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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 11 May 2017

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

Income Tax

1. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on what the top rate of income tax should be. (S5O-00969)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): In February, the Scottish Parliament endorsed the Scottish Government's proposal that the additional rate of income tax should be maintained at 45p for the tax year 2017-18.

Analysis produced by the Scottish Government showed that there is a revenue risk associated with raising the additional rate. However, the First Minister has asked the Council of Economic Advisers to consider how and to what extent that risk can be mitigated. If we are sufficiently assured that the risk can be mitigated, we will consider raising the additional rate from 45p to 50p from 2018-19 onwards as part of our budget considerations.

Anas Sarwar: Last week, the First Minister said that she would support a 50p tax band as long as it was across the United Kingdom, but not if it were just in Scotland, in case people chose to leave. Yesterday, the Scottish National Party voted against a pay rise for low and middle-income earners in the national health service. Why does the cabinet secretary think that low-income earners in a competitive market—they are wanted across the globe—will not choose to leave Scotland, but that high earners, who would have to pay a little more tax, would leave Scotland? Is that not a very Tory argument?

Derek Mackay: Where we have the powers, our position is to make taxation fairer and more proportionate to the ability to pay, while raising additional revenue to invest in our public services. That is the point of taxation and that is what we want to achieve. That is why we are taking a methodical approach.

There is some irony in a Labour Party member talking about low and middle-income earners, when it was the Labour Party that wanted to increase the basic rate, which would have had an impact on those very people.

We will take the right decisions on tax to make the system balanced, fair and progressive while

ensuring that we raise the necessary revenue to invest in our public services.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Would the cabinet secretary agree that there might be behavioural change if we adjust the rates too much, and that a difference from the UK rates of an additional 2p might be a good starting point?

Derek Mackay: I thank John Mason for his advice. I am not setting any parameters at this stage in the parliamentary cycle. I agree that there are issues around behavioural responses as they relate to tax, and that is why we are taking the methodical approach.

The First Minister has asked the Council of Economic Advisers to consider the matter so that we can take our tax decisions in the light of all the available evidence. Behavioural change and issues around tax avoidance are things that the Scottish Government—and, indeed, the whole Parliament—should consider when we use the economic levers at our disposal.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary accept that there is a high risk of less money being raised by increasing the higher rate, as a result of behavioural change? That would not necessarily be through higher earners leaving Scotland, but by them re-ordering their affairs so that, for example, they are paid through dividend income, rather than salary. Will the Council of Economic Advisers take all those issues into account when it considers the proposals?

Derek Mackay: I agree with Murdo Fraser that there is a point around behavioural change and how people deploy various ways to engage in tax avoidance. That is a concern, and that is why we have to understand all those issues when we consider tax. The Council of Economic Advisers will consider all the available evidence; its members will also bring their own expertise to the table.

Murdo Fraser's question allows me to make the additional point that it would be better if the Scottish Government were to have full control of all those matters so that people would not have added opportunities to avoid paying tax in Scotland.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that if the Scottish Parliament does not have powers over dividend and savings income taxes or taxes impacted by incorporation—including capital gains and corporation tax—and the power to police tax avoidance, any changes to the top rate of income tax run the risk of reducing, rather than increasing, funds available for public services in Scotland? Does he agree that Labour MSPs would be better

joining us in arguing for the full transfer of those powers to the Scottish Parliament?

Derek Mackay: I agree with that analysis. The Government has made that case around the transfer of all powers in relation to tax, to ensure that we can close any loopholes and take a co-ordinated approach to tax in order to maximise the revenues to invest in our public services.

The point is well made, and I look forward to seeing what all the parties have in their manifestos for the UK general election in relation to tax, although I suppose that, thanks to the leak, we have an understanding of what the Labour Party might be able to do, which shows the irony of its position in the UK and in Scotland. We are not following the Tory proposition of just passing on tax cuts to the rich; we want to raise the necessary revenue to invest in our public services.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Question 2 has not been lodged.

