent commitment to support the holding of a referendum before that could take place?

**Michael Russell:** When the proposition is put to the people of Scotland, there will be absolute clarity on what we are suggesting be done. If Mr Findlay could show the patience for that, perhaps he would also accept the bona fides of a Government that, on all occasions, has been unequivocal in its support for the European Union—something that one could not say about Mr Findlay.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Article 50 will be triggered with no protections in place for EU nationals living in the UK. Yesterday, Labour was still making the ludicrous claim that it will challenge the UK Government's Brexit plans at every turn. So far, that party has failed to provide any opposition to the Tories or to stand up for EU nationals. Surely

the Labour Party will not fail to give the people of Scotland a choice over their own future, will it?

**Michael Russell:** The Labour Party position is, to put it kindly, confused. However, confusion is one thing, but voting against the rights of EU citizens is quite another. Yesterday, some Labour members in the House of Commons did that, which was disgraceful.

The position of this chamber has been, and continues to be, clear: EU nationals should not be used as bargaining counters. However, yesterday evening, the Tory party whipped its members to vote to use EU nationals as bargaining counters. Some Labour members voted in support of that Tory motion. The people of Scotland can judge for themselves who is standing up for the rights of human beings and who is not.

**James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** The minister lectures Parliament about the importance of respecting democracy. What respect do the minister and the Scottish Government have for democracy when they want to stampede the country into a divisive referendum that no one wants? It has been only two years since we had a clear, democratic vote in favour of staying in the United Kingdom.

**Michael Russell:** Clearly, Mr Kelly is not a Corbynista. The reality is that Mr Corbyn is quite happy to accept the democratic right of Scotland to hold such a referendum.

I return to my earlier point. I stood—the people around me stood—for election to this chamber on a manifesto that referred to Scotland being taken out of the EU against its will. I am standing full square on the mandate that I have; so is this party. If only Labour were thinking of Scotland rather than of its threadbare self.



## Inclusive and Accessible Tourism

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-04576, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on inclusive tourism, promoting accessible tourism and changing lives through the visitor economy.

14:19

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** We mark the beginning of national tourism week tomorrow. Since taking up my role as the cabinet secretary with responsibility for tourism last year, I have spoken many times about what tourism means for Scotland's prosperity. I have spoken about the £11 billion of economic activity that tourism generates in the wider supply chain, and I have spoken about the importance of Scotland's place in Europe—seven of our top 10 key markets are European—and in the wider world. I have welcomed the significant increase in the jobs that the industry provides. Tourism provided 217,000 jobs in 2015, which was 8.5 per cent of Scotland's employment. All those are good and sound reasons to be proud of our vibrant and successful tourism industry.

The industry continues to grow. People who come to visit us are drawn to Scotland for a wide variety of reasons: they want to see our exceptional natural landscapes, visit our award-winning attractions and taste our wonderful food and drink.

Scotland's economic strategy is not just about delivering sustainable economic growth: it is also about tackling the inequalities that continue to exist in our society and which are, unfortunately, still very real for many people. We often say that tourism is everyone's business, and we have made great progress in making that so, but tourism is not yet for everyone. One in every three people in Scotland misses out on being a visitor in his or her own country. We want to change that, and we are doing so.

I am sure that all members can think of a holiday or even a day out that was special for them—something that brings back a fond memory or makes them smile. The time I spent as a child with my grandparents in a caravan on the shores of Loch Doon was very special to me, as I explored the ruins of Loch Doon castle and made them mine when all the day visitors had left.

Members might be familiar with the annual Glasgow Taxi Association day out to Troon, which began—believe it or not—in 1945 with only three taxi drivers. Now, more than 150 drivers take part. Since 1945, countless Glasgow children have

been able to enjoy the delights of the Ayrshire coast. The annual trip is a wonderful example of what inclusive tourism is all about.

In February 2016, the First Minister launched VisitScotland's spirit of Scotland campaign, which introduced a brand new approach to promoting Scotland around the world. At the launch, she highlighted the new partnership between VisitScotland and the Family Holiday Association. The aim was to create the ScotSpirit programme of about 100 short breaks for disadvantaged families from across Scotland.

In September, I launched a second project, the Glasgow pilot, to provide days out for disadvantaged families who live in the Glasgow area. At that launch I found out that—difficult as it is to believe—some families from the outlying parts of Glasgow never visit the city centre. I also met families who had taken part in ScotSpirit breaks. I met a single mother of two who had had to give up work due to a relationship breakdown and deteriorating physical and mental health. Another participant had moved to Scotland from Nigeria, where she had had her own business. She was back at college, trying to improve her employability while her young daughter was at nursery. Both families had enjoyed weekend breaks: one in Inverness-shire and one in Ayrshire.

At the launch of the ScotSpirit breaks programme just over a year ago, we did not imagine the success that it would achieve in such a short time, in terms not just of the number and quality of breaks that have been provided, but of the generosity of the industry in providing opportunities for so many families. Overall, 250 families have benefited from the two programmes—nearly 1,000 people in total, 555 of whom are children. More than half the families had never had a break together.

The initiative has been truly collaborative and has involved all parts of the industry, from Historic Environment Scotland to Largs putting greens, from Abellio ScotRail to Boots n Paddles, which is a mobile outdoor adventure company, and from Hilton Hotels to the Bean and Leaf, which is an Ayrshire cafe-bistro. The scheme has provided a range of experiences that the families who took part will remember for a long time. Indeed, the experience might well change their lives; resilience is important, and the act of coming together to have time away at a difficult time can make a difference to how people see themselves, their relationships and their capacity to move on from difficult situations.

European partnership has also been part of making the programmes a success. In January, I heard at first hand about the work of VisitFlanders, which has been developing social tourism since

2001. In that year, the organisation helped 752 individuals; it now helps around 150,000 people a year to have a break, which is phenomenal. VisitFlanders has recorded a range of social benefits from its social tourism initiatives, including increased citizenship and improved wellbeing, self-esteem and family relationships. Enabling an additional 150,000 people to take a break has helped to support the tourism industry, often in the low season when many businesses struggle to stay open and employ staff. Through the signing of a renewed memorandum of understanding with VisitScotland, both organisations will continue to share best practice and expertise on a number of topics, including social tourism.

Like the families who have taken part in our ScotSpirit breaks, carers are a group who can benefit from the inclusive tourism agenda. The Government recognises the vital role that unpaid carers and young carers play in our society. We know that caring can be a positive and rewarding experience that has a positive impact on wellbeing, but it is crucial that carers are supported effectively in order to enable them to cope better with the stresses and demands of their caring role, and to look after their own health and wellbeing—which includes their taking much-needed breaks.

From 1 April 2018, the new Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 will make a meaningful difference to unpaid carers and will contribute to improvement of their health and wellbeing; it will ensure that they can continue to care if they wish to do so, and to have a life alongside caring. The act places a duty on local authorities to provide support to carers on the basis of the carers' identified needs, and there is a requirement that the responsible local authority consider whether support should be provided in the form of a break from caring. Each local authority will also be under a duty to prepare and publish a short breaks services statement that sets out information on the breaks that are available in Scotland for carers and cared-for people.

I would like to talk about respite. The initiative of respite—respite breaks plus hospitality—already connects local carers centres with hospitality providers including hotels, guest houses, leisure clubs and restaurants. The aim is that providers will become respite partners by offering a gift of a short break to a carer or young carer. The pilot project originally included Dumfries and Galloway, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian and North and South Lanarkshire councils, and was extended in 2016 to include Angus, Dundee, Edinburgh, and Perth and Kinross councils. The initiative has been developed and administered by Shared Care Scotland, which is one of our national carers organisations, in partnership with Scottish Government officials and the Hospitality

Industry Trust Scotland, and we have since 2014 provided funding of £123,325 to the pilot. An evaluation report was published in January, and its findings and recommendations for future provision are currently being considered.

In addition, since 2010, the Scottish Government has provided funding of over £20 million to the volunteer-run short breaks fund that is administered by Shared Care Scotland and Family Fund. The three programmes within the short breaks fund provide grants to third sector organisations to develop new and existing short breaks provision in order to promote greater choice, flexibility and personalisation of services.

The programmes also provide grants directly to families of disabled children and young people to support their breaks or activities. Inclusive tourism is not just about providing opportunities such as those that I have just mentioned. For people who live with disability, taking a simple break can be challenging. Like our country, Scotland's population is diverse, with disabled people making up nearly one in five of Scotland's working-age population. As we know, our population is also ageing.

Euan's Guide, in partnership with VisitScotland through its inclusive tourism programme, is an excellent example of how we are making tourism in Scotland available to everyone. Work to improve access can improve the experiences of a wide range of visitors, from families with young children and senior travellers to people with permanent physical or sensory disabilities. Access guides and accessible itineraries of things for visitors to do and see are available through [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com), which provides a range of information on accessible holidays. Last Sunday, on disabled access day, this very building—which scores four and half stars in Euan's Guide and has its own access statement—offered British Sign Language guided tours for visitors, and hosted entertainment from the Edinburgh signing choir.

As well as tackling inequalities, the accessibility of tourism products and services has real potential to boost the wider economy by actively supporting the local communities in areas in which there are accessible tourism businesses—for example, North Berwick, which has a beach wheelchair-access facility.

In 2015, the Great British tourism survey reported that tourism parties in which at least one member was identified as having a disability contributed approximately £1.3 billion to Scotland's economy. That is a sizeable contribution by any measure. This year, VisitScotland is working hard to take the agenda further through the introduction of two new accessible tourism destination areas: through the hashtag [#accessiblelife](https://twitter.com/accessiblelife) and the everyone's

Edinburgh working group. As part of that work, VisitScotland is carrying out a basic assessment of accessibility actions during its quality assurance visits and is developing new guides on inclusive events and inclusive design to support building refurbishment and development, and an inclusive communications guide.

The benefits that even a short break can bring must not be underestimated; they can be economic, educational and social. The Family Holiday Association has identified a wide range of such benefits. For business, breaks can reduce the impact of seasonality by filling capacity during low-season or shoulder-season months, and they can create and maintain employment levels in the tourism sector and the wider economy. They can also provide free marketing and help businesses to develop an improved corporate reputation.

A higher number of breaks can provide support for small and emerging destinations and boost regional investment in accommodation, retail, transport, hospitality, attractions and the cultural sector, and can promote a destination's tourism potential to the wider public. People who participate in tourism at an early age are more likely to do so as adults, thereby supporting longer-term sustainability.

By enabling people to take breaks, we can reduce pressure on health services through the improved mental and physical wellbeing of participants. There can be a reduced reliance on social services, with fewer applications for unemployment benefit and other state benefits. For people who are in work, a break can support better performance and make burn-out less likely. Participants also report improved family cohesion and a higher level of life satisfaction and self-esteem. In addition, there can be a positive impact on the ability to learn and a desire to undertake personal development. Many of us probably take our holiday time and our breaks for granted, but we are talking about giving people who might not have that opportunity the chance to have such experiences.

At the broadest level, enabling more people to take a break can improve social cohesion, participation in community life and engagement with education and employment. I hope that we can be as ambitious as VisitFlanders and allow 150,000 people to take a break. Its work is part of the fabric of Flemish society and the Flemish economy. It is certainly a wonderful example and something that we can and should think about aspiring to replicate.

I hope that I have explained the importance of inclusive and accessible tourism. I think that it is an area in which we can not only learn from other countries, but on which we can lead. There are many good examples. I am not claiming that we

have a totally inclusive and accessible tourism sector as of now, but we can aspire to having one. There are not many things in life that offer a win-win outcome, but inclusive tourism—whether by increasing accessibility, giving disadvantaged families and individuals a break or supporting growth in our sector—is one of them. It helps individuals and it helps the sector.

I look forward to listening to members' speeches, and I hope that this can be a shared endeavour that we can lead on and support on behalf of the people of Scotland. I ask members to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the vital role that tourism plays in Scotland's prosperity, not only in its direct economic impact, but in the many ways that it can help to tackle the inequalities that exist in society; notes the recent collaboration by VisitScotland, the Family Holiday Association, Historic Environment Scotland and the many industry partners to provide ScotSpirit Breaks for families in difficult circumstances, which has shown the positive impact that the industry can have on improving the lives and life-chances of people who are not able to step outside their everyday routine; commends organisations such as Euan's Guide for their work with public partners and private sectors in making tourism more inclusive through the development of access statements for facilities and services, along with accessible travel itineraries; congratulates destinations and individual businesses, right across Scotland, on how they are making use of these tools to help widen opportunities, not only for people with permanent disabilities, but also parents with young children, senior travellers and people with temporary injuries and their travel companions; considers that tourism is for everyone, and welcomes the continued support of public and private partners and the tourism industry itself in their willingness to work together, aiming to further develop inclusive tourism as an overarching approach so that all of Scotland can reap the many social and economic benefits that it can bring.

14:33

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

It is a pleasure to take part in today's debate, which provides a timely opportunity to discuss the importance of inclusive tourism from the point of view of the positive impact that it has in improving the lives of many people in Scotland and the substantial economic benefit that it brings to our country.

The debate is also timely because, as the cabinet secretary mentioned, this week marks Scottish tourism week, and there are many reasons to be positive about the tourism sector in Scotland. There are now more than 217,000 people working in the industry—that figure has increased by more than 10 per cent year on year. Tourism spend in Scotland generates more than £12 billion of economic activity in the wider Scottish supply chain and contributes some £6 billion to Scottish gross domestic product. The fact

that that represents about 5 per cent of total Scottish GDP shows how important the tourism sector is to the economy.

It is also one of the fastest-growing sectors in the economy, with growth in tourism spend of approximately 15 per cent last year. Tourists from the rest of the United Kingdom contribute to the vast majority of tourism spend in Scotland, while the largest single overseas market comprises tourists from the United States. That shows that the Scottish tourism market is reflective of the overall Scottish economy, with the rest of the UK market being the most important, followed by our relationship with the United States.

Social tourism is now an important part of the overall growth of the tourism sector in Scotland. In 2015, tourist groups in which at least one member was identified as having a disability contributed some £1.3 billion to Scotland's economy, which is approximately 20 per cent of total spending on day visits in Scotland. Our amendment to the Government's motion, which we will support, recognises that we should capitalise on the growing importance of social tourism. Our amendment also supports the further promotion of Scotland

"as an accessible visitor destination for all tourists from other parts of the UK and worldwide."

Recognising the social and economic benefits to be derived from inclusive tourism, VisitScotland is working to expand inclusive tourism in two main areas, the first of which is accessible tourism, which involves working with industry and promoting the business case for those with specific access requirements to visit places and gain experiences that might not otherwise be available to them. The second area is social tourism, which enables those from disadvantaged backgrounds to experience a trip to another part of Scotland, something that they might not otherwise benefit from.

VisitScotland has rightly identified potential for significant development in accessible tourism. There are 11.6 million people in the UK with a disability, which is approximately 18.5 per cent of the total population. It is estimated that as many as four out of five people with a disability do not enjoy a holiday—something that many of us take for granted—and, as I am sure that all members will agree, that situation is worthy of improvement. To address it, it is important that we remember that accessibility is limited for a large number of people who have a visual or hearing impairment or a learning disability, as well as for those who have physical disabilities.

The accessible tourism market also includes the provision of tourist facilities for families with young children, elderly people, people with mental health

issues and people with temporary physical impairments. It is clear that that is a very wide market with wide appeal. In order to expand that market, VisitScotland has recognized a number of access barriers that prevent people from having a holiday or a break with their family. An understanding of those barriers has helped the sector to understand better how to open up the visitor economy to as many people as possible.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member talks about the different types of disability and the need to tackle barriers. It is interesting that 71 per cent of disabilities are non-visible. The accessibility guides that the member has talked about can perhaps raise people's awareness of the types of measures that they might need to take.

**Dean Lockhart:** I completely agree with that point and I thank the cabinet secretary for making it. I will come on to this later, but VisitScotland has introduced specific training programmes for tourism operators to enable them to identify and address the needs of people who have special access requirements. The cabinet secretary highlighted a very good point.

The access barriers that VisitScotland has highlighted include physical barriers, which mean that people with impaired mobility might not be able to access facilities, buildings or a physical landscape; and technology barriers, because holidays and accommodation are increasingly being booked online, which can prove challenging for some people. There is also still only limited information on accessible visitor sites in Scotland.

A number of successful measures have been taken by the tourism sector to break down those barriers. VisitScotland suggests that there are three core aspects that businesses need to address to expand access in a meaningful way: first, training their staff to be disability aware; secondly, providing detailed information on websites and in brochures about levels of access; and, thirdly, making sure that physical facilities are fit for expanded access. I am glad to say that those aspects are being addressed, because VisitScotland is arranging specific training for managers and front-line staff of tourist accommodation so that they are aware of the needs of tourists with specific access requirements. In addition, organisations such as Euan's Guide work with the public sector to make available information about sites that are accessible to all members of the public, which is to be commended.

The second element of inclusive tourism is social tourism. That expanding area of tourism reflects the fact that some 250,000 families in Scotland are unable to take a short break because they cannot afford the cost or are unable to take time off because of caring or other commitments.

The barriers to social tourism differ from those to accessible tourism. In the case of social tourism, family or social barriers might mean that the personal or financial position of an individual or family makes it difficult for them to afford a trip or to take the time that is involved in having a family trip. Social tourism involves facilitating access to short breaks for the most disadvantaged in society.

To achieve that, collaboration is required across the tourism sector. There have been notable success stories. As the cabinet secretary mentioned, VisitScotland, the Family Holiday Association and many industry partners combined last year to provide two initiatives that enabled more than 250 vulnerable and disadvantaged families in Scotland to take a short break or a day trip in Scotland that they would otherwise not have been able to take. That resulted in more than 1,000 people having an experience of Scotland that would otherwise not have been possible. The initiatives provided weekend breaks throughout Scotland and included families visiting the wider Glasgow area to enjoy a day away from their routine stresses, which has been highlighted as being very good for the individuals involved.

I commend everyone involved in those initiatives for their forward thinking and generosity of time and resource in making them happen. The initiatives are good examples of how collaboration across the tourism sector can deliver results and of how it is possible to combine the social dimension and a positive business outcome. For example, an increasing number of such visits are taking place during the low season for tourism, which means that social tourism can increase occupancy and assist tourism businesses during quiet times.

I will highlight an organisation in my region that exemplifies many of the values of inclusive tourism that we will discuss. Trossachs Mobility is a registered charity based in Callander that aims to break down the barriers that disabled people often face when it comes to exploring the great outdoors. It provides specialised, all-terrain wheelchairs that are designed for the most difficult of outdoor terrains. By making our national parks easier for people with disabilities and other physical limitations to access, the charity allows disabled people to enjoy the Scottish countryside and gives individuals a sense of independence that normal wheelchairs cannot offer. A partnership with Stirling cycle hub has recently enabled Trossachs Mobility to create a link with disabled people's families, so that they can cycle alongside the person in the all-terrain chair. That is a great example of social inclusion because, without that service, those families would not be able to access the great outdoors.

Trossachs Mobility benefits from continued support from Stirling Council and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. That will help the initiative to continue to grow and I wish it well for the future.

During the debate, we will hear from my colleagues and other members about how inclusive tourism is able to address social responsibility by expanding the enjoyment of having a break away from everyday pressures and, at the same time, provide business growth by creating opportunities to meet the demands of many people who have previously been excluded from the market. There has been limited regulatory intervention to encourage an increase in the availability of accessible tourism sites throughout Scotland, but accessible tourism initiatives are most successful when they are sector led, involve collaboration between the many people and organisations that are involved in the sector and have a strong business case as well as social benefits to be derived from them. I congratulate all the people in the tourism sector who have worked together to promote inclusive tourism in Scotland.

I move amendment S5M-04576.1, to insert at end:

“and to further promote Scotland as an accessible visitor destination for all tourists from other parts of the UK and worldwide.”

14:44

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I was pleased to see the reference to Euan's Guide in the Government's motion. I first met Euan MacDonald a couple of years ago at a parliamentary reception to which I was invited by the late and much missed Gordon Aikman, whose campaigning achievements we celebrated a few weeks ago. Euan is a power chair user who was diagnosed with motor neurone disease back in 2003 and I was delighted to meet him again last week, when he was in the Parliament with his sister Kiki to promote the disabled access events over the weekend, to which the cabinet secretary referred.

Euan, like Gordon did, has met a life-changing condition by seeking to achieve change in society. His starting point was that it was difficult to find accessible places to go, even if it was just for a coffee with friends. He set up Euan's Guide, which is a fantastic example of collective action online. It is disabled people, their families and their carers who write the reviews, and it is people facing the same challenges who read and take advantage of them. I hope that many more people will add their tuppenceworth to the guide, so that accessible venues and visitor attractions across Scotland are promoted and publicised, and all venues are

encouraged to match the standards of the best, including this Parliament.

Mark Cooper is another wheelchair user turned campaigner who has used his campaigning energies to secure a change in the law, so that pubs and restaurants are required to be accessible. Like many activists, Mark was spurred on by his own experience. After going for a drink with friends in an Edinburgh pub, he had to leave midway through the evening when he discovered that the only toilet that he could use was up some stairs that he could not climb. His energy and commitment helped to secure a change to the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 to require those seeking to obtain or renew a licence to serve alcohol to show how they had made their premises accessible. However, that new requirement has still not been brought into force, and it is time for that to change. Our amendment highlights the need for the Scottish Government to ensure that that change in the law is now implemented. Ministers have had more than five years to consider necessary changes to secondary legislation. I have no doubt that they have done that. Now, they need to get on with implementing the will of the Parliament.

Another formidable campaigner for the rights of disabled people is Dame Anne Begg, former MP for Aberdeen South and nowadays an active member of the Aberdeen disabled action group, which advises the city council on policy as it affects disabled people. Her view is that tourist destinations in general are now much better geared up for disabled visitors than was the case 20 years ago, but that there is a great unmet need in relation to those who are most severely disabled.

A good example of work that is being done in that regard is the changing places campaign, which campaigns for bespoke public conveniences for those who need to lie down rather than sit in order to get changed while on a day out. Anne Begg is supportive of the campaign for such facilities at Aberdeen beach, which was started by local nurse and mother Judith Scofield and which enjoys active cross-party support. That example illustrates the point that improved access for a disabled person can allow that person's family also to enjoy a day out in situations in which they might not otherwise be able to do so. It also illustrates the point that the visitor attraction gets a benefit from increased visitor numbers and the spend that goes with that. More users of Aberdeen beach will mean more income for the businesses on the beachfront, and improved facilities for the most disabled will usually mean better facilities for everyone else as well. That point has been recognised by the National Museums of Scotland, which is seeking to respond positively to a similar

call by the changing places campaign in relation to its facilities.

As we have already heard, accessible tourism is not only about removing physical barriers to holiday destinations for disabled people and others; it is also about lowering the financial and social barriers that can equally prevent access to what our country has to offer. We welcome the work of VisitScotland and ScotSpirit to promote social tourism, which is another important aspect of an inclusive approach to holidays in Scotland.

The Family Holiday Association, which has already been mentioned, has highlighted the fact that a lack of access to the tourist experience is one of the consequences of poverty in Scotland. According to the Office for National Statistics, almost a third of families cannot afford a week's holiday, and as many as 200,000 Scottish children live in families that cannot afford a day out. The FHA has been doing something about that across the UK for 40 years. It is good that there is a new initiative in Scotland to extend the work that the organisation does with businesses large and small. Those taking advantage of the work of the FHA include families who are short of cash—the minister gave an example of people dealing with marital breakdown, but the impact of bereavement, domestic violence or substance abuse is also relevant in that regard. One of the striking things about the FHA's testimony is the difference that even a short break can make to people's lives in those circumstances.

It is remarkable that, even in the 21st century, a third of Scottish households have not experienced the joys of a holiday in Scotland. That is a measure of the number of people for whom inclusive tourism is still an aspiration, rather than a fact, and it reflects an unreached market for Scottish tourism businesses. Holiday opportunities for disadvantaged families require willing participation from tourism businesses, and their feedback is interesting. They all regarded inclusive tourism schemes as a way of meeting their corporate social responsibilities. Two thirds of them hoped for additional visitor numbers as a result of those schemes. Three quarters thought that the schemes were good for the image and reputation of the tourism sector as a whole. Every one of them recognised that they made a real difference to the families in question, and, for every one of them, that was part of the reason for taking part in those schemes.

In promoting accessible and inclusive tourism, all sorts of barriers need to be addressed. A variety of partners need to be involved—some already are—such as science centres, art galleries, museums, local authorities, Historic Environment Scotland, EventScotland and VisitScotland. All those partners have a role to

play, as do travel companies, service providers and visitor attractions and their staff.

As in the past, the driver in the future will no doubt be the voluntary groups and committed individuals: from Euan's Guide to the Family Holiday Association, and from Mark Cooper and Anne Begg to the changing places campaign. Those people and organisations see what the barriers are and set out to remove them.

The job of Government and its agencies, and of this Parliament, is to get behind those campaigners, because their successes will be good for us all.

To that end, I move amendment S5M-04576.2, to insert at end:

“, and looks forward to the implementation of section 179 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, which will make reporting on accessibility a condition of licensing applications and renewals.”

14:51

**Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I apologise for the state of my voice, which is the direct result of my having been a tourist to Liverpool or, more accurately, Anfield on Sunday and of the necessity of raising my voice on occasion to ensure the desired result. My voice certainly has not recovered yet; it feels almost worse than watching the Scotland and England game on Saturday did, which did not do much for my voice, either.

I broadly commend the cabinet secretary's opening remarks. Funnily enough, I was sure that the debate would be truncated and that we would have a statement from the First Minister on what she announced yesterday not to Parliament but to the Bute house drawing room. It would have been a great relief to my voice if we had got a little less time for the debate. That has not turned out to be the case, which is probably sad for many other reasons.

I will make two points by way of introduction. The first is on the cabinet secretary's remarks on the importance of the private sector investing in accessible tourism and the range of services that are necessary. On that issue she is absolutely right, and that investment happens in a range of ways.

I hope that, in her final remarks, the cabinet secretary will address the impact of the changes to rates that have affected every tourism business in Scotland. Even with the welcome reductions that the finance secretary has brought in at the last minute, I have been made aware that many tourism businesses face a 12.5 per cent rise. The rise has been capped at that, but there is as yet no position on next year. I hope, as we all do, that the

Barclay review will this summer produce sterling results. I hope that the cabinet secretary will address in winding up the impact that the changes have had, particularly on investment in exactly the kinds of services and facilities that she rightly highlighted in her opening remarks.

My second introductory point is on Dean Lockhart's observation about the 15 per cent growth in tourism spend in the past year. During a family visit to Castle Urquhart three or four Saturdays ago, I had a long discussion with the custodian. Incidentally, a couple of people were pushing in a wheelchair across the castle slopes someone who I think was their mother, which was quite a demanding thing to do. The custodian made an observation about that astonishingly beautiful part of Scotland and that astonishing castle being as accessible as they could be to old people and to those with disabilities. He observed that there were many more tourists at the castle—I think that its visitor numbers have risen considerably in the past year, which has been caused, ironically, by the weakening of the pound. I am not proposing that we get into a debate about why the pound has weakened, but there are no two ways about it: that has had an impact on tourism numbers over the past year.

The main point that I will address is what Lewis Macdonald was right to hint at, which is the impact of poverty on tourism and accessible tourism. He made the fair observation that, rather than being a reality, inclusive tourism is an aspiration or a hope for too many families.

I lodged my amendment—I confess that I was quite taken that it was selected—because Lewis Macdonald's point reflects island needs, which relate to the impact on people with less money and on their ability to use ferry services. Alasdair Allan's constituency—the Western Isles—and all the west coast islands have rightly benefited from a change in Government support for seven or eight years, and all that we in the northern isles look for is the same arrangements. That is particularly the case when, for a Shetland household or for people visiting the islands, a round trip from Aberdeen to Lerwick for a family of four costs £600. That has a direct impact on tourism and on potential tourists from families with less money or families in which there is a disabled family member.

As a Department for Work and Pensions report from last June shows, households with a disabled family member are, on average, more likely to live on lower incomes, and current travel costs to and from Shetland represent an additional burden on those households. We hope that the Government will take that forward and recognise that there is an issue of equity.

Another aspect of tourism highlighted by a number of members, including Government front benchers, concerns toilets. Lewis Macdonald made a point in relation to public conveniences. A good example from Shetland is Jarlshof, where there are bronze age Viking remnants, which have been well interpreted by Historic Environment Scotland. However, a facility is needed for bus and car parking and for people with disabilities, as there are no public toilets at the site, although I and a number of people across the tourism industry have made the case for that to Historic Environment Scotland. We would be grateful if a minister added to that and we hope that Historic Environment Scotland and its chief executive, Alex Paterson, who used to be the chief executive of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, will grasp that nettle, not least because the Jarlshof site is visited by many hundreds of tourists from cruise liners.

Lerwick is now one of the busier ports in Scotland for cruise liners—it had 79 ships in the past year, with more than 50,000 people. Many of the tourists are elderly, rather than people with disabilities, so facilities need to be appropriate for their needs, but that is not currently the case. If the cabinet secretary could put a bit of pressure on her agency, we would support that, as it would make the difference to exactly the kind of tourists who she mentioned in her opening remarks, which I entirely endorse. A positive change is needed.

The Government motion mentions Euan's Guide and Lewis Macdonald made a point about it being online. That raises the obvious point that we need far better availability of broadband and mobile phone coverage around Scotland, so that the people who might be able to benefit from Euan's Guide, which is clearly so useful, can do so. That is not the case at present, because broadband and mobile phone coverage—as any of us who enjoy the rural, island and wild areas of Scotland know—is patchy, to put it mildly. As for the thought of 4G, when I looked at my phone at Castle Urquhart the other day, there was no G on it. As my kids tried to get on to social media and the rest of it, the little thing was whirling, which was a blessing, but that is by the by. The importance of broadband and mobile phone coverage has to be recognised, because the lack of it has a detrimental effect on businesses and on the visitor experience. Euan's Guide is a graphic example of that in the context of today's debate.

I strongly welcome what is proposed in the Government motion on inclusive tourism, which comes in tourism week, as has been said. I hope that the Government will be minded to accept the Liberal amendment, which highlights the additional factors that need to be taken forward.

I move amendment S5M-04576.3, to insert at end:

“; acknowledges that the cost of travel to and from the Northern Isles serves as a barrier for many families and individuals; notes, for example, that households with at least one disabled family member are more likely to live in poverty, and agrees that a reduction in ferry fares to Orkney and Shetland would extend the potential of accessible tourism to the whole of Scotland.”

14:59

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** We should never underestimate how attractive Scotland is as an international tourism destination or how important tourism is for the Scottish economy. Scotland's culture, landscape and complex history attract millions of people to visit each year from all over the world, and tourism sustains well over 200,000 jobs.

I have many fond memories of travelling around Scotland to explore and view its incredible landscapes, visit its inspiring towns and cities and learn about its unique and dynamic history. There should be no doubt about how attractive Scotland is for tourism; as a country, we have a responsibility to utilise its appeal and to grow and sustain the Scottish economy by protecting assets for generations to come.

I welcome the news that there has been a 33 per cent increase in the volume of visits to Scotland by those in the accessible tourism market since 2009. However, it is estimated that up to £9 billion went unspent last year in the UK because people were not aware that a particular disability could be catered for. As much of Scotland's tourism is heavily orientated towards outdoor activities, such as golfing, biking and hiking, it is crucial for us to accept that many of our tourists, including people who are elderly or less mobile and young children, have access needs. It is our job and our responsibility to make tourism in Scotland a more inclusive activity and to make it easier for our visitors to enjoy what Scotland has to offer.

VisitScotland has played a crucial role in unlocking Scotland's potential for tourism; it has highlighted a business initiative that is designed to attract more tourists, especially by making our services more accessible and inclusive. Accessibility involves so much more than just accommodating wheelchair users; it is about the attitudinal barriers that often prevent accessibility policy from being pursued, such as a vision that it is expensive. We must play our part in stimulating conversation to get across the fact that simple things make big differences, including getting messages across to normalise the topic.

Almost half of disabled tourists spend between £500 and £1,000 on a holiday, while 10 per cent spend about £1,500. That produces enormous social and economic barriers. We need to invest in



a broader strategy that tackles the stigma not only for the traveller with accessible needs but among us here in Parliament and everyone involved in the tourism industry.

The business case for improving the accessibility of tourism is strong, but more needs to be done to make it tangible to business owners, who might not have an incentive to improve facilities. The range of initiatives on accessible tourism has included Capability Scotland's accessible tourism project, which aims to make Scotland the most accessible tourist destination in Europe by identifying barriers that disabled people face. The Guide Dogs open for business package, which was launched in 2013, offered inspiration to the tourism industry for thinking about ways to make their businesses more inclusive. The Scottish Disability Equality Forum has launched the accessible travel hub website, which makes information, articles and guidance readily available. Last year's aiming for inclusive growth event on accessible tourism was extremely successful. It brought together representatives of more than 20 tourism organisations from around Europe to raise the level of accessible tourism expertise around the continent, present policies and achievements, share ideas and set agendas.

Golf courses, galleries, coastal paths and museums bring thousands of tourists to my constituency and the rest of Fife every year. The massive impact that that visitor expenditure has on local businesses, the economy and jobs cannot be overstated—from directly influenced roles, such as those of hotel and restaurant staff, to those in the transport and retail industries, opportunities are created for services or facilities in communities that would otherwise not be sustainable. There are compelling economic, as well as social, benefits from ensuring that the tourism market is accessible to all. While a great number of businesses in Fife and wider Scotland have already made positive changes to improve their accessibility, we must continue to develop and promote our facilities and demonstrate our commitment to accessible tourism for every visitor.

The tourism industry for one of Fife's best known natural assets—its beautiful coastline—could be transformed by making our coastal areas more accessible and promoting an inclusive and proactive approach that would engage new audiences who might have felt unable to enjoy those assets previously. We must do all that we can so that no one feels unable to enjoy Fife's breathtaking shores and scenery.

In 2014, Homelands Trust—Fife opened a unique and accessible self-catering facility overlooking the Firth of Forth that was designed and equipped to meet the needs of people with a range of disabilities and health conditions. The

Paxton drop-in centre offers a variety of group and individual activities, such as self-management courses, alternative therapies and health walks.

Fife tourism partnership's vision is for Fife to establish the social and economic benefits for businesses, visitors and the wider area by creating an accessible destination. The partnership hosts a series of workshops for businesses and staff. All such services also help Fife residents with similar disabilities, so that is a win-win scenario.

Euan's Guide, which is an online guide that shares information about places with disabled access, lists some great reviews of places in Fife, including the Harbourmaster's house and the Adam Smith theatre in Kirkcaldy. A massive number of tourism businesses and destinations are now promoting services for disabled guests as the norm, and I am proud that Fife's tourist destinations and venues are being recommended for accessibility.

In 2015, Scotland's accessible tourism market was estimated to be worth more than £1.3 billion. I place a special emphasis on stimulating conversation about disabilities and access not just in the tourism industry but in everyday life. VisitScotland and the tourism industry have made immense progress but, as the main tourism season approaches, there is still much to do to achieve the ultimate goal of making our fantastic holiday destinations accessible to everyone. I fully support the efforts of the Scottish Government and all its partners to make tourism more accessible, truly change lives and support the Scottish economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** We have a little bit of time in hand if anyone is desperate to speak for more than six minutes, and interventions will be welcome.

15:05

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I will try to keep it to 50 minutes in that case.

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** Hear, hear, Jeremy!

**Jeremy Balfour:** It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate this afternoon. I suspect that there will be a lot of consensus among the speakers. Tourism is a vital industry for Scotland and, as a representative of the Lothians, I know that we benefit from having so many people come to our city all through the year. It is good to have different types of people from different countries, cities and backgrounds.

I want to touch on two or three areas and on how we can make tourism as accessible as possible. Before someone can benefit from staying at a hotel or visiting the castle or some other

historical site, they have to be able to get there. That is often a major issue for people who have a disability. We rightly talk a lot about people who have mobility issues or are wheelchair users, but we have to remember that they make up only 6 per cent of people who have a disability. As the cabinet secretary pointed out, a lot of disability can be hidden or less obvious.

I am pleased with what Transport Scotland has done—with the Government's encouragement—in its 10-year accessible travel plan. I hope that, over the next 10 years, we will see improvements in how people get from A to B—and that applies not just to tourism but to life in general.

We might need to look again at people who get to a site by car. Disabled parking spaces are often available, but only to those who have a blue badge, which means that they have a mobility issue. A person cannot get a blue badge to use disabled parking spaces if they do not have a mobility issue. However, I have been contacted by people who have a disability that does not affect their mobility, but for whom things would be much easier if they could get that bit closer to where they are going. I wonder whether we need to do some long-term thinking about whether disabled parking spaces should be only for those who have mobility issues, or whether we need to extend the rule so that people can use them whatever their disability. I also make the plea that we should encourage the appropriate punishment of those who do not have a disability and who park wrongly in such spaces.

We have already heard that we need to make tourism businesses inclusive. That can be done in lots of different ways, for example by training staff, using websites and having appropriate facilities. I am sure that we are all aware of the issue. Things have improved over the past 20 years, but I suspect that one of the areas that we are still not good on relates to staff knowing when to intervene and when not to intervene. Perhaps we need to look at feedback and ensure that staff do what the customer needs.

I have a secret—I am addicted to rollercoasters. Whenever I go on holiday, I try to persuade my family to go somewhere that is at least within knocking distance of a rollercoaster—the higher, the bigger, the faster, the better. However, on a number of occasions, I have been prevented from going on a rollercoaster because of my disability. When I explain to the operators about my disability and what I can do, I often overcome the situation. I understand that they want to try to be appropriate but the customer—not the operator—must always come first.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I definitely do not do rollercoasters, but Jeremy Balfour touches on a really important point, which Dean Lockhart and

David Torrance also spoke about. It is about training and attitude, and about how we make sure that people intervene appropriately and see things from the customer's perspective, as Jeremy Balfour says. A lot of this is not necessarily about expensive changes, although such changes will sometimes happen. If, as a country, we can change our attitude, that in itself will be a big step forward.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I absolutely agree with the cabinet secretary on that. Maybe one of the ways to do that is to create ambassadors for disability. That is happening down south—the UK Government is appointing ambassadors to work with industry and the tourism boards and tell them what people need—and what they do not need. It may be well worth having a bit of joined-up thinking from all four nations. We could use ambassadors to speak to people about different disabilities; as the cabinet secretary says, educating people often does not cost a company or an organisation any money and can be of real benefit to an individual's experience.

This is a hard thing to say and we may not want to recognise it, but sometimes a disability will prevent someone from doing something. Let me give a practical example. Someone who is a wheelchair user is probably never going to get to the top of the Scott monument in Edinburgh. We simply have to recognise that. It is about telling disabled people, "We will try to be as accommodating and as open as possible and will try to educate people as much as possible, but there are limitations that come with your disability."

There are two sides to the coin. I hope that we never go to the extent of ruining historical buildings by doing so much to make them accessible that we lose their uniqueness. I appreciate that there is a difficult balance to strike and that the issue is debateable, but I think that it needs to be said in this debate that sometimes someone's disability means that they cannot go somewhere. Yes, we should make every effort possible to provide opportunities, but not always.

15:12

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I will focus mainly on social tourism. My starting point is how much I personally benefit from having a break—a lot of other speakers have mentioned that, too. It could just be a day out on the train to Mallaig, it could be a long weekend camping in the Highlands or the Borders—which I assure members can be done quite cheaply with a tent—or it could be a week away in Andalusia, like the break I recently had during the February recess. An interesting point came to mind as Jeremy Balfour was speaking. I went up one of the towers that the Moors built—I think that it was in Sevilla—

and although the tower was 13 storeys or so high, it had a ramp all the way up. I am not exactly sure why that was done, but it made that tower much more accessible than a lot of the towers in Scotland.

We all benefit from getting away from our usual routine and physically being in a different place. It is all very well having a day off or a few days off at home, but all the usual chores sit there and look at us, be it the washing, the gardening, the ironing or whatever.

In Glasgow, there is a tradition of families going away to Millport, Rothesay or Arran for a day or maybe a little bit longer. I obviously feel sorry for the residents of Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen, who are unfortunate not to have so many beautiful islands close by—I say to them that they should come and live in Glasgow.

There is evidence from a number of studies of how much individuals and families benefit from having a break. The benefits include parents having reduced stress and being better able to cope; a positive impact on mental health; families spending more quality time together, which means better family relationships; and children having more confidence and increased aspirations.

Other benefits are perhaps not so easy to measure, but most of us would instinctively feel that they would result. For example, families have more happy memories to share, and children and families feel more like everyone else and have new experiences and broadened horizons. I personally see breaks or holidays as a chance to reflect and get away from the treadmill that we are all sometimes on. There are also the harder but still important benefits that have been mentioned, such as the boost for the travel and tourism industry and our resorts, especially if more people use them during the low season.

All those factors convinced me that the Family Holiday Association and other organisations in the field, such as the Glasgow Children's Holiday Scheme, are doing something that is really worth while. I first came across the idea a number of years ago when I met people from the Family Holiday Association who asked me where in Glasgow I thought that the association might get involved. I suggested two of the primary schools near me in Barlanark, which is part of greater Easterhouse, and we sat down with the two headteachers to discuss some of the possibilities. The headteachers were enthusiastic about the idea and immediately came up with families they knew would benefit from just being away even for a day or, better still, a long weekend. In 2016, VisitScotland and the Family Holiday Association arranged for 254 families to have a short break or day out. As others have mentioned, it is striking

that two thirds of those people had never had a break away together before.

Some people say that a holiday or break is a luxury and, if people cannot afford it, that is just tough luck—they cannot afford it and that is that. However, I argue against that way of thinking. None of us needs a luxury holiday on a cruise ship or some other incredibly expensive holiday, but I believe that we all need breaks from the usual routine and that that is an essential part of our lives, as individuals or families. It is to the credit of the Parliament that there has been an increased focus on mental health over the past six years while I have been a member. Surely having a break from the usual routine has to be one positive way of helping people's mental health.

The numbers can be staggering. We are told that 250,000 families in Scotland are unable to take even a short break, mainly for cost reasons. As has been mentioned, we have a lot to learn from other countries. In France and Spain, the unions and the tourism industry are heavily committed to the idea of social tourism, and Flanders is seen as one of the leaders in the sector, with some 150,000 disadvantaged people getting a break each year, as the cabinet secretary said.

VisitScotland and the Family Holiday Association have produced a report entitled "Tourism for Everyone", which looks back mainly at last year and which contains a number of facts and figures. It says that 254 families benefited from a short break or a day out; that 90 per cent of those families felt able to cope better after their experience; that 97 per cent visited new bits of Scotland; that 24 per cent had more confidence to try trips in future; that 88 per cent felt more optimistic about the future; that 87 per cent said they got on better as a family; and that 100 per cent would recommend attractions to family and friends.

Those are encouraging figures, but what strikes me are people's personal stories, both in the report and from elsewhere. We have probably all heard the stories about children in Glasgow who had never seen a cow. A few years ago, when I was living in London, I was struck and quite shocked by someone telling me about kids in London who had never seen the Thames. What kind of society are we if that kind of thing can still be said today?

I personally found some of the quotes in the report quite moving, and I hope that members will be interested in them. The report contains a family case study, which states:

"Rachel and her daughter Amy live with Rachel's parents. She is a good mum and very capable, but she has ... low self-confidence".

Rachel said:

"We have stayed overnight with relatives, but Amy has never left the town we live in."

I find that quite hard to even think about. Rachel went on:

"I've only ever been to Edinburgh once on the train and I really liked it so I would like to do something like that with Amy."

That is a family living in Scotland today.

Here is another quote from a family:

"We don't have a table in our house and dinner time is always stressful. Staying at a hotel gave us the chance to eat together at a table for the first time, and for me that was incredible."

Is that not pretty special?

Finally, there are families for whom the issue is not just financial but about the fact that they are not used to being in hotels and so can be quite reluctant. The report says that one family

"needed a bit of support and reassurance in relation to staying in a hotel."

It continues:

"Right up until the Friday of the planned weekend away, Mum was adamant that she was not going. I helped her to manage her fears and worries, and build her confidence so that she felt able to go away with her boys. It has been an amazing experience for the family and they are so grateful to everyone who made it possible."

In conclusion, we see the hard side of the issue and we see the benefit to the economy, but there are real families and real people who can benefit from social tourism.

15:20

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** The title of this debate is quite broad, and the debate itself has had quite a broad sweep to it, covering topics from social tourism to disability access. I intend to use my time to focus on one particular facility in my constituency, Leuchie house, which I intend to puff gratuitously. I do so because it is a great example of what is possible and it offers some lessons that could be learned more broadly.

For those who do not know it, or who have never seen it, Leuchie house is a beautiful 18th century classical mansion, set in lovely grounds near North Berwick. For many years, it was a respite centre for multiple sclerosis sufferers. From 1970 until about 1998, it was run by Servite nuns; in 1998, it was taken over by the MS Society, which ran it until 2010, when the society made what I think was the wrong-headed decision to withdraw its support. That was followed by almost certain closure, although, in the end, that was halted by a huge campaign that was locally based but which had support from all over, given that the

centre was a national facility. In 2011, Leuchie house reopened, this time as an independent charity under the leadership of the redoubtable Mairi O'Keefe.

Since then, Leuchie house has received significant support from East Lothian Council and the Scottish Government on more than one occasion. That has allowed it to continue to provide services, and, indeed, to expand its services. It is no longer a respite centre for MS sufferers alone; a wide range of conditions are covered. In 2016, 37 per cent of the guests were not MS sufferers but had one of some 30 other conditions that require a significant amount of care, such as motor neurone disease or Huntington's disease. In expanding, Leuchie house has worked closely with campaigners such as Gordon Aikman and Euan MacDonald, who have been mentioned already.

Leuchie house is a respite centre, but, if members go there, they will find that people talk to them not about respite but about holidays, because Leuchie very much sees itself as being about breaks for about four days or even as much as up to two weeks. Why is that? First, it is happily circumstanced to find itself in—in my entirely objective opinion—the most beautiful county in Scotland. The cabinet secretary talked about Scotland's beautiful countryside, about visitor attractions of many different kinds and about wonderful food and drink. East Lothian has all of those and more. Leuchie house is a short distance from the beautiful beach at North Berwick, where the wheelchairs that the cabinet secretary referred to are. It has a very close relationship with the providers of North Berwick beach wheelchairs, which it uses regularly.

Two or three things about Leuchie are unique. The most important is the model of break or holiday that Leuchie provides, which is not just for people who need significant care; it is for the people who need that care and for their carers. Carers—usually they are the cared-for person's loved ones—who come to Leuchie house do not have to carry out their day-to-day caring responsibilities. That is the big difference. Actually, there are really two differences, because there is respite for the carer without the cared-for person having to go away somewhere else. The couple—maybe a husband and wife—can stay and enjoy their holiday together, but it is not an accessible holiday of the kind that means that the carer has to continue with his or her daily caring duties; the approach is very much aimed at carers as well as those who are cared for.

Leuchie house deals with people who need a very significant level of care. In fact, 50 per cent of its guests last year had the very highest level of care needs.

For a respite centre, Leuchie house is just pretty good fun. The first time that I visited was in June. I arrived at the door to be greeted by what appeared to be Santa Claus—it had been decided that Leuchie house should have an Australian Christmas.

In recent months and years, Leuchie house staff have developed a most unusual client-handling technique, which allows them to remove people from their wheelchair, encase them in a flying suit and then strap them into a microlight so that they can fly above East Lothian. Many guests have discovered that, when it comes to mobility, we are all pretty equal once we get a few hundred metres above the ground—perhaps even on a rollercoaster, which Mr Balfour mentioned.

Leuchie house is very much a place that gives people the opportunities that they want, whatever they might be and whatever is required to provide them. Although it is a health facility, the Leuchie MOT assessment service has found and produced more than 700 preventative interventions for its guests in the past year. It conducts very intensive wheelchair examinations, leading to many people leaving with a wheelchair that is far better suited to their needs than the one that they had when they arrived.

Leuchie house has a close and developing relationship with Queen Margaret University to ensure that its care both informs and is informed by cutting-edge research into social care, which that university specialises in.

What are the lessons of Leuchie house for inclusive tourism? The first is that we should support Leuchie house. A week tomorrow, at 6 o'clock in the Parliament's members' lounge, there will be a reception for Leuchie house to which everyone is very welcome. Members can find out more about Leuchie house then. The second big lesson is that carers must be considered as well in inclusive tourism. The third lesson is that, if we really believe in what is possible and what can be done—although Mr Balfour might be right that we might find some things that are impossible—tourism can be not just inclusive, but pretty close to being without limits.

15:28

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):**

I align myself with almost all of Mr Gray's comments—with the exception of what he said about his constituency being the finest. I align myself with what he said about the work of Leuchie house—from which Ms Mairi O'Keefe is, I think, with us in the gallery. I have a constituent—probably at least one—who is eternally grateful for the support that is given there.

It is very good that we talk about disabilities. I am conscious that the word “mainstreaming” is used a lot. I commend the mainstreaming approach and do not think that such things are about a named individual or a department: we are all responsible.

That does not mean that even new builds or new initiatives are without their challenges. It is important that technologies, procedures, standards all round and our expectations improve. We have heard about practices from a number of colleagues. I hope that, in years to come, we will not hear that people who live on the outside of a city have never been in the city centre, or that people have never seen the countryside. Equality impact assessments will underpin that, but challenges remain in that respect. Equality impact assessments are routinely done, but are, sadly, often box-ticking exercises. I favour a rights-based approach to how we do all business, including tourism. The point of reference on this occasion is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 9 of that convention requires of countries

“the identification and elimination of obstacles”.

Health and safety and risk assessment have an important role in doing that. As we have heard, not all barriers are physical. Many barriers, in particular in respect of mental health, are attitudinal.

Article 9 goes on to say that it should be ensured that persons with disabilities can access their environment. In that regard, transport is terribly important. Regardless of whether we are able-bodied, if a lift at a ferry terminal is not working, if there are limitations to bus travel or if taxi travel proves to be challenging, it affects us all, although the effects are compounded for those with disabilities.

Another issue is inspection, repair and replacement regimes. There is danger in that, in recent years, the fabric of many of our communities has not been maintained. The public facilities and services that we all share are also important resources for tourists. At the weekend, the Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland expressed concerns to me about street furniture and road signage not being removed. We need to be alert to even the mundane things that can affect people.

The benefit of communications technology in information sharing has been mentioned. I align myself with Tavish Scott's comments. It is all very well for members sitting here in the chamber, where we can get a 4G signal, but that is not the case everywhere. We also need more multilingual signage and we need to ensure that people with hearing and visual impairments are catered for.

There is good news. The national collections provide free access to the public. Free access is positive—it allows participation of people who are on low incomes, among whom women, disabled people and some ethnic minority groups are disproportionately represented.

On social tourism, access to breaks that most of us take for granted has been mentioned. In the previous session, I was a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, which reported on loneliness and isolation. We went to the island of Islay in my constituency, and to Easterhouse, where there are real challenges. I commend the work that NHS Highland is doing, along with the *Inverness Courier* and Drakies primary school, to encourage people to mix intergenerationally. I am sure that similar work is taking place across the country.

A lot of good things are happening, and I know that the Scottish Government consultation on its “Draft Delivery Plan 2016-2020” picks up on the UNCPRD’s rights references. I will pick out a few of those references. Commitment 6 says:

“A new help guide aimed at boosting accessible design will be published”.

Design is everything.

There are challenges—indeed, we have heard some people talk about the challenges of retrofitting, so we need to get it right from the outset. That commitment was connected to the legacy for the 2016 year of innovation, architecture and design.

Commitment 7 is to provide

“A new help guide to assist tourism businesses”

with information technology, as well as social media, which is important.

Under commitment 10, we see that

“Creative Scotland is undertaking a wideranging review of equalities, diversity and inclusion in the arts, screen and creative industries.”

I hope that that can be reflected in public funding going to promotion of diversity in the arts. I would certainly make public financial support conditional on that.

A number of members have mentioned Euan’s Guide. Its great attraction is that, rather than politicians pontificating, Euan, who is helped by his sister, is writing as someone with lived experience of the issues. Euan, who is from Leith, has done commendable work. I hope that his workload is diminishing.

The VisitScotland initiative must be appreciated. Members have talked about the benefits of the concessionary bus scheme. That has been a tremendous boost, particularly in allowing social

mobility for the older generation. The economic benefits are important, too. I must say that I am not as drawn to the economic benefits as I am to the social and health—physical and mental wellbeing—benefits. I understand that for someone who is making important decisions about whether to heat their home or put food on the table, the last thing on their mind will be whether to take a holiday, let alone anything fancier than a trip to the city centre. If we want to improve our communities, we must enable such schemes, because there is no doubt that all the problems are reflected in lower life expectancy.

I am going to keep on going until you tell me otherwise, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Do not take it as a given—you have another half minute at the most.

**John Finnie:** Okey-dokey. Thank you.

The Scottish Greens will support Tavish Scott’s amendment tonight. The northern isles have geographic challenges, which does not mean that tourists should not go there. The challenges should be celebrated and tourism to the isles should be supported. Mr Scott said that it is an equity issue, and I agree.

Respitivity is important. Carer centres have an important role to play in signposting people to services and assisting with benefits.

A lot of the issue is about structures and facilities, and a lot of it is about information. It is also about inclusion, so I commend the role of access panels in improving the lot not just of locals, but of visitors to their areas. Fundamentally, this is about changed attitudes, so I welcome improvements in that regard, although there is a way to go. However, I do not sense any complacency. We can have a more equitable future. As the cabinet secretary said, that will require shared endeavour.

15:35

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I thank John Finnie for his speech. I presume that my time is dead on what is allowed and that I will not have any extra time—or maybe I will get extra time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You could speak a little more slowly.

**Sandra White:** I will do my best, Presiding Officer.

I am pleased to speak in the debate, which has been welcomed by people in the gallery and elsewhere, and by members. The speeches have been excellent—and in many cases very moving, which is particularly true of John Mason’s speech.

I thank the many groups and individuals who sent members information about their experiences. In particular, I thank VisitScotland for the information that it provided about training programmes and access statements, which many members mentioned. VisitScotland is doing a grand job.

Fiona Hyslop talked about her memories of great holidays as a kid, as did other members. I certainly have great memories of family holidays in Arbroath—I wrote “freezing Arbroath” in my speaking notes, but I thought that I should score it out—in Leven and in Port Seton, which was not yet called Seton Sands and was not quite as fancy as it is now.

As a family of eight from Govan, we would never have had a break away if it had not been for the fact that my father worked in the shipyards and the trade union and friends were able to get a fund together. We were not the only family to take advantage of the fund—others did, too—but we would never have had a break if it had not been for the social cohesion that there was back in those days, for which I am very grateful.

Although things have changed, they have not changed dramatically for many people out there. Not too many years ago I—along with other people—ran summer play schemes, as we called them. John Mason and other members talked about such schemes, which still go on, offering days out or even a week’s holiday. We took kids from Paisley who had never been down the water to Largs, Millport or Ayr. They had not even been to Glasgow. We took them on the subway—they had never been on the subway—to Kelvingrove. It was fascinating for us and for the kids.

Such schemes must continue, although it is sad that in the 21st century there are still kids who live in poverty and who need them, as Lewis Macdonald said. The social tourism initiatives of VisitScotland and the Family Holiday Association, which John Mason talked about, have provided short breaks for a day or a week for struggling families in Scotland, and two-thirds of those families had never had a break together before.

Social tourism has the potential to help many more vulnerable and disadvantaged families. It helps people who are on low wages or who are having a hard time. It also brings longer-term benefits to society and the economy. For people who can manage to get a break, it is fantastic for their mental health and for other health problems. There is a great need for the approach; some 250,000 families in Scotland are unable to take even a short break, due to their circumstances.

I mentioned ill health. For people who have caring responsibilities, the respite initiative—I am trying to get that word right; it is “hospitality”

but with “resp” on the front—is important and has enabled 564 unpaid carers and their companions to take breaks. The initiative has been provided by the tourism industry—hotels, guest houses, leisure clubs and restaurants—which is absolutely fantastic.

The Scottish Government has also allocated more than £20 million from 2010 to 2017 to the short break fund, which is administered on behalf of the national carers organisations by Shared Care Scotland. That is just fantastic. As has been mentioned, everyone needs a break at some time in their life, so that is an absolutely fantastic initiative.

Before I came to the debate, I wondered whether I should mention this. I know that it is not one of Fiona Hyslop’s Cabinet responsibilities, but I will make the suggestion anyway. We have talked about social tourism helping to tackle deprivation and so on. I am the convener of the Social Security Committee, which is currently scrutinising the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. I wonder whether the issue that we are debating should be included in the bill. When we talk about children living in poverty, perhaps we should consider the fact that they cannot get a break, because that has an effect on how they and their families live their lives. John Mason mentioned the fact that some families have never even sat round a table together. In some cases, the kids are living four, five or six to a room, with absolutely no comfort or even space in which to do homework. Nobody should be living in poverty, so I wonder whether, given that Parliament is scrutinising a bill that aims to eradicate child poverty, the issue that we are discussing should be part of the ethos of that bill. I raise that issue so that perhaps the cabinet secretary will address it in her summing up.

I am pleased to speak in the debate. There are some fantastic things going on out there. We have to move forward and ensure that not just people suffering social deprivation but people with disabilities and caring responsibilities get the same chance of a break as anyone here has.

15:42

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** We have heard from members about the importance of tourism and the vital role that it plays in the Scottish economy. We have also heard about the need to make it accessible to all, and ideas on how to do that. We live in a country that is so blessed with history, beautiful scenery and modern iconic structures—including the Kelpies and the Falkirk wheel in my home town—that it is no wonder that we are a magnet for tourists from throughout the UK and abroad.

In many shops and retail, leisure and tourism areas, however, there are still far too many barriers faced by people with disabilities. Last Friday, I visited Forth Valley Sensory Centre in Falkirk and met the manager, Jackie Winning, and a great group of people who use the centre. A number were visually impaired and others had hearing loss, but every one of them told me of the great job that the centre plays in assisting them in their daily lives, and the value that they place on the services that it provides.

A 2016 survey of people with disabilities reported that only 12 per cent of pubs and clubs were cited as “good” in making access easy for people with disabilities. That means not just people in wheelchairs or who have limited mobility, but people with visual impairments, deafness and other less obvious problems. Only 15 per cent of restaurants, 42 per cent of hotels, 43 per cent of railway stations and 57 per cent of museums and galleries were deemed to be going the extra mile to make life a bit easier, and to enable people with disabilities to enjoy what so many people take for granted—the ability to make the most of our lovely country.

Whether it is in day trips, weekends away, holidays or accessing attractions and facilities, many of our fellow citizens find that the hurdles begin right at the start, when they are checking out locations, travel and hotels. In 2017, that means using the internet and websites. That is often bad enough for people with good vision, but for people with limited or no sight, the challenges are tenfold. Many of Scotland’s attractions, hotels and restaurants need to consider the needs of people with disabilities, and make their websites more user-friendly. Revamping cluttered web pages and enhancing small fonts would certainly go a long way towards assisting people who are looking to access those businesses. VisitScotland has gone a long way towards making its website as accessible as possible for people with visual impairment, through simple use of good contrasts and clear fonts, and by making it easy for people to change background colours and font size.

Catering for people with disabilities makes good business sense. Recent surveys have shown that when people find a business that knows how to make life that bit easier, they are more likely to return to it. Once a booking has been received, a good business can help people with disabilities by giving clear and concise directions to it, especially if people need to use public transport, and by highlighting any pitfalls en route.

As we have heard, accessibility of transport is still a major issue for many people. I am talking not only about physical access, but about use of voice-only announcements—for example, at airports and train stations. There is also the added

difficulty that a bus driver might face in communicating which stop is the correct one for a person to get off at.

In the hospitality sector, priority should be given to keeping clutter away from entrance ways and corridors. Often, performing such simple tasks can be of immense help to many people, so perhaps interior designers could incorporate in décor colour contrasts that would enable more people to see. Perhaps larger establishments could also have staff who are trained in British Sign Language. Happily, ever-growing numbers of older people are still able to enjoy life to the full by visiting hotels, restaurants and visitor attractions. That further increases the need for use of such things as handrails and mid-height electricity sockets.

I will mention the needs of asthmatics. I wish that more hotels would remember that not everyone thinks that feather bedding or duck down implies luxury. A business’s failure to offer an alternative implies that it is yet to wake up to the need to provide full accessibility for people who have less obvious problems.

In the design of new buildings—visitor centres, hotels, museums, music venues, cafes and transport hubs—the needs of people with sensory impairments ought to be built in from the start. I am talking not just about ramps and disabled toilets, but about other aids to make a building more inclusive from the beginning.

Local councils need to be encouraged to install in the vicinity of major venues special crossings over roads that not only indicate when to cross, but provide sufficient time for people with disabilities to cross. People who are able to just rush across the road do not really think about that.

I could go on, but I am delighted to have contributed to the debate, and look forward to the day when our beautiful country truly is accessible to all.

15:47

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I am happy to be involved in the debate for a number of reasons. My colleague David Torrance reminded me of one of them when he mentioned the Scottish Disability Equality Forum, of which I am a patron. After waxing lyrical about the coastline of Fife, he asked what Paisley had to offer. That could have changed the tone of my speech, but I refer him to the *Official Reports* of previous debates.

The main reason why I am pleased to take part in the debate is that I am married to a woman who has a disability. Her disabling condition has changed over the years for which we have been married. I know what it is like for people in such circumstances to arrange a holiday or to go



abroad. The silly wee things that everyone else takes for granted are the things that we have to organise—I say “we”, but it is the royal “we”; Stacey has to do it, because I tend to believe that there is no such thing as a problem that cannot be overcome. Stacey likes to ensure that there is a bit of reality behind that. It is necessary to make sure that the chosen destination is sufficiently accessible for the holiday or break to be enjoyed by husband and wife alike.

When Stacey and I first went abroad when her disability got worse, we went to Rome for a weekend. Rome has been there for a wee while, and it is not the most accessible place in the world, but we did not miss anything. We managed to get ourselves from A to B and managed to see everything. At one point, Stacey said that she had never thought that, as her disability got worse, she would be able to go down side streets and so on—personally, I take all the credit for her ability to do that. However, that is how a disabled person feels in such scenarios.

We are talking about how things can be so much better for disabled people and about the future that we are looking for in that regard. I think that it was John Finnie who referred to access panels. I am a member of the Renfrewshire access panel, whose members used to complain and moan on a regular basis when I first met them about not being listened to and not being involved in processes. There was a list of local matters that they were worried about. However, since then, we have got them involved so that they engage with the local authority. For example, Paisley’s historic town hall has had a £1.7 million revamp, part of which was about ensuring that disabled access was made available at the front of the building. That means that, instead of having to use a side entrance to access an event, disabled people go in with everybody else, which sends the important message to everyone that disabled people are equally important as customers, clients or people attending an event.

The access panel was involved from the design stage in the revamp of the town hall to ensure that the disabled access made no difference to the historic building and that it still looks, and is, the same impressive building. However, it was designed that wee bit differently to ensure that we could bring it into the 21st century and have disabled access as well. When I consider some of the things that have been done locally on disabled access, it is clear that access panels are extremely important.

It is sensible that disabled people visit destinations that offer them support. However, as others have said in the debate, that is not always about physical access. My personal circumstances are about accessibility, with regard to Stacey, but

as the cabinet secretary, Fiona Hyslop, has said, 71 per cent of people with disabilities have non-visible disabilities. Any accessible tourism approach must take that fact into account and ensure that things are designed in such a manner that they are fully inclusive and meet the needs of all potential groups, which means absolutely everybody.

As other members have done, I want to talk about Euan’s Guide. Although Euan’s Guide is not always about accessibility, that is one of the main issues for many people. Euan’s Guide was founded in 2013 by Euan MacDonald and his sister Kiki. A simple night out with a family member who has a disability can require the kind of organisation that was needed for the Normandy D-day landings; for example, we need to know where an accessible toilet is, whether the disabled person can get into a venue and whether they can move about in the venue once they are in. People usually take such things for granted, but it is good to see that we are looking at the way forward for disabled people in that regard. Alison Harris rightly said that if venues are designed to take disabled people into account, they and their family members will visit the venue again. That will help both tourist destinations and the economy. Reference has also been made to training for those who are involved in tourism venues with regard to disabled access, and that is extremely important.

The Euan’s Guide listings provide information about accessible toilets, wheelchair access, hearing loops and many other aspects of access. I know that Euan MacDonald is a keen football fan. We have been talking about access to tourism in Scotland, but another part of the economy is our national sport of football. The experience that a disabled person has at a football stadium varies according to the stadium. I was part of the recent successful fan buy-out of St Mirren Football Club, along with Gordon Scott. One of the first things that we did with the club’s Paisley 2021 stadium was ensure that we had a platform for disabled fans that was at a level that allowed them to see the game and be protected from the elements. That sounds like a simple thing to do, but it does not happen in a lot of football grounds. I am looking at Mr Finnie, who is a supporter of Heart of Midlothian Football Club; its stadium is not too bad, because it has quite an accessible area for disabled fans. However, in many stadiums disabled fans are just left at the front of the stand in an area that is open to the elements, which means that they can get absolutely soaked.

Whether they are football clubs or other businesses, all our businesses have to think about who their potential patrons will be and how inclusive the business will be. Previously, St Mirren FC just had disabled fans down at the

bottom of the stand, but the club now has a platform for them that is probably one of the best in Scotland. We had to fight to keep the temporary disabled platform that was put in place in the north stand of Hampden Park for the Commonwealth games. That shows how, even in this day and age, we still have to have such debates and fights.

This is a fantastic debate. It is great that we and VisitScotland are being serious about the fact that there is a market in tourism for people and families with disabilities. We need to work at that. We need to grasp the opportunity that we have to show that Scotland will go the extra mile to ensure that, regardless of a person's background and abilities, they will still be able to get access to a decent holiday or a venue.

15:55

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

Tourism makes an important contribution to the Scottish economy and, if we want to protect that, we need to have world-leading facilities. Other countries recognise the benefit of their tourism industries and look constantly to upgrade their facilities to meet customer needs.

I like getting out and about to see different parts of Scotland and have no problems recommending it to domestic and foreign tourists. However, getting around some of our most beautiful parts proves challenging for disabled people.

Someone who has mobility problems and depends on a wheelchair can find it challenging because thought has not been put into the design of our tourist attractions. However, it is not just about wheelchair users. We need facilities to take account of different disabilities. People who have limited vision need colour contrast to find their way around facilities. How often are disabled toilets and bathrooms all white? The porcelain, the walls and floor, even the grip handles, shower curtains and, worst of all, the toilet seat are all white. That might be accessible to someone with sight but it is not to someone with impaired vision. The same is true of audible fire alarms in hotels, which are not very reassuring for people who are profoundly deaf. The use of written signs does not work for people with cognitive impairments. The list goes on.

Such basic design considerations should be incorporated into the design of visitor attractions. What makes somewhere accessible to people with disabilities also makes it accessible for everyone. Easily understandable information alongside physical accessibility creates no barriers but allows everyone to enjoy our wonderful facilities.

Euan and Kiki MacDonald set up Euan's Guide—a Trip Advisor for people with disabilities. I am proud that Ryan McMullan, who helped to

pioneer the Inclusion Scotland internship programme in the Parliament, now works with them too. Euan's Guide is a really useful tool. I ask members to imagine their frustration if they decided to go out with family and friends and discovered that they could not access the venue that those friends and family had booked. Euan's Guide gives people the confidence to plan a trip, a meal or simply a drink with friends. It was good to see Euan, Kiki and Ryan in the Parliament last week encouraging MSPs to feed in reviews on accessibility to make it easy for people to plan social events.

Another advocate for accessibility is Mark Cooper, who headed up the barred campaign that fought for legislation to promote accessibility. As other members said, that measure is now in statute, and has been for many years, but is yet to be enacted. It is a simple piece of legislation that forces licensees to think about how accessible their premises are for disabled people.

The people who have driven the greatest change often have a disability. It is often said that necessity is the mother of invention, but all that those people are asking for is fairness, equality and the ability to enjoy what the rest of us take for granted.

Gordon Aikman's work to bring practical initiatives to the attention of the people in power has been mentioned. His writing was really powerful. One piece that especially struck a chord with me described when he was able to get on to the beach with a specially designed wheelchair. The sheer pleasure of being able to do something that we all enjoy and take for granted came across.

I turn to public transport. People need to be able to travel to venues and attractions. I ask members to imagine how it feels if the bus simply drives past because the driver sees a person's wheelchair and cannot be bothered to spend the time to lower the ramp. I know of someone having a day out who was left behind by the last bus 30 miles from home because the ramp did not work. That would put paid to anyone's confidence and the question is whether they would risk going out again.

We have all read about high-profile cases in which wheelchair users have been left behind because of bikes and buggies taking up disabled spaces on buses. We need to provide space for bikes and buggies, but people in wheelchairs are especially vulnerable and, therefore, they must have priority.

People who have vision impairment have difficulty using buses, because there are no audible announcements. People who can see can tell where they are, and there are often signs on buses saying what the next stop is. However,

someone who cannot see has to depend on the driver telling them.

Train travel can be just as bad. Trains have only a couple of wheelchair-accessible spaces, and people need to buy their ticket and then book a wheelchair space—they cannot just turn up, because someone needs to be there to fit a ramp and get them on the train. Even if they book a wheelchair space, there is no guarantee that they will get on the train, because, if someone else in a wheelchair is there before them, they cannot get on, as there are limited spaces. I know of people who have booked correctly and have still experienced problems. It is easy to see how people's confidence can disappear and how they can become isolated because of a lack of access to transport.

The Liberal Democrat amendment takes that issue further by asking for affordable ferry fares for all, noting that disabled people are more likely to face poverty. That is correct, but they are also more likely to have to travel with an assistant or family member, due to the barriers that they will face.

People with disabilities need to enjoy the same freedoms that the rest of us take for granted. When members are out and about, they should assess their journey and experience from the point of view of a disabled person. If members see something that works well, they should put a review on Euan's Guide so that others can use their experience. I was told last week that Euan's Guide does not have enough reviews from the Highlands and Islands, so my mission is to get more people to review facilities in that beautiful region.

The issue is not just about holidays and social interaction. The same principles apply to day-to-day life and access to work.

16:01

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I am delighted to contribute to this Scottish Government debate on inclusive tourism, particularly as I am the constituency MSP for Uddingston and Bellshill, which is home to many amazing visitor attractions. I hope to highlight many of them in this debate, not only because of their interesting features but because of their inclusive and accessible credentials.

Before I come to the many wonders of Lanarkshire, I wish to focus specifically on the issues around access to attractions and places of interest in Scotland. It has to be said that improving the accessibility of tourism products and services has real potential to enhance social equalities, help achieve industry growth ambitions and boost the wider economy. Therefore, inclusive

tourism supports the continuing strategic economic focus on the four Is of innovation, investment, internationalisation and inclusive growth in Scotland's economic strategy. That strategy is being deployed by VisitScotland through its inclusive tourism programme, which involves delivering on its accessible tourism approach with the aim of harnessing the growing inclusive tourism market and helping to make Scotland an internationally recognised inclusive destination, with a resultant increase in economic, cultural and social benefits.

Although I am keen to highlight the inclusive credentials of some of my local attractions and places of interest, I also wish to share a few of the core messages of a report by the Equality Network entitled, "Wish You Were Here—The Scottish LGBT Travel Report", which was emailed to me by the organisation. I would also like to note some examples of VisitScotland's on-going work.

The Equality Network's report highlights key research findings relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender travel and perceptions of Scotland as an LGBT-friendly destination. The report survey had 1,365 total responses, of which 930 were criteria fulfilled. The report outlines that 77 per cent of people consider Scotland to be an LGBT-friendly destination and shows clearly that feeling welcome is very important to LGBT travellers. It also shows that, although the perception that Scotland is an LGBT-friendly destination is quite high among Scottish LGBT travellers, some LGBT individuals from the rest of the UK and abroad feel that there is a need for improvement. I hope that everyone across the chamber can ensure that we do more work on this area as part of our wider considerations on inclusive tourism.

I am delighted that for a number of years VisitScotland has been working with business owners and industry partners and encouraging them to engage with accessible tourism programmes, which has helped position Scotland as an inclusive and accessible destination. I recall that work being recognised in September 2016, when VisitScotland co-organised, with partners at VisitFlanders, a conference on behalf of the European Network for Accessible Tourism. The conference, which the cabinet secretary addressed, focused on best practice in developing and marketing accessible tourism.

More locally, I am aware that, as many members have said, VisitScotland has worked closely with Euan's Guide over the past few years. That has included commissioning the organisation to develop a series of accessible itineraries of things to do and see in Glasgow and in the fantastic Strathclyde park—a place in my constituency that is close to my heart. I am sure

that we all agree with VisitScotland that Euan's Guide is an important partner in advocating Scotland's inclusive tourism programme for businesses. VisitScotland continues to fully support Euan's Guide with its disabled access activities.

On Strathclyde park, the chair of the Lanarkshire area tourism partnership, Mark Calpin, said:

"Lanarkshire offers a variety of accessible attractions and accommodation including M & D's"—

Scotland's theme park—

"the Boathouse Gym, the Alona and the Holiday Inn Express within Strathclyde Country Park. The partnership is committed to welcoming all visitors by improving customer service and information for anyone with additional access needs."

That is exactly what we should be championing today.

When I was researching and considering what to include in my contribution to the debate, I checked out Euan's Guide online and was pleased to see that Strathclyde park had received a review from a user of the park that eloquently puts across the benefits of that space in my constituency. The individual said that there is a multitude of nice areas around the park and the lake, and that

"there is a step free path that goes around the whole of the lake. It's a good place to visit for a change of scene and some fresh air. Lots of activities to keep you active."

Of course, Strathclyde park is not the only amazing attraction in my constituency. I am very lucky to have attractions such as Bothwell castle, which is a historic venue in a beautiful part of my constituency. I also have the fantastic Hamilton racecourse, where many excellent race meetings and various functions are held. However, I recognise that sometimes those amazing spaces and places can be costly to access. The restriction of access by cost is the area on which I will end my remarks.

As Sandra White and John Mason said, many families across Scotland still do not have the opportunity for a break, because of low income or because they are struggling with their situations. We believe—and I believe—that everyone should have the opportunity for a break. The impact for those who do not have the opportunity for a break is huge, and increasing access to tourism holds great potential. In 2016, VisitScotland, in partnership with the Family Holiday Association and more than 30 partners from across the tourism industry, delivered two successful social tourism initiatives, which provided 254 struggling families in Scotland with a short break. Such initiatives truly showcase the best of inclusive tourism, whereby we lend a hand to those who

need it: people for whom a well-deserved break can mean all the difference.

As we move forward as a country, I want us to continue making accessible tourism a priority for people regardless of whether they have accessibility requirements, are LGBT or face financially difficult times, because we all need a break and spaces to escape to. Scotland is a country filled to the brim with potential, not only in tourism but in the most general of senses. I look forward to us continuing to unlock that potential and I once again welcome the debate.

16:09

**Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank Fiona Hyslop for taking me with her on a short trip down memory lane. I remember, as a kid in Glasgow, seeing taxis with balloons and streamers taking children to the seaside for a charitable short break. I also thank Sandra White for reminding me of trips down the river from the Broomielaw to the tail of the bank. Those things had got slightly lost in the clouds of my memory.

Today's debate gives everyone who is taking part the opportunity to speak about why we love Scotland and why so many people come to visit its natural beauty, our illustrious historical sites, the many scenic routes and the fantastic range of attractions and sights for young and old alike—all that before even mentioning Scotland's fabulous food and drink. As the debate has highlighted, tourism is one of Scotland's key economic contributors and, with visitor expenditure totalling more than £5 billion in 2015, it is Scotland's largest industry.

I will speak about my area of the north-east region, although I suspect that it will not be in such eloquent and lovely terms as the Rev Jenny Adams spoke about Moray during time for reflection.

In 2015, almost 400,000 people visited the Dundee Contemporary Arts centre and more than 140,000 people visited the McManus art gallery and museum. Those are two impressive attractions in the centre of the city: one is a world-class centre for the development and exhibition of contemporary art and culture; the other is a museum that charts Dundee's rich industrial history as the city that was once famous for jute, jam and journalism. I encourage members to visit both attractions when they get the opportunity.

Dundee's tourism is set to get an even bigger boost in the next few years with the opening of the V&A museum and the redevelopment of the waterfront. Our hope—it is more than a hope—is that the V&A will be designed to be accessible to all. Those two projects are signs of a city that very much wants to be open for business. They will

have a positive impact on the city by encouraging inward investment and should lead to the creation of new jobs, many of which will be tourism related.

In 2015, the tourism industry supported more than 9,000 jobs in the Dundee and Angus area. Figures such as that demonstrate how important the industry is not only to our overall economic performance, but to local economies the length and breadth of Scotland, particularly rural community economies where many small businesses depend on tourism to survive. We can all share in Scotland's tourism success, but the focus of this afternoon's debate is on how we involve everyone in our tourism industry and how we open it up to those who might feel that they have not yet discovered Scotland, for whatever reason.

Towards the end of last year, outwith the peak tourist season, VisitScotland piloted a scheme that it hoped would put "social tourism on the map". In partnership with the Family Holiday Association, as well as with accommodation, transport and activity providers, it provided a family break to more than 250 struggling families with at least one child who had not had a break for a long time. I suspect that most of us in the chamber take the idea of a family break for granted but, according to VisitScotland, one in three people in Scotland is unable to take a holiday due to cost, ill health or caring responsibilities. In true Scottish fashion, the marketing of the scheme was centred around the spirit of Scotland or, in Twitter terms, #ScotSpirit. At its heart, the campaign was designed to give families the opportunity to get away and to spend quality time together.

At the start of my speech, I spoke about Dundee, a city in which one child in four is recognised as living in poverty and which has the third largest percentage of its population living in the 15 per cent most deprived areas. That is not a record for us to be proud of. Behind those figures are a lot of families who will not have been on holiday together and who will not have travelled in and experienced much of the country in which they live. I hope that they will benefit from VisitScotland's ambition to make sure that everyone is able to experience our tourism industry for themselves.

I confess that before today's debate I was not wholly familiar with the concept of social tourism and I have learned a lot from listening to others. Perhaps that is no great surprise because, unlike in several countries in Europe where it receives public funding, social tourism is a less well-known idea in Britain. However, as VisitScotland's pilot demonstrated, and as has been spoken about today, there are a number of benefits to be reaped from exploring it more—benefits for the young

people and their self-development, benefits for families and benefits for our economy.

To conclude, social tourism is about opening up opportunities for individuals and families. While it is important to go out and promote Scotland to the world, we cannot and must not forget about our people here at home, in particular those who need support to enjoy what some take for granted.

16:14

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** The purple pound is recognition of the spending power of disabled people and their families in relation to tourism, which was estimated to be worth £1.3 billion to Scotland's economy in 2015. The VisitScotland briefing highlights that one of its key priorities is accessible tourism; we can understand why when we realise that there are 12 million disabled people in the UK whose spending power is estimated to be worth more than £200 billion a year.

I was recently contacted by a constituent who has a 16-year-old disabled son, and she highlighted a major issue that impacts on residents and tourists alike—the lack of changing places toilets. In Scotland, there are just 144, including one here in the Scottish Parliament. There is not one at Edinburgh airport, Scotland's biggest airport, although it plans to have one installed next year.

The difficulties that that lack of facilities presents were highlighted by my constituent:

"A significant number of people and their families and carers are unable to access services or visit places because of a lack of adequate toilet facilities. Changing Places toilets enable many people with profound and multiple learning disabilities to participate in the community, but sadly there is currently no legal requirement for provision of these fully accessible toilets, thereby excluding many people with PMLD from leading as normal a life as possible and hugely affecting their quality of life."

More than 230,000 people in the UK require changing places toilets, including those with profound and multiple learning disabilities, people with conditions that may affect their movement such as cerebral palsy and motor neurone disease, people with head or spinal injuries, people living with a stroke and older people who require assistance.

PAMIS, the Dundee-based charity promoting a more inclusive society, is part of the changing places campaign group that seeks an improvement in the provision of CP toilets. It highlighted some of the difficulties when people with complex disabilities require assistance from one or two assistants:

"Without a suitable changing bench, many disabled people have to be laid on the floor to be changed. This is undignified, unhygienic and puts assistants at risk of injury.

In the absence of a hoist, assistants are again put at risk when forced to manually transfer a disabled person who is unable to self-transfer between a wheelchair and a WC.”

My constituent informed me in our meeting:

“The lack of adequate toilet facilities leaves many people isolated, lonely and frustrated. We can’t stray too far from somewhere we can change him. On days when the weather keeps us indoors, my son becomes so bored, lonely and frustrated, he will repeatedly knock the same spot on the wall until his knuckles are grazed and he wears the wallpaper and crumbles holes in the wall.”

The Equality Act 2010 protects disabled people against direct and indirect discrimination and requires that owners of public and commercial buildings take reasonable steps to make sure that their premises and services are accessible. The public sector equality duty requires that public bodies place equality at the heart of everything that they do. The Scottish Government strategy “The keys to life: improving quality of life for people with learning disabilities”, published by the Minister for Public Health in June 2013, sets out a vision for improved partnership working to deliver better outcomes for people with learning disabilities and their families and carers. The strategy outlines some of the risks and inequality experienced by people with profound and multiple learning disabilities of being unable to use toilet facilities when out on a day trip. However, the non-domestic building technical handbook that provides advice to architects and engineers makes it clear that the provision of changing places toilets is at the discretion of the property owner and is not a requirement. Seven years after the Equality Act and four years after the Scottish Government strategy, we need a change to the law to ensure that those facilities are provided to improve the quality of life for disabled people. That will encourage more people who have disabilities and their families to visit Scotland and, in particular, our capital city Edinburgh, and so will create jobs and grow our economy.

Many countries across Europe have recognised the spending power of disabled people. Along with the European disability forum, the European Commission organises the access city awards, which are now in their seventh year. The awards recognise those cities that are examples of best practice in making European Union cities more accessible. Chester is the winner of the 2017 competition. It is the first UK city to win the award, and it was chosen out of 43 cities from 21 countries. What an accolade it would be for Scotland’s capital if we could aim to win that award in future years. The publicity that would be generated would not only encourage many of the 12 million disabled people in the UK to visit, it would also encourage the 80 million EU citizens who are disabled to consider Edinburgh and Scotland as a world-class holiday destination.

If we are serious about accessible tourism, we must address the issues that affect disabled residents and tourists alike. Edinburgh airport has recognised the need to address that issue, and I urge other tourist-related attractions to consider how they can support disabled visitors to enjoy a day out in Edinburgh and across Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** Thank you very much, Mr MacDonald. I call Tavish Scott to close for the Liberal Democrats. You have seven minutes or thereabout, Mr Scott.

16:21

**Tavish Scott:** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

As Gordon MacDonald mentioned Edinburgh airport, I cannot resist making a couple of observations. If he is making representations to the airport, I can give him a few more examples. None of the gates at the far end of the pier—from around gate 11 onwards—has lift access. Mr MacDonald made a strong argument about the facilities at Edinburgh airport. It is the entrance to the capital city for many people who come here on flights from all over the UK and the world, but a mum who has a pushchair, or a person who has a disability or who is old and struggles with steps faces too many gates at Edinburgh that have no lift.

Mr MacDonald was right to highlight, as other members have done, the importance of airports, which are money-making ventures—after all, they have to be profitable to survive—investing in the facilities that are needed. Rhoda Grant was right to say that such facilities help not just people who are going on holiday or taking a short break, but people who are going about their normal day. Mr MacDonald, too, was right to highlight that. He also gave a figure for the value of inclusive and accessible tourism to Scotland.

A number of similar figures have been correctly bandied around this afternoon, but it was the two human speeches—if I may put it that way—that really struck me. The first of those speeches was from George Adam. I am still contemplating the vision of George and Stacey Adam on the floor of the Colosseum and I do not know who would be more frightened—the lions or George Adam. Well, I think I do know who would be more frightened. However, George Adam made a very good point about design-stage involvement, access panels and other ways in which people who have an inherent and deep knowledge of how facilities should be designed should be involved in the design of public and other buildings that are being constructed or adapted to make them more

accessible for wheelchairs or for people who need other assistance. That is a strong case indeed.

George Adam also made a point about St Mirren FC—I was about to call it Love Street because I am too old and when I started watching premiership football, it was Love Street—and the design of modern stadia. I was at Anfield at the weekend and folk in wheelchairs were down at the front of the main stand. George Adam made the good point that, if it is pouring with rain, they are the folk who will get the wettest. That is something for stadium designers to take into consideration.

The second member I want to mention is Jeremy Balfour, who made a series of thoughtful remarks about the importance of facilities being appropriate for use. He made some observations about disabled parking spaces for people who have limited mobility and not just those who have blue badges. He shared the thought with members that the definition of that would create some interesting challenges for local councils and for legislators. Nevertheless, it is an important principle to consider, as is the on-going issue of the abuse of disabled parking spaces by people who just should not be there in the first place.

Jeremy Balfour also made the important point that there needs to be a sense of realism in the discussion, because there will be limitations. In my part of the world, we have the Noss and the Hermaness national nature reserves. They are not the easiest places to get to and it is beyond Scottish Natural Heritage or indeed any of our other agencies to put in place perfectly accessible access to nature reserves when that involves a five-minute ferry crossing in an inflatable boat and then a walk around the cliffs. We need to find other ways for people to experience and enjoy the absolutely extraordinary wildlife and bird life of such parts of Scotland.

Jeremy Balfour made a strong point about the need to recognise that we cannot do everything, although we may wish to. He also had a great couple of lines about enjoying being on a rollercoaster—well, Jeremy, all I can say is that you are on one now; it will last about a couple of years and goodness knows what will happen at the end of it, but that is a different debate altogether.

Rhoda Grant made an important point about facilities being not just for visitors and tourists with disabilities or particular needs, but for everyday life. She rightly made the point that ferry services are, of course, not just for one group of people and that all people will benefit from those services being affordable. In relation to that, James Tait from the Shetland Tourism Association pointed out last year that 78 per cent of local businesses in Shetland described expensive travel costs as

“the main disincentive to visitor tourism and barrier to industry growth”.

My observation to the Government on designing a transport policy that supports the growing tourism industry in Scotland is that it needs to take into account the wider benefits for residents and visitors as well as—in the specific context of this debate—the benefits for inclusive and accessible tourism.

I support the amendment in Lewis Macdonald’s name and the amendment in Dean Lockhart’s name as contributions to the Government’s motion, which we will support from these benches. From the tone of the debate, I suspect that this is very much a matter for broad parliamentary agreement.

16:27

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I, too, welcome the chance to take part. Labour welcomes the Government motion and all the Opposition amendments and we appreciate the support for our amendment from members who have confirmed that so far.

We firmly believe that everyone should be able to enjoy equal access to the many wonderful places and visitor attractions across Scotland. We have heard about many of those places today. We heard about rollercoasters, and sometimes politics feels like a rollercoaster ride, but it has been nice to hear about our common appreciation not only of the places in our regions and constituencies but of the places that we have visited in our younger days or with our families.

It has been nice to hear about our common appreciation of and love for our own little patches of Scotland. However, as the cabinet secretary said, not everyone has equality of access yet, and it is unfortunate that we still have a number of things to do to make sure that everyone can enjoy that equality of access. I was heartened by the cabinet secretary’s opening remarks that she is firmly committed to that equality of access. We can see that determination across the chamber.

The debate is about Scotland’s wonderful places, about equality and about our connections with people and with place. As many colleagues across the chamber have mentioned, it is also about health and wellbeing and about being nice to ourselves and kind to each other. I have learned a lot about other parts of Scotland and I appreciate hearing about other people’s lived experience—I hope that we can all reflect on that. A number of challenges have been raised, which has brought a dose of reality to the debate.

We have talked about physical barriers in the historic environment. With the places that we love because they come from another point in history,

there is always the conundrum that, if we completely change them, they will lose their value. However, given the creative minds and talent that we have in Scotland, it is not beyond us to find solutions.

John Finnie was absolutely right to talk about new buildings and about the constant changes that we face not just in the fabric of buildings but in relation to transport, which colleagues have mentioned, as well as dealing with and maintaining lighting and street furniture. When I am in Hamilton town centre, I get really annoyed about A boards. I know that traders love them, because they want to showcase their businesses in different ways and sometimes they cannot fix signs to shopfronts, perhaps because a building is listed. However, that clutter on the street is a barrier to people who are trying to get around.

David Torrance said a really nice thing when he made the point that the simple things can make the biggest difference. Other members have echoed that, and I think that it is true. John Finnie talked about the importance of equality impact assessments, and we have talked about the work of access panels. It is great that there is a high level of awareness across the chamber of the importance of those things.

I bumped into Alison Harris this morning, and she told me about her visit to Forth Valley Sensory Centre. It is good that she brought that into the debate. Rhoda Grant also made good points, particularly in relation to toilets, which have been talked about a lot and are important. She also talked about public transport and audible announcements. I think that we can all agree that there is work to be done on those issues.

On Labour's amendment, I again put on record our thanks to the campaigner Mark Cooper. His hard work and determination helped to secure change through a provision in the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010. We look forward to the implementation of that. I noted that the cabinet secretary was nodding in a friendly manner when Lewis Macdonald was speaking, so we hope to hear something about that in her closing speech. Dean Lockhart said that, if the sector can lead with changes, that is better than regulation. However, where there is regulation, it has to be implemented and enforced. That is another area where we need improvement.

If we all fell off the rollercoaster that is Scottish politics, there could perhaps be a career for some of us in tourism and marketing. We have heard wonderful tributes to special places in members' areas. Iain Gray gave a moving and impressive speech about Leuchie house. It was a wonderful image to think of someone soaring over East Lothian in a microlight—we have had rollercoasters and microlights. While we are

looking at some of the practical challenges that are faced, it is important that we do not set any limits on the aspiration of making Scotland an equal country. Dean Lockhart mentioned access to national parks, which is important, and he talked about all-terrain vehicles in the Trossachs. There is lots of good work to touch on.

We have heard powerful statements on the issues of poverty and the need for more socially inclusive approaches. John Mason talked about children in London who have never seen the Thames, and we can probably all relate to that in thinking about our constituents and people who we know. I do not know whether Sandra White was just thinking out loud, but she said that we perhaps need to explore the issues through the proposed child poverty bill, which was encouraging.

During the debate, I have been thinking about school trips. Young people often go on trips, which can be to a local museum or a residential trip, with their classmates and their school. However, such trips are beyond the reach of some families. Another issue is that, when everyone comes back after the school holidays, people want to know where others went, and we need to think about the pressure that that puts on young people.

There is much in today's speeches that we can all agree on. We would appreciate members' support for our amendment, which we think is important.

I know that extra time was previously available, but I do not know whether that chance has gone, Presiding Officer. Do I have much time left?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You can have another minute if you like, as long as you speak into your microphone—you have had a wee bit of an issue with turning away from it.

**Monica Lennon:** Okay—I will try.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will you confirm one thing for me? Was Iain Gray in the microlight? I did not hear that bit. [*Laughter.*]

**Monica Lennon:** Yes, with Jeremy Balfour—that is in my next chapter.

Richard Lyle also spoke. He and I are in neighbouring parts of Lanarkshire—

**Iain Gray:** Will the member give way?

**Monica Lennon:** Of course.

**Iain Gray:** As a point of information, I have been challenged by Leuchie house to fly in a microlight to raise money, so I look forward to a donation from you, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have caught me well out there. I agree.



**Monica Lennon:** Perhaps Iain Gray could microlight his way over to Strathclyde park, where he might get a warm welcome from Richard Lyle. Jeremy Balfour would be very welcome to come to M & D's theme park and try out the rollercoasters.

I think that we can all agree that there is lots to offer. I was pleased that Richard Lyle mentioned the submission from the Equality Network. We have talked a lot about disability and about poverty. However, it is important to recognise lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex issues as well. It is encouraging that 77 per cent of people said that they see Scotland as an LGBTI-friendly destination but, again, we can do more to build on our reputation.

Thank you for your generosity, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. That will teach me to intervene from the chair.

16:36

**Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. As members know, I own a hospitality business.

We have heard excellent contributions from all sides about the benefits that tourism can bring to the Scottish economy and about how the sector should—rightly—be proud of what it has achieved. I am sorry that, in closing, I will not be able to mention everybody's wonderful ideas and thoughts.

I will make the same point as Tavish Scott made about George and Stacey Adam. I say to Mr Adam that I find it amazing that they visited Rome. When I went to Rome with my family, I visited the forum, the Colosseum and the Spanish steps, and I found that quite a challenge.

Fiona Hyslop reminded us that there are many reasons why visitors come to Scotland. We have wonderful food and drink and we have exceptional landscapes. We know that accessible tourism is not just about physical access but about opening the doors to those with visual or hearing impairments, learning disabilities and mental health issues.

A number of members have mentioned the value of the tourism industry. As we know, spending by tourists in Scotland generates around £12 billion in economic activity in the wider Scottish supply chain and contributes £6 billion to Scottish gross domestic product. As we celebrate tourism week, I pay tribute to those who work hard to drive the economy, create jobs and attract visitors.

We know that tourism is a growth sector, and people who work in the industry know that there is

always room for improvement. Improvement can come in the form of promoting accessible tourism. We know that an economic benefit can be gained from inclusive tourism. VisitBritain reveals that about £12 billion is spent in that area and that it concerns 18.5 per cent of our total population.

However, there is more than just an economic benefit to developing accessible tourism in Scotland. We need to make that happen and to make it possible for everyone to access Scotland's wonderful tourist destinations. As the Scottish Government website says,

"Tourism is everyone's business—everyone in Scotland is an ambassador."

That leads to Jeremy Balfour's point that we should perhaps have ambassadors to help to deliver the improvement.

I welcome the Scottish Government funding to deliver the aim, which we have heard can break down barriers, whether they are technological or physical ones. Many members have touched on measures that are being implemented, such as the two new accessible tourism destinations—Fife and Edinburgh—and the production of a new guide to help event organisers to make their events more accessible. Also important is the development of a new accessibility guide website and a promotional campaign. I look forward to hearing about further developments in VisitScotland's new programme and about what it will do to encourage businesses to work in partnership with local authorities.

There is much to be positive about. Fiona Hyslop made an excellent point about a shared partnership between hospitality providers and local carers to offer respite. I have to admit that I had never heard of that.

Iain Gray talked passionately about Leuchie house, which is a wonderful respite centre that is based near North Berwick. When I met Mairi O'Keefe, who runs the centre, I said that it is more like a hotel, and she said that that is absolutely the ethos that it tries to deliver.

Iain Gray was completely right about the fun aspect of Leuchie house. People with MS, MND and Parkinson's disease are treated to flights in paragliders. I want to be the first person to donate £10 to Mr Gray's fund, because I would love to see him in a paraglider. In fact, I would quite like to come and visit.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that Mr Gray has opened up a competition. He is doing well.

**Richard Lyle:** Higher!

**Rachael Hamilton:** I will see how Cheltenham goes.

Tavish Scott spoke about the need for better parking and toilet facilities at Historic Environment Scotland attractions, and my colleague Jeremy Balfour spoke about the problems of parking closer to a venue when people do not have a blue badge. He urged members to think carefully about the practicalities of delivering accessible tourism in historic and listed buildings.

It is clear that we need to raise awareness of inclusive tourism. There is not just a need for it to be rolled out further; we need to highlight individuals who practise social tourism but do not publicise it. We need to consider programmes, events and activities that will enable all groups of people—from youths to families, retirees, individuals with modest incomes and individuals with restricted physical and mental capacities—to enjoy tourism. We want everybody to enjoy it.

Alison Harris and Rhoda Grant spoke about the practicalities of delivering accessible and inclusive tourism. I love a feather duvet, but Alison Harris made the good point that asthmatics might not want one.

Studies have shown that most organisations do not know that they are involved in social tourism and therefore do not highlight it. That means that those who are searching for appropriate destinations are not getting full sight of the available appropriate destinations that are out there.

David Torrance highlighted Guide Dogs Scotland. I, too, received a briefing from it yesterday. It is important to note that, when VisitScotland launched its initial accessible tourism project in 2012, the Guide Dogs events were the most popular stakeholder events that guide dog owners wished to participate in. We must ensure that everybody is included. By simply making people aware of what social tourism and accessible tourism are, we can see a concentrated effort to help more people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged backgrounds to experience the joys of a Scottish holiday.

Lewis Macdonald made an excellent contribution on Euan MacDonald's initiative. I wish that I had met Euan MacDonald last week, too. We have heard that Euan's Guide works really hard to raise awareness and remove the fear of the unknown. It provides a brochure that reviews the accessibility of locations and attractions. I looked at its website last night and found that it mentioned Abbotsford house near Melrose, Melrose abbey, the John Gray centre in Haddington and the national museum of flight, which are on my doorstep.

The idea of introducing ambassadors to help disabled people at venues and events is probably quite a good one.

We have heard about members' local accessible and social tourism venues. We have heard about Trossachs Mobility benefits, the beach buggies on North Berwick beach, the work that is done at Aberdeen beach, the Family Holiday Association, Strathclyde park, Hamilton racecourse and the upcoming Victoria and Albert museum.

Many members have mentioned the benefits of a holiday. We know that a holiday provides individuals and families with physical and mental health benefits and with broader educational, cultural and communal advantages. Sandra White said that everybody needs a break, which was a really important comment. I was struck by Tavish Scott's comments on the impact of poverty on aspiration and hope. That says it all.

As has been mentioned, holidays have the potential to tackle social inclusion, loneliness and isolation. That reflects the value that our tourism community brings beyond the economic benefits, and I warmly welcome the hospitality industry's recent generosity in digging deep to help to give a short break to those who ordinarily would not be able to enjoy a holiday.

Last year, I lodged a motion to congratulate VisitScotland on its spirit of Scotland and breaking barriers for families initiatives. I wanted to recognise the advantages that the 300 people from disadvantaged backgrounds had by going on a short break. Today, we have heard about businesses that got involved, such as Hilton hotels. As Dean Lockhart said, such initiatives are often successful when they are sector led.

The Labour amendment is fair in asking for the implementation of section 179 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010. That section means that anyone who applies for a licence must state what disabled access their business provides. As that has been law since 2010, we are happy to support the amendment. We want to know what is happening with the section's implementation.

The wider benefits of holidays are not being experienced by the one in three people who cannot access them because of cost, ill health or caring responsibilities. Accessible tourism can help such groups of people; when they have access, we will see the positive benefits that have been mentioned.

As Dean Lockhart's amendment makes clear, the focus should be on all tourists—on those who live not only in Scotland but outside it. We want to ensure that Scotland remains a welcoming place for everyone, no matter where they are from or what disability they have. I support the amendment in Dean Lockhart's name.

16:46

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am pleased to respond to what has been a thought-provoking and informative debate. Bill Bowman made reference to learning from others. I think that we have all learned something from the debate. There has also been generosity of spirit from across the chamber. The debate has reflected what we want from the spirit of Scotland and how we should be as a nation. It has also helped us to identify what we can do and what we can aspire to.

There has been a sense of realism and challenge, which is also important. Although there has been a lot of content about the good things that are taking place, with good examples being given, that should not lead us to think that we should somehow be satisfied. That is the challenge that we face.

I hope that the debate has been thought-provoking for everyone in the chamber. Increasingly, the key role of tourism is being recognised for the almost unique reach that it has across our economy, our country and our society. I hope that today's debate has given members a chance to see tourism in a new light.

I wanted to bring the debate to Parliament today in order to shine a light on inclusive tourism and to see what more we can do—by bringing the force of Parliament's support—to spread the word, to recognise what is available and to encourage more activity.

One of the first visits that I made as the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs was to the Seagull Trust, which undertakes amazing work to provide canal-based tourism breaks. That reflects a can-do attitude. A number of members referred to that can-do attitude in their speeches; it will be important in how we take forward the issue.

Three amendments to the motion have been lodged. I am happy to support Dean Lockhart's amendment

"to further promote Scotland as an accessible ... destination".

Our work to date is only the beginning of ensuring that Scotland is a destination for everyone. I am also happy to support Lewis Macdonald's amendment to make reporting

"on accessibility a condition of licensing applications".

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice has advised that work on implementation of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 will begin this year. Although there are secondary legislation issues, we will try to ensure that the work is progressed as early as possible. I will ask the relevant officials to keep Lewis Macdonald informed of progress.

I commend Tavish Scott on his ingenuity—he always manages to get his constituency into debates. He raised an important point about the cost of travel. We are working hard to support disabled families through our disability delivery plan, including addressing accessibility and providing decent incomes. I understand that work to reduce ferry fares to the northern isles is under way, and that older and disabled islanders already receive two free return journeys to the mainland a year. I am happy to support his amendment.

Tavish Scott also raised the issue of rates. On the operation of the small business bonus scheme in the tourism sector, I understand that half of premises will not pay rates at all, and that 8,500 businesses will benefit from the cap. Furthermore, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution has—at my request—identified tourism as an issue to consider for the Barclay review of business rates in Scotland.

Inclusive tourism can bring a wide range of benefits. It helps the tourism industry, as we heard. Alison Harris made the point about the need to broadcast the economic benefits more widely to the tourism industry. Other members talked about the social and educational benefits, and wider benefits for families.

When I had my discussion with VisitFlanders, I was struck that its initiative's genesis was in the trade union movement. Sandra White talked about support from the unions that her family—a family of eight from Govan—received, so we should perhaps reflect on that as we proceed with our venture in social tourism. We can and should learn from other countries.

If we want to tackle inequalities in our society, we must identify what can be done. We have to think about how experiences such as regularly going out for a drink in the local pub, taking a day trip to a museum or gallery or getting on a ferry can be made readily accessible for everyone. George Adam's personal reflections were helpful in giving us a sense of the barriers that many people face. Paul and Ryan from Euan's Guide, who I think are here today, know only too well the impact of those barriers.

Members talked about the reviews on the Euan's Guide website. Rhoda Grant described the challenges in her region, the Highlands and Islands, very well; we need more reviews from the area. Recent reviews of the Theatre Royal in Glasgow, which is the city's oldest theatre—as cabinet secretary, I have been involved with the building in the context of funding—and Fife Voluntary Action's premises show what a difference removing barriers can make. The website aims to be accessible to the widest range of people, regardless of technology or ability.

Sandra White, Richard Lyle, Tavish Scott and John Mason talked about how we tackle poverty and what we might do for children. The year 2018 will be Scotland's year of young people, and the aim will be to inspire Scotland's young people to celebrate their achievements, and to create new opportunities for them to shine. The tourism industry could offer many opportunities by enabling young people to travel beyond their own areas, to see something out of the ordinary, to do something different at school or to take a break from caring or other responsibilities. Such experiences can make a huge difference to the lives of young people. Perhaps in 2018 we should collectively challenge ourselves to think about what we can do. Sandra White talked about the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill, which is the responsibility of another minister. We should think about our ambitions for young people in that regard.

Dean Lockhart mentioned Trossachs Mobility. I am keen to learn more; I have met one individual who is involved and was inspired by what I heard.

Lewis Macdonald made a good point about getting behind champions—it is not just about what Government can say and do, although we can provide support and do things through legislation. Lewis Macdonald mentioned Judith Scofield and Dame Anne Begg in that regard.

Tavish Scott mentioned Jarlshof. I will raise the issue with Historic Environment Scotland, which I hope can respond directly to him. It is important to acknowledge what is being done. All the Historic Environment Scotland sites that are open in March took part in a disabled access day, for the first time. We are seeing that approach being taken by a number of our institutions and collections. Historic Environment Scotland has also procured two new mobility vehicles—for Edinburgh castle and Stirling castle—to assist with activity.

David Torrance made thoughtful comments about unlocking potential. I think that unlocking potential, for businesses and for individuals, is a key part of our perspective.

Jeremy Balfour introduced the concept of a rollercoaster analysis. His point about the basic issue of near-access parking is interesting. As someone who—some time ago—used parent-and-child parking spaces at supermarkets, I think that some of our visitor institutions might think about a similar approach to parking. We can also consider use of ambassadors. I also draw to his attention some of the customer excellence schemes that already exist. George Adam referred to access panels, as well.

John Mason brought to life the heart of the debate on social tourism in reflecting on the real impact that it has on real individuals, especially

children. It is important to reflect the feedback of people who have been involved in social tourism.

Iain Gray was inspiring as a champion of Leuchie house, and I am sure that everyone in the chamber would support him in a microlight challenge. He made an important point about families when he talked about the model of care at Leuchie house. That reflects everything that we have been talking about. We cannot treat on their own individuals with learning disabilities or those who need care; they are part of our society and they are part of families. It would be helpful to look at the subject from that perspective as well as from a tourism business perspective, because when such people go on holiday they frequently take someone with them, which requires additional expenditure.

John Finnie talked about taking a rights-based approach to the matter, which I think is an important part of the debate. That also ties in with the debate around young people and children that Sandra White brought into the discussion.

George Adam talked about town halls and football stadiums. There is a challenge with older buildings such as town halls, although Burgh halls is a very old building in Linlithgow that has been refurbished and restored in a very accessible way.

Some very practical things have been talked about. Rhoda Grant talked about colour coding, and there was a focus in some of the later speeches on the Equality Network's issues concerning LGBT visitors in the report "Wish You Were Here".

However, the real theme of our debate must be about how we can ensure that Scotland is more welcoming to all. If we are serious about our economic strategy and about inclusive growth being part and parcel of Scottish society and our economic activity, there is no better case than that for tourism, as a key sector in our economy, of being able to drive the inclusive growth agenda.

For me, the most important statistic relating to the ScotSpirit breaks that we have heard is that 98 per cent of the children had fun and have happy memories of the breaks. That is an almost perfect outcome. We want to create happy memories as well as resilience. We want Scotland to be the sort of country that we want to live in—one in which there is a warm welcome and which is accessible to all. If the debate has done anything to contribute to that agenda, I am grateful for members' speeches. Collectively, we can be pleased with not only the tone but the content, and with the inspiration that many of the speeches have given us today.

## Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-04535, in the name of James Dornan, on the appointment of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. I call James Dornan to speak to and move the motion.

16:58

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** On behalf of a cross-party selection panel that was established under the Parliament's standing orders, I invite members to nominate Bruce Adamson to Her Majesty the Queen to be appointed as the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. The selection panel was chaired by the Presiding Officer and the other members were Jeremy Balfour, Mary Fee, Jenny Gilruth and Tavish Scott.

Although the Parliament is not subject to the code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies, we followed the guidelines to ensure that best practice was observed and that the process was fair. On behalf of the panel, I thank Louise Rose, the independent assessor who oversaw the process and has provided the Parliament with a validation certificate confirming that the process complied with good practice and that the nomination is made on merit after a fair, open and transparent process. I also thank all the children and young people who participated in our survey, which sought their views on the role of the commissioner and the issues that concern them.

As members will be aware, the role of the commissioner is to promote and safeguard the rights of children and young people in Scotland. In particular, the commissioner must promote awareness and understanding of the rights of children and young people; keep under review the law, policy and practice relating to the rights of children and young people; promote best practice among service providers; and publish research on matters relating to the rights of children and young people.

The commissioner is also required to lay before the Parliament an annual report, which is scrutinised by the Education and Skills Committee. The report must include information on any issues that he has identified in relation to the rights of children and young people, the activities that he has undertaken to fulfil his functions and any recommendations arising from his work, and it must provide an overview of the work that is to be undertaken in the following year, including how he intends to involve children and young people in his work. I look forward to hearing from the new

commissioner about his work and achievements in due course.

I turn to our nominee, who is in the gallery with his family. Bruce Adamson was the unanimous choice of the panel from a strong field of candidates. Bruce is a lawyer who has more than 20 years of experience in children's rights. He currently works at the Scottish Human Rights Commission and has been central to the development of law, policy and practice covering the broad spectrum of children's rights. He represents the commission on the United Kingdom's national preventive mechanism under the convention against torture and has extensive experience of inspecting places of detention in Scotland and other countries. He is also a member of the children's panel and has worked directly with vulnerable children and their families, listening to their experiences and making decisions about their safety and wellbeing.

The panel believes that Bruce will be an excellent champion for the rights of children and young people, and that he will bring to the post energy, enthusiasm and commitment. I am sure that the Parliament will want to wish him every success in his new role. I think that the Parliament will also wish to thank the outgoing commissioner, Tam Baillie, and to wish him well for the future. *[Applause.]*

I move,

That the Parliament nominates Bruce Adamson to Her Majesty The Queen for appointment as the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland under section 2 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2003.

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

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The first question is, that amendment S5M-04576.1, in the name of Dean Lockhart, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04576, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on inclusive tourism, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-04576.2, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04576, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on inclusive tourism, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-04576.3, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S5M-04576, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on inclusive tourism, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-04576, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on inclusive tourism, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the vital role that tourism plays in Scotland's prosperity, not only in its direct economic impact, but in the many ways that it can help to tackle the inequalities that exist in society; notes the recent collaboration by VisitScotland, the Family Holiday Association, Historic Environment Scotland and the many industry partners to provide ScotSpirit Breaks for families in difficult circumstances, which has shown the positive impact that the industry can have on improving the lives and life-chances of people who are not able to step outside their everyday routine; commends organisations such as Euan's Guide for their work with public partners and private sectors in making tourism more inclusive through the development of access statements for facilities and services, along with accessible travel itineraries; congratulates destinations and individual businesses, right across Scotland, on how they are making use of these tools to help widen opportunities, not only for people with permanent disabilities, but also parents with young children, senior travellers and people with temporary injuries and their travel companions; considers that tourism is for everyone; welcomes the continued support of public and private partners and the tourism industry itself in their willingness to work together, aiming to further develop inclusive tourism as an overarching approach so that all of Scotland can reap the many social and economic benefits that it can bring and to further promote Scotland as an accessible visitor destination for all tourists from other parts of the UK and worldwide; looks forward to the implementation of section 179 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, which will make reporting on accessibility a condition of licensing applications and renewals; acknowledges that the cost of travel to and from the Northern Isles serves as a barrier for many families and individuals; notes, for example, that households with at

least one disabled family member are more likely to live in poverty, and agrees that a reduction in ferry fares to Orkney and Shetland would extend the potential of accessible tourism to the whole of Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S5M-04535, in the name of James Dornan, on the appointment of the new Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament nominates Bruce Adamson to Her Majesty The Queen for appointment as the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland under section 2 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2003.

**The Presiding Officer:** I, too, thank our outgoing commissioner, Tam Baillie, and congratulate Bruce Adamson on his appointment and wish him well in his term of office. [*Applause.*]

## Play Scotland (Play Charter)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-03584, in the name of Ruth Maguire, on welcoming Play Scotland's play charter. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the promotion of Scotland's first inclusive Play Charter by Play Scotland, a group which works to promote the importance of play for all children and young people in Cunninghame South and across Scotland, and campaigns to create increased play opportunities in the community; understands that the charter describes a collective commitment to play for all babies, children and young people in Scotland, in line with the right of children to play as set in out in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); further understands that the charter builds on the Scottish Government's National Play Strategy and the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach to supporting children, young people and their families; notes the charter's aims of highlighting that every child has the right to play and the importance of play, ensuring that a commitment to play is more strongly embedded within policies, strategies, key qualifications and Continuous Professional Development training, ensuring that children and young people are supported in their right to play and that play spaces are valued within communities, inspiring individuals, play providers and organisations to promote a range of inclusive play opportunities, and to bringing back the sight and sound of children playing in communities; notes that all MSPs have been encouraged to become Play Champions by pledging their support to the charter, and wishes Play Scotland every success in its ongoing campaign.

17:04

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** I thank all the MSPs from across the Parliament who signed the motion allowing the debate to take place, and all those who have stayed to participate in or to watch the debate.

I need to make a special mention of play champions in my constituency at St Luke's primary school and early years in Kilwinning. I visited the school on Friday and was hugely impressed by its commitment to play. Finn, one of the early years pupils, gave me a brilliant guided tour of their junkyard garden, of which they are rightly proud—thank you, Finn.

I extend a warm welcome to all our visitors in the public gallery, particularly Marguerite and Sharon from Play Scotland. I am grateful for all the good work that they do in encouraging play, and I look forward to joining them and their colleagues after the debate for a reception in committee room 5—members are, of course, encouraged to join us.

The debate is about the importance of play and of children's right to play. Growing up in the

1980s—or the olden days, as my daughter calls them—the opportunity to be outside playing was something that my friends, my brother and I took for granted. We went exploring on our bikes, built ramps and bogies, and had games of kerby that went on all day. We also used to play games involving our favourite television shows, with “The Fall Guy” being the one that I remember vividly, which involved us in trying our best to emulate the characters Colt, Howie and Jody by climbing and jumping off things. I do not remember any serious injuries, but I remember the occasional gentle warnings shouted by our mums to “get off the garage roof”, or that “someone's going to end up breaking something soon”.

The other day, the Minister for Childcare and Early Years, Mark McDonald, tweeted a picture of some magnificent chalk art on his street that brought a smile to my face, as that was another thing we used to play at when we were younger and I had not seen it since my girls were young. It was another great play activity that provided them with hours of amusement.

The United Nations definition of children's play is

“any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise.”

In other words, play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons. Play is also frequently described as what children and young people do when they are not being told what to do by adults. Play is an essential part of every child's life, and it is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as for children's social, emotional, intellectual and physical development.

The importance of play was unequivocally recognised when it was enshrined as a right in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into force in 1990. Article 31 of the convention states:

“Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.”

Article 31 was lent even more force in 2013, when the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted general comment 17, which clarifies and underlines for Governments worldwide the meaning and importance of article 31, as well as their obligations to “promote, protect and fulfil” children's right to play by means of appropriate “legislation, planning and budgets”. The comment states:

“While play is often considered non-essential, the Committee reaffirms that it is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an

essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development.”

The fundamental value of play is also recognised by the Scottish Government, which launched Scotland’s first national play strategy in 2013. The strategy recognises the life-enhancing nature of play and affirms a commitment to enabling all children and young people to realise their right to play, in particular through facilitating sufficient space and time for play and promoting positive support for play.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I thank the member for taking an intervention and for bringing the debate to the Parliament. She makes an essential point about providing the facilities and the time for play. I get feedback locally about the deterioration of facilities such as play parks. Could more be done through liaison between the Scottish Government and local government to ensure that such facilities are maintained so that enjoyment can be provided?

**Ruth Maguire:** I thank Liam McArthur for that intervention. His question is more for the Government than for me, but I would say that it is not always about play equipment; it is about the space and time for play. That can mean ensuring that the green spaces that we have outside are accessible. For example, one of the most depressing things that we see is a “No Ball Games” sign on a bit of pristine grass that looks perfect for football.

The play charter describes our collective commitment to play for all children and young people, in line with article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It builds on both the Scottish Government’s play strategy and the getting it right for every child approach to supporting children, young people and their families. It is hugely important in positively promoting play and providing a clear reference and rallying point for everyone with an interest in and responsibility for play.

I encourage all the MSPs who signed the motion also to consider pledging their support for the charter, becoming play champions and encouraging relevant individuals and organisations in their constituencies to pledge their support for the play charter, too. Let us do all that we can to ensure that the children and young people in the communities that we serve can enjoy all the wonderful opportunities to play that we did. It is their right. [*Applause.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Although I know that people in the public gallery will appreciate some of the things that are said, I ask them not to clap after each speaker. I will give them the opportunity to show their appreciation when the meeting closes.

17:10

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing the debate to the chamber and giving us the opportunity to discuss a topic that is, as everyone present knows, close to my heart, and about which I am extremely passionate.

I have said many times in the chamber that education is a major solution to health and welfare issues. A key element of that is the impact that physical literacy can have on health inequality and the attainment gap. I maintain that we can close neither the attainment gap nor the health inequality gap—in terms of physical health and mental health—without fully addressing the physical literacy deficit that exists in tandem with other inequalities.

From a physiology perspective—allow me to get this out of the way first—we know that the cardiovascular system, the neuromuscular system and bone density, as well as neural pathways that are important in speech, listening skills, behavioural traits and attention capacity, are all established pre-school. We all intrinsically understand that a child who is given the opportunity to be active outside the classroom is more likely to have positive behaviour traits inside the classroom, is more likely to engage in the classroom and is, therefore, more likely to achieve.

However, we seem to be obsessed increasingly with making children sit still all the time. It is unnatural. Part of the brain switches off in youngsters if they are forced to sit still for too long without any physical activity. Children are not built to sit still. Good grief, Presiding Officer—I am not built to sit still! I would be in constant trouble with you if part of your remit was to get MSPs to sit still with their arms crossed and to sit up straight. There would be a naughty step on which I lived all the time.

That brings us to the importance of active play—especially in the early years. As I have said before, youngsters want to move about a lot with their peers. In doing so, they set patterns for life and learn interaction skills, confidence, resilience, self-awareness and awareness of others—all behaviours that are much more difficult to learn sitting still in a nursery or classroom, but which have a huge influence on outcomes from the classroom. We have not got that right yet. We need to consider how we give every child the opportunity for outdoor and indoor play: climbing, jumping—in puddles, if necessary—falling down, getting back up, catching, throwing and all the other ways that they can invent to learn in their own ways.



That is the blueprint for life. That is how we tackle preventable ill health and stack the cards in our favour. It is how we give ourselves a better opportunity to tackle the obesity crisis, diabetes, musculoskeletal issues, chest, heart and lung issues, not to mention rising mental health issues, all of which disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged people in our society and which—apart from anything else—cost our national health service billions of pounds.

That is what I mean when I talk about behavioural drivers. I maintain that, if we could get our youngsters active at the earliest opportunity and give them the pathway to remain active all through their school years, the chances of their choosing not to smoke, not to take up alcohol, not to be overweight, and to eat well and to have good mental health would be hugely increased. We have to look at access to such opportunities and we have to break down the barriers to participation.

I had the powerchair footballers from the South Ayrshire Tigers in Parliament today. I have often mentioned them and the fact that they hammered an MSP football team last year. If members ever want to understand what having an opportunity to participate means and the impact that it can have on lives, they should speak to that team. They are just the most amazing group of people. Participation has taken them out of isolation and into the mainstream.

That all starts with access to active play, and with the premise that it is every child's right to play with their friends, get dirty, be noisy and be sociable, irrespective of background or personal circumstances—all the things that we took for granted when we were kids. In my view, that is the basis of solving many of the problems that we see in our society today.

Once again, I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing the debate to the chamber and for allowing me another chance to rant about my very favourite topic.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You know, I am liking the idea of a naughty step.

**Brian Whittle:** That worries me.

17:15

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I thank my colleague Ruth Maguire for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

Children have a right to play, as enshrined in article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but the issue is about much more than that: we all know that play is what teaches our children social skills, how to compromise and how to be tolerant and resilient. Play is the universal

language of childhood. Even young animals play: we buy toys for our dogs, cats, rabbits and hamsters. The benefits of play in the developing years simply cannot be overstated.

However, not all children are lucky enough to be given encouragement to play or to be bought toys that most children come to expect. As a former children's panel member, I have seen children who were so neglected and starved of attention that they had to be taught how to play. It was then that I realised what an important part of a child's development play is.

Since 1998, the benefits of Play Scotland's inclusive strategic approach have been significant. It aims to ensure that no child is left out. The play charter challenges barriers and ensures that discrimination and stigma based on age, gender, disability, ethnicity, poverty or low income have no place in affecting children's play experiences, so that all children feel included.

As was outlined by Brian Whittle, the benefit of play to the physical, emotional and mental health of children and young people is immense. Through play, they are able to develop social skills and responsibility, to appreciate the environment and to participate in sports, art and culture. That grows their identity and self-esteem and, in turn, makes them less likely to offend and to engage in antisocial behaviour in later life.

I welcome the positive development that we have heard about, which builds on the Scottish Government's national play strategy and the getting it right for every child approach to supporting children, young people and their families.

The play charter's commitment to training adults so that they can support high-quality play experiences in a variety of places where children play is also positive. Those places include nurseries and childcare venues, schools, children's services facilities, out-of-school clubs and holiday schemes. The approach works to ensure high-quality play experiences across key areas that contribute to children's development and growth, and which affect their daily life experiences.

The play charter supports children's participation in the planning, development and evaluation of play services, recognising them as play experts and seeking out their views. Of course, that ensures that children and young people are engaged and that the play charter is reflective of their interests and needs. Play Scotland's campaigning through the play charter to ensure that play is more strongly embedded within policies, strategies and key qualifications is welcome with regard to making sure that we get it right for every child.

We must all encourage children to play, and we must create the correct environments—indoors and outdoors—where they can do that. Play is not a luxury for our children—in my view, it is essential to the health and wellbeing of future generations.

I wish Play Scotland continued success in its campaign and would be happy to be a play champion. I wish it well in its attempts to raise awareness of the benefits of play and of providing inclusive play experiences for children across Scotland.

17:19

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I, too, thank Ruth Maguire for bringing this debate to the chamber—not least because it gives me another opportunity to talk in the chamber about my children. It is always a delight to do so.

One of the most recent innovations in my household is that my 18-month-old daughter has taken to leaving the sitting room and pulling the door closed behind her while saying “Buh-bye”—then, a couple of moments later, a wee smiley face pops round the door going, “Ello”. That demonstrates the importance of play. By doing that, my daughter is exploring language, learning how to use words and, what is more, having a wee laugh while she does it. That encapsulates just how important play is in the development of children.

We are right to talk about the importance of article 31 and children’s right to relax, play and take part in cultural and artistic activities, but the issue is much more important than that, because it is about how our children learn. The insight that children need to play in order to learn goes back to the early 20th century. The importance of play to children’s cognitive and emotional development, to their ability to self-regulate and to their language development has been well demonstrated. The 16 most powerful predictors of children’s academic achievement are based on how well they learn to play, so it is concerning that the area in which children are allowed to range and play unsupervised has shrunk by 90 per cent since the 1970s. The debate is important and we need to talk about the issues because play is not just our children’s right, but what they need in order to learn.

I will talk briefly about an Edinburgh scheme in which I took part last year: the playing out scheme. As a result of frenetic activity and lobbying by a group of parents, a number of roads in Edinburgh were closed for a single day so that children could go out and play. It was fantastic. There was chalk drawing on pavements and bicycle races going up and down the roads, and parents were standing talking, drinking coffee and sharing home baking.

There were huge benefits—not just to the children but to the adults and the communities in which they live. This year there will be a five-month-long pilot from April to August. Streets can be closed on five dates in that period. The council has prepared a simple checklist and application form, and it is free for parents to apply to take part. The scheme is a demonstration of a simple thing that addresses many of the challenges. It enables and makes it easy for parents to take the initiative, and it is exactly the sort of thing that we should be considering.

We should welcome the play charter, which sets out a number of great things, but it is key that we ensure that the actions are embedded in policy. The play strategy that the Government has set out is right, but we also need to set out the challenges. One in six children in Scotland does not have access to outdoor space, 85 per cent of children in Scotland say that they do not spend enough time engaged in free play, and more than 1,000 Scottish schools have no access to outdoor facilities. We must just offer warm words and support the actions, but instead set challenges for the Government.

This is a consensual debate and it should remain so, but when we talk about facilities, we need talk about local services and the impact of local funding. We must have some innovation. Schemes such as playing out will come at little cost to local government. We should consider whether we should be opening our schools during summer holidays in order to enable play and to address issues of childcare in the holidays. We also need to talk about local services. If we are to have accessible and stimulating parks in which our children can play, that requires investment in local services.

I thank Ruth Maguire for securing the debate: the topic is hugely important. We should all champion play, but we should also challenge the Government: let us have some action and let us have some investment.

17:23

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I share Daniel Johnson’s approval of the playing out days. I actually chucked on Abbotsford Crescent during playing out day last year. When the street was closed it attracted not just children: people from toddlers to 80-year-olds were there. The scheme turned the street into a place for people.

I thank Ruth Maguire for securing a debate on what is an important issue. We can all do more to safeguard and promote the rights of children, and the right to play is absolutely central to children’s experience. We know that challenging, active play is essential for children’s health and wellbeing,

and when we look at rates of childhood obesity it is clear that we can and must do better. A recent study led by the University of Strathclyde showed that children's levels of physical activity begin dropping off as early as the age of seven.

We have much to do. We need to push for a more child-friendly, play-centred society, and that requires a cultural shift. Ruth Maguire spoke about a "No ball games" sign. Just down the road from where I stay there is a little cul-de-sac that was tailor-made for children's play, but residents woke up one morning and guess what was there? A "No ball games" sign. It took quite a lot of work to have that sign removed. How many children have had their sporting skills and physical activity held back by that kind of intolerant attitude?

Developing child-centred communities is crucial, and ensuring that nurseries have adequate outdoor space has to be at the heart of any planned expansion of childcare provision in Scotland. My colleague John Finnie recently shared a photo on Twitter of a sign that said "Play street from 4 pm until sunset". If members could have found any space to play between the parked cars, they are more able than I am at imagining how to play in that busy urban space.

There are simple steps that we can take. If we had space for wellies and waterproofs in primary school changing areas—and they were provided as a matter of course—there would be no such thing as an "indoor break time" just because it was a little wet outside. We all know the impact of children who are bursting with energy and how difficult it is for them to sit down and focus—that is not fun for teachers or for pupils.

We can all agree that children's needs have rarely been at the heart of planning processes. Article 12 of the UN convention gives children a right to be consulted, for their views to be given due weight and for them to be heard in matters that affect them, but how often are children truly involved in consultations about residential developments and planning decisions about places where they can play? The space afforded to play areas in some developments is meagre and their design is dull, to put it politely. In the play area closest to my home, one would have to have the hands of a man of 6 foot 5 to be able to hold on to the bars. It would never have been designed that way if toddlers had been asked what they wanted.

That said, there are some excellent examples of challenging play spaces for children and families. The fantastic play project the Yard in Edinburgh shows how inclusive play can be. I am glad that Scotland's play charter stresses that we must promote inclusive play and ensure that our play environments meet the needs of children with disabilities, too. Sadly, too many children in

Scotland do not have appropriate access to places to play.

Good-quality housing also plays a part. Too many new homes lack adequate space for children to play indoors or outside. Who has room for a sandpit or a little water table in a small two-bedroom flat? Shelter Scotland's recent report showed that families with children spent almost 1 million days in temporary accommodation last year and that 13 per cent of families with children who needed temporary accommodation were there for longer than a year. Those children are being badly failed on their right to play in their homes.

Playing outdoors is more difficult than it should be. Traffic poses a barrier to outdoor play and a 20mph speed limit across all built-up areas would make it much safer, and would also improve air quality.

Article 31 of the UN convention established the right to play for all children and young people up to the age of 18. In any future work, I ask the Scottish Government to not forget that the right to play, to explore one's environment and to socialise does not stop at the age of 10, 12 or 15—it goes on. We should work together to promote the charter and the right to play.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are still quite a few members who wish to speak in the debate, so I will be happy to accept a motion without notice under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Ruth Maguire*]

*Motion agreed to.*

17:29

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I thank Ruth Maguire for lodging the motion and for bringing Scotland's first play charter to the chamber. For years, experts from health and education have called for an inclusive, formal play charter to ensure that every child in Scotland is given the opportunity to play, explore and develop. Today, thanks to Play Scotland, the charter is a reality.

We all know the importance of play in developing happy, healthy, well-rounded young children. From our getting it right for every child approach to the play strategy action plan, play is at the heart of guaranteeing the wellbeing of children, and we want Scotland to be the best place for children to grow up. By supporting the play charter, we can show our commitment to that valuable cause.

As the debate has progressed, I have thought back to my childhood, particularly up to the age of eight when I lived in Kelvingrove. I spent a lot of time building dens, climbing trees and in disused railway tunnels; I sneaked in through tunnels to the old sweetie factory and looked for tunnels under Yorkhill hospital when I was not actually digging them. I also dug for treasure under Glasgow art gallery before sneaking in to count the nipples on the statues, as young boys invariably did. My tunnelling did not quite extend to Steve McQueen's, trying to get a motorbike over the Swiss border, but my childhood was extremely adventurous.

When I became a father, I tried to continue that approach with my children, taking them to the forest to look for trolls—which are a notorious problem in the Campsies—and river rafting and canyoning. I wrestled with them as often as possible, which my wife criticised me for heavily until a *Sunday Times* article pointed out the importance of rough-and-tumble between fathers and male children in particular—although my daughter was much more violent and unforgiving than her two brothers.

The benefits of play are huge and well proven, not just for ourselves but for our communities, where play still forms an integral part of life for young people of all backgrounds. It is important that children have the freedom to construct their own play. Let us take the example of the Eglinton country park inclusive play area, which opened in North Ayrshire in 2011. The space is available for boys and girls of all physical, mental and social abilities. It was designed in consultation with four special needs schools in North Ayrshire, by listening to what children really wanted: a space to allow them to develop and explore the world in their own way. That project has been successful, and sheds light on what Scotland's play charter is all about. Inclusive play means that no child is left behind, and that we continue to address the barriers that prevent children from enjoying play, no matter what the circumstances. I hope to see other such projects flourish throughout my constituency and across Scotland.

As we all know, the right of children to relax and play is formally enshrined in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by the UK in 1991. Under the convention, our children have a right to play regardless of age, gender, disability, ethnicity and socioeconomic background. I thank Play Scotland for doing such an excellent job in increasing awareness of the importance of play to the development of children and young people in Scotland. I welcome the fact that 88 per cent of households now have access to some form of play area in their neighbourhood, although more could be done to ensure that those play areas are accessible, safe and inclusive for

all—particularly for the 12 per cent who do not have access.

I am heartened to see that many MSPs have pledged themselves to Scotland's play charter and I hope that many more will join the list in the coming weeks. We can demonstrate our commitment to play in our policies and strategies, and inspire individuals, play providers and organisations to promote a range of play activities that are inclusive of all children.

I look forward to working with Play Scotland to find further opportunities to remove barriers to inclusive play in my Cunninghame North constituency, to help ensure that we really do get it right for every child. Regardless of whether children play on their own or with friends, whether play is loud and boisterous or quiet and contemplative, whether it is spontaneous and creative or serious and strategic, it is time for us all to take play much more seriously in our homes, our schools and our communities.

17:33

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** One of my favourite programmes when I was growing up was "Why Don't You?" which challenged us to switch off the television and go and do something more useful instead. It gave lots of ideas about how to play. That was really important for me and my younger brothers as we were growing up. Suddenly our world was given a new horizon. We could go into the back garden and see it not as only a back garden, but as many different things. Many happy hours were played there.

I welcome Play Scotland here this evening and apologise that I will not be going to its reception because I will be rushing off to play with my children at home after this debate.

I touch now on a slightly different area, because some parents do not know how to play with their children or how to encourage their children to play.

When my two young girls were slightly younger, we used to go to an organisation called Dads Rock here in Edinburgh. Dads Rock was set up to encourage fathers to play with their children. There is still a legacy from many decades back that means that fathers perhaps do not interact and play with their children as well as mothers do. On a Saturday morning, Dads Rock simply brought together children and their fathers and gave them tools and a framework to learn to play. It worked really well. Not only were we allowed a snack, which my wife would never let us have at home, we actually got to play with toys and books, and we were given a framework within which to do that. The only sad thing was that although the organisation was located in a more deprived part of the city, it was middle class people coming in

from middle class areas who benefited from its free service.

When we talk about play, we need to look at how we encourage all fathers and mothers, whatever their background, to interact and to take the time to play with their children. We all live very busy lives. We all have emails to answer and work to do in the house. We all have pressing demands on us. I suspect that, too often, playing with our children drops down our agenda. We need to send out the message that, if the washing is not done just when it should have been done because people are playing with their children, that is a sacrifice worth making.

The second area that I want to cover has already been mentioned by two members, and that is the playing out scheme in Edinburgh. I too attended the event last year. If we can recapture that, even in a limited situation, and close streets off so that children can again learn to play on the street with each other and with parental supervision and input, we will start to break down barriers.

I thank Ruth Maguire for lodging the motion and highlighting a really important issue, and I wish Play Scotland all the best as it moves forward along with other organisations and seeks to encourage us all, whether we are grandparents, parents, uncles or aunts, to play with children and to encourage them to play in appropriate ways.

17:37

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** I, too, thank Ruth Maguire for bringing the debate to Parliament. As parents, we sometimes find it too easy to fear for our children's safety, and it can become a habit to keep children indoors and off the streets. Time feels increasingly scarce and, if a parent works shifts or is a single parent, it can be a challenge for them to send their children outside rather than keep them indoors, especially when they know that a child who is using their computer or watching TV indoors is safe and secure.

We should not lose sight of the benefits of play from an early age. For infants, programmes such as the baby brain workout, which Barnardo's promoted during last year's infant mental health awareness week, identify play as a key pillar of infant learning and emotional development. As Brian Whittle said, early interaction is important for the neurobiological development of infants' brains.

Children who play outside with others grow into curious, well-adjusted adults who not only are healthier but develop key social skills. Play stimulates and enhances learning, and it fosters creativity, which means that the time that we value indoors—such as time that is spent reading

books—should be balanced with time outdoors to consolidate learning.

Outdoor play is a great leveller. It allows those who come from more challenging backgrounds to get some of the same stimulation and fun as those who come from wealthier families get. We should create spaces for play that reflect the understanding that children have different abilities and interests. We should also bring children of different interests and abilities together by using universal design, rather than separate them into overspecialised spaces.

Breaking the monoculture of public spaces is a good thing. Not all children are interested in a football pitch or able to take advantage of the facilities that are focused on able-bodied children. However, the biggest obstacle to play, especially in more deprived communities, is a lack of play spaces, as we have heard from some speakers.

In my constituency of Rutherglen, the redevelopment of Cuningar loop has been a fantastic step towards giving everyone the opportunity to play and to reconnect with the outdoors in their own way. The loop is set in 15 hectares of what was derelict land—the size of 15 football pitches—and it has been transformed into a community green space for local people and visitors to get involved, get active and be inspired by the outdoors. In one cohesive space, it has walking and cycling facilities, a workout area and Scotland's first outdoor bouldering park, as well as picnic and outdoor classroom facilities. It was part funded by the Scottish Government as part of the 2014 Commonwealth games legacy and it provides just the sort of opportunities that Scotland's play charter is looking to achieve.

The Scottish Government has invested £7 million through the go play and go2play programmes to support play for children in disadvantaged communities across Scotland. Women's Aid in South Lanarkshire has received funding from the go2play capacity building fund to introduce free play clubs. The clubs allow primary school-aged children who have experienced domestic abuse the opportunity to play with peers in a safe environment. The organisation also promotes the benefits of play for children from challenging backgrounds.

Through an active commitment to the value of play, we can target improving mental health, educational attainment and social mobility. A happy, stimulated and socially integrated child has a far greater chance of leading a fulfilling and happy life. Along with the Government, I believe in the value of play in improving the lives and the life chances of children in Scotland. That is why I have pledged my support to the charter and have signed up to become a play champion. I

recommend that everyone in the chamber should do so too, to support our young people.

17:42

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing tonight's debate to the chamber. I apologise to her and to the minister for having to leave before the end of the debate to make a constituency engagement.

I want to say a few words because of the importance of play to children's development and early learning. A great deal of research provides us with clear evidence of that. I have seen the importance of play with my own eyes because, in previous jobs, I have seen children and their parents trying to do the best that they can in the most difficult circumstances—in circumstances of war, of displacement or of grinding and almost unimaginable poverty. It is remarkable that, no matter how difficult the circumstances, children will still find a way to play and a way to exercise their imaginations with the most limited resources.

We must understand that the importance of play is an international issue. I know that Play Scotland is part of the International Play Association. In the previous parliamentary session, the IPA's executive body met here once. I hosted a meeting of the IPA's board in the Scottish Parliament as the IPA wanted to show its interest in what was happening in Scotland.

The right to play is very much an international issue, which is why it appears in article 31 of the UNCRC. However, it is right that we look to home and do not assume that just because we do not have the particular difficulties, everything is fine, because it is clear from many of the contributions that it is not and that we could do better.

I will make a couple of remarks on one or two issues that have come up. In the play charter, Play Scotland is very clear that children's right to play is not an add-on; it must be embedded in our approach to parenting and to early learning. That is critical.

In passing, I mention the excellent programme support from the start, which East Lothian Council runs as part of its early learning strategy. The programme provides many opportunities, particularly but not solely in the school holidays, for children to play and for their parents to learn more about how to support effective play.

Places are important to play. That really matters and it is a big factor in the concern that many have expressed about the reduction in recent years in the opportunity or capacity to play outside and in children being allowed to play outside. Daniel Johnson mentioned concerns about the number of school playing fields being reduced. That is not the

case in East Lothian Council's area, where 86 per cent of our schools have playing fields, which is the second best percentage in Scotland.

A local authority's approach to school playing fields is reflected in its approach to the greater community spaces that Clare Haughey spoke about. For example, again in East Lothian, there has been tremendous effort by a community group that supports Cuthill park, which has transformed the park and the play opportunities there. On Saturday, the group will launch the latest of those—the woodland learning zone.

Finally, I know that this is not really in the minister's brief, but perhaps he could talk with his colleague the Minister for Local Government and Housing about the detrimental effect that new housing developments and the factoring of common land can have on play areas. Many private housing developments in my constituency have children's play areas because the planning permission demands that but, having provided that, the developers pass on the ownership of those small packets of land to factors, which sometimes sell them on to somebody else altogether. That makes it difficult to maintain those play areas, which often end up being a blight rather than an opportunity for children.

17:47

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I am delighted to speak in the debate. I, too, thank Ruth Maguire for bringing it to the chamber and giving us all the opportunity to participate. Like other speakers, I fully welcome the promotion of Scotland's first inclusive play charter by Play Scotland and I agree that play for all children and young people is vital. Play is fundamental in allowing children to develop and grow and it is important to the wider aim of tackling social inequalities. We must ensure that all children in Scotland have equal access to play, because play has an important role in learning, and that will aid in closing the attainment gap. As members have alluded to, it has been proven that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have less access to play, due to negative barriers such as a lack of sustainable and safe local spaces. That is important in an area such as mine, where for two of the four secondary schools, nearly half of their enrolled children are in the most deprived bracket in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation.

I fully believe that play should be offered at all levels in school and in all aspects of the community. I have enjoyed hearing members' stories about when they were growing up. Like Ruth Maguire, I grew up in the 1980s, and there was lots of open space to play sports or to take part in physical activity. Where I grew up in

Coatdyke, there was a bit that we called the grass, and everybody went down there. I spent my whole summer holidays there, from 9 o'clock in the morning right through till 9 or 10 at night, playing football, hidey or whatever. Now, when I walk down there, there is never anybody playing, and there are lots of "No ball games" signs when, actually, it is a pretty safe and good place to play. That is such a shame.

A lot of spaces, such as at Dunbeth park or what used to be Espieside, now have 4G pitches on them. Those are excellent facilities and I have used them myself, but they are often unaffordable, particularly for young people. Just last week, I received a letter from a 13-year-old who is at Chryston high school. He and his friends were playing football on the 4G pitch at the high school and they had to be removed. It was not the fault of any of the staff that they had to be removed, but the pitch was not actually booked by anybody else. That begs the question of whether we could make better use of such places at times when they are not being used.

I know that, in North Lanarkshire, there is an issue about private finance initiatives in schools, which might come into play in the legal sense. However, the general principle is that we should try to make use of all our spaces. That helps with nurture, development and wellbeing, as well as, as I have already said, closing the attainment gap.

I want to mention an organisation in my constituency, which is parent action for safe play. It has a purpose-built, state-of-the-art playground that I had the pleasure of visiting last month. Over the last 15 years, the organisation has worked in the area to develop and improve play, youth and sport services for local children and young people. Its motto is that it is run by the local community, for the local community.

Parent action for safe play has very impressive facilities that include a soft-play area, outdoor ball-game facilities, a community garden and an adventure playground. The space is enjoyed by the wider community, which is an example of an organisation that is not using the space opening it up so that people can come in. There is no locked gate or anything like that; the outdoor facilities are there for everybody to use.

The organisation also provides services for local neighbourhoods, community groups and schools, such as training older children in the schools to become play champions in order for that to be sustainable. Schools will buy into its services for perhaps a year or two, and then it is to be hoped that they can keep going from there. It is a really good set-up. Last week, I was delighted to receive an email saying that it had received £120,000 of funding from Children in Need in order to provide

an even greater range of opportunities across my constituency.

Before finishing, I will say, very briefly, that I am also pleased that, through the seven lochs wetland park project, there will be a new plan inclusive play area site in North Lanarkshire, at Drumpellier country park in my constituency. It will have a crannog play unit, which is the first of its kind in Scotland. I know that a lot of work and research have gone into that. It is very much an enhanced play provision, and the lochs at Drumpellier park—as the area is known more widely—are already a very good tourist attraction, so that might be more encouragement for people to come.

I thank Ruth Maguire again. I will not be able to make tonight's reception. I do not want to be outdone by either Daniel Johnson or Jeremy Balfour; I too need to go home and play with my child.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask all members who are here to remember—and perhaps to pass on to their colleagues in their groups—that I find it courteous for members who take part in a debate to stay until the end of that debate, unless they have received permission from the Presiding Officer, by note, to leave early. Thank you.

Mr Greer is the last of the open speakers.

17:52

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

As colleagues have done, I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing the Play Scotland charter to Parliament for debate. I also thank Robin Harper for helping me to prepare for this debate. I welcome Robin back to the chamber and hope that he has as enjoyable a view from the public gallery as he had in his time down here on the floor of the chamber.

Over the past two decades in Scotland, we have seen some significant advancements in education. Importantly, many are based on an appreciation that the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic need to be supported by strategies that encourage all our children and young people to be confident, to have good social skills and to enhance their creativity.

However, at the same time we see a host of trends that work against the overall aims of the curriculum for excellence—especially the lack of esteem for the physical, creative and communication components. Unfortunately, art, music, drama, technical subjects and languages are always the first victims of budget cuts. That regressive trend, if it is allowed to continue, will deprive our youngest children during the very

years when they need to learn and develop at their own natural speed, using their huge curiosity and motivation to experiment.

Restrictions that deprive children of the opportunity to play in the open air, to set their own targets and to develop their social skills and their ability to relate to others are counterproductive, and indeed they can be destructive.

In listening to other members reminisce about their time spent in playing, I realised that mine was not that long ago. Actually, I have a connection with one other member in the chamber, in that I played with Rona Mackay's son; we were in the same cub group. I realise that that was a risky play to make—I am sure that I will suffer for it later—but it was exactly those sorts of outdoor play and social skills that we were learning through that.

Presiding Officer, this is not a fringe debate; it is one of vital importance to wellbeing and social cohesion in Scotland. We cannot separate play from the development of language skills, motor skills or the risk-assessment skills that all children need to keep themselves safe.

Many ambitious parents believe that they need to give their children an advantage by their beginning formal education as early as possible. In Sue Palmer's book, "Toxic Childhood: How the Modern World is Damaging Our Children and What We Can Do About It", she cites evidence from across Europe that a playful approach to language and learning is as effective and often more effective than an old-fashioned drill-and-learn regime. Indeed, by the age of 10, the language skills of children who have had the joys of a child-centred education are statistically the same as or are often ahead of those of children who have been subjected to the rigours of formal education. All the research, including the United Kingdom's current effective provision of pre-school education project, points to the importance of talk that arises from children's own interests; outdoor play, whether that is free or supervised; music and song; and not having until the age of five a playful introduction to phonics, well before plunging into pencil and paper work.

Finland and Sweden are often cited in debates in the chamber. Formal education does not start until the age of seven in those countries. They are at the top of the international league for literacy attainment, and there are the additional benefits of much lower achievement gaps between rich and poor and between the genders.

I congratulate Play Scotland and Ruth Maguire on bringing a debate on the play charter to the Parliament. Play Scotland is a great focal point for debate and discussion for professionals and practitioners of early years education in Scotland, and I hope that it will continue to push to ensure

that we improve what happens for our young people.

Many organisations that work outside and alongside our schools and nurseries—the Scottish Wildlife Trust, forest schools, the John Muir Trust and eco-schools, for example—supplement in their own ways the work that is done by early years and pre-school teachers. The Government should do all that it can to ensure that we share the joy of nature and the outdoors with children throughout Scotland, and the play charter should give us all the push that is needed to ensure that that happens.

17:56

**The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald):** I will do my best to respond to an excellent and wide-ranging debate, which I thank Ruth Maguire for securing. I also thank Play Scotland for its on-going support for play and for facilitating this evening's reception to celebrate Scotland's play charter. The turnout for the debate, which is a lot higher than the turnouts that we often get for members' business debates, demonstrates the strong commitment that exists to play throughout Scotland. The Government shares that commitment.

I will respond to some of the points that have been made. Ruth Maguire and Rona Mackay emphasised the right to play as articulated in article 31 of the UNCRC. We in the Government also see that as very important. That is why we developed Scotland's national play strategy in collaboration with the play sector to help us to raise the profile of the impact of play and ensure that Scotland's children achieve their full potential. We believe that play is central to that.

I thank the play strategy implementation group for working with us to create and enhance the fundamental building blocks that will enable and inform a more playful Scotland in which children can realise their right to play every day. I strongly believe that the play charter will help us to further embed the principles of the play strategy, and I again thank Play Scotland for continuing to diligently encourage us to commit to play as an essential ingredient of children's wellbeing.

The play charter is right to focus on inclusivity and our shared vision for play. It seeks to improve the experiences of all children and young people, including those with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and it aims to ensure that all children and young people can access play opportunities in a range of settings that offer variety, adventure and challenge. They must be able to play freely and safely while learning to manage risks and make choices about where, how



and when they will play according to their age, stage, ability and preference.

Brian Whittle spoke about physical literacy and its impact on children's health and wellbeing, as he often does in the Parliament—and rightly so. Play is crucial for children's healthy development. A growing body of evidence supports the view that playing throughout childhood is not only an innate behaviour; it contributes to children's quality of life, wellbeing and physical, social and cognitive development.

I firmly believe that nothing is more powerful than a child's imagination—it can take a child anywhere and make them anything. Through our investment in play, we are working with families to create spaces and places for that imagination to thrive. Play is one of the keys to unlocking the potential of Scotland's children.

As part of our expansion of early learning and childcare to 1,140 hours a year by the end of the current parliamentary session, we are working with the Care Inspectorate, the Scottish Futures Trust and others to publish new good practice design guidance for all early learning and childcare centres across the sector by the summer, which will include looking at outdoor play provision.

We are running a series of trials, some of which will look at outdoor play. A project that is based here in Edinburgh will look at the establishment of outdoor nursery provision through a nature kindergarten.

This morning, I had the pleasure of speaking to early learning and childcare higher national certificate students at West College Scotland's Clydebank campus. I was asked about how we get the public to understand the importance of early learning and childcare to children's development and asked to get across that it is not just about sitting around and playing. I questioned why we need to make that distinction. Exploratory play is fundamental—it is critical—to children's development; it is how they learn about shapes, textures, colours, words and numbers.

Daniel Johnson spoke about investment. The Government continues to invest in play and, this year alone, we have invested more than £3 million in it. That includes funding of £700,000 for play, talk, read, £1.6 million for the bookbug programme and £260,000 for Play Scotland, plus a host of other fantastic initiatives.

Since 2012, we have invested more than £3 million in Inspiring Scotland's go2play play ranger fund. The fund supports Scottish charities to develop play ranger provision for vulnerable children and disadvantaged groups and to engage them in active outdoor play. Play rangers provide a huge number of benefits not only for our children but for parents and communities, by enabling

children to play in spaces that are familiar to them, such as their street or local park, while giving parents peace of mind and encouraging positive interaction between children and the wider community.

Alison Johnstone mentioned the Yard. A reception was recently held in Parliament to celebrate its 30th birthday. Inclusive play is important, and I want it to be encouraged much more widely. I am concerned that it is often an afterthought, particularly for soft play centres, which often run relaxed and inclusive sessions at times that they deem to be quiet. Those times are quiet because they are inconvenient, and they are as inconvenient for families with disabled children as they are for other families. That issue needs to be recognised.

Alison Johnstone also spoke about consulting children. I have experience of that from my time as a local councillor, when a play park in my community—the one that I used to play in as a child—had fallen into disrepair. Through working alongside community workers in the council, we consulted widely with children who lived around the play area on how they wanted it to be redeveloped. A budget was identified and the park was redeveloped. The play area is now busy and thriving, when previously families tended to avoid it. There are good examples of children being consulted about play opportunities.

Kenneth Gibson gave us an interesting insight into his childhood—we will leave it at that. He emphasised that play is about freedom and opportunity. If we restrict those aspects, we restrict opportunities for children to develop their potential fully.

Jeremy Balfour made an important point about fathers who do not interact and play with their children, or who perhaps do not do so until the children are a bit older. He emphasised the importance of early play and interaction with fathers to develop bonds and develop children's crucial cognitive abilities.

Clare Haughey touched on various areas in which play has an impact. She mentioned mental health, and it is worth recognising that area, particularly when we look at the other pressures that children and young people face in our communities.

Iain Gray highlighted a number of good examples from his East Lothian area. He asked me to raise an issue with the Minister for Local Government and Housing about ensuring that play areas in new developments are not only suitable but maintained. I will be happy to raise that with my colleague Kevin Stewart following the debate.

Fulton MacGregor made an important point about how best to use spaces; that point was also

made by Daniel Johnson. We need to look more carefully at how well we use spaces and facilities—particularly those that sit empty for long periods and could be better used with a bit more creative thinking.

Ross Greer talked about the importance of nature and the outdoors. I mentioned the trial in Edinburgh. There and in a number of other areas, we are looking at collaborative approaches. For example, the University of Aberdeen recently ran a scheme alongside the wee green spaces project that gave children opportunities to use the university's botanic gardens as a place in which to play and explore. There are good examples out there, and we want to encourage such collaboration.

I have run over time, but I hope that I managed to mention everyone. I realise that I am preventing Jeremy Balfour from getting away to play with his children, and I had better not hold him up further. I hope that the other members who are here will join the individuals in the gallery at the reception later, as we continue to celebrate play and emphasise its importance to the children of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate. Our visitors may show their appreciation now, if they wish to do so. [*Applause.*]

*Meeting closed at 18:06.*

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

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