Trainee Teacher Recruitment (University of Aberdeen)

3. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it will take to ensure increased recruitment of students from the north of Scotland to train as teachers at the University of Aberdeen. (S5O-00971)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): We have taken a series of actions to help address issues around teacher recruitment. Those include increasing student intake targets for the sixth year in a row, taking steps to maintain teacher numbers as a central part of our priority to improve education, launching a new teacher recruitment campaign in February this year and developing, alongside Scottish universities, a package of innovative routes to teaching to help encourage more graduates to become teachers.

We are very happy to work with the local authorities to help tackle teacher shortages in the Aberdeen area. Currently, we are supporting the University of Aberdeen's distance learning programme, which allows local authority staff to train as teachers while remaining in post, and we are funding an extension to that programme so that it covers secondary teaching and is available to all local authorities. We are committed to considering whether a second cohort of professional graduate diploma in education internships can be supported through the transition training fund.

Lewis Macdonald: Clearly, some of those steps are very welcome. The cabinet secretary will be aware of the evidence that Willie MacLeod gave to the Education and Skills Committee

yesterday, in which he highlighted the steps taken by Western Isles Council to recruit and retain trainee teachers from its local area. As the cabinet secretary clearly recognises the need for further action to address the recruitment crisis across the north of Scotland, will he have further discussions with the University of Aberdeen about what more can be done to enable such imaginative and innovative local schemes not just in the Western Isles and Aberdeen but right across the north and north-east of Scotland, where recruiting and retaining trainee teachers is such a critical and pressing problem?

John Swinney: I welcome Lewis Macdonald's comments and the thoughtful approach that underpins them. The problem is not just in Scotland or just in the north-east of Scotland; it is widespread. Just before the Easter recess, I was at the international summit on the teaching profession, where I heard that, across about 20 jurisdictions around the world, including some highly respected ones, there are increasing shortages of teachers. We have to be innovative and creative about the approaches that we take to encourage people to join the teaching profession. I assure Mr Macdonald that the Government will work closely and jointly with the University of Aberdeen and the local authorities in the north-east of Scotland on solutions that will deliver objectives that we all share.

Benefit Reductions (Dumfries and Galloway)

4. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to mitigate the cumulative effect of United Kingdom Government benefit reductions in Dumfries and Galloway. (S5O-00972)

The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman): The UK Government will have cut £1 billion a year from welfare spend in Scotland by 2022, with £0.25 billion coming through changes introduced last month alone. We have taken a number of actions to protect the poorest and most vulnerable from the worst excesses of the UK Government's austerity agenda and welfare cuts. Those include spending more than £350 million since 2013-14 to fully mitigate the bedroom tax, so that 70,000 households save around £650 per year, and helping 241,000 individual households in crisis through the Scottish welfare fund. There has been a further investment of more than £1 billion in the council tax reduction scheme. As members will know, we have not imposed a two-child cap on that scheme. At the local level, Dumfries and Galloway has received more than £30.5 million of that mitigation funding.

It has to be said, however, that the Scottish Government should not have to mitigate cuts and

policies that the Scottish Parliament has not voted for and, I believe, would not vote for.

Joan McAlpine: One of the most recent stories about the on-going cuts has been about the effect on Motability vehicles. The charity Muscular Dystrophy UK found that 900 people are losing their Motability vehicles every week, due to the reassessment of personal independence payments. That is having a devastating effect on people in rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, where the vehicles give people a vital lifeline for everyday life, including getting to and from work. Does the minister agree that that is completely unacceptable?

Jeane Freeman: The Conservative Government tells us that its welfare policies are designed to help people into employment. Even in its own terms, and even if we believe it, the significant impact of the loss of Motability vehicles on individuals is considerable, particularly, as Joan McAlpine said, for those living in rural communities such as her own and, indeed, mine.

Whether it is about austerity or welfare cuts falling on the backs of the poor, we know that the Conservative Government has no care for and no recognition of the damage that is caused by its policies. In Scotland, we are doing things differently. We are working with Motability to ensure that its service will continue to be available when we take on the delivery of those benefits in our rights-based social security system, which will be a system that is based on dignity and respect.

Edinburgh City Bypass (Capacity)

5. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on plans to increase the capacity of the Edinburgh city bypass. (S5O-00973)

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government is committed to undertaking improvements on the Edinburgh city bypass and announced the preferred option for the upgrade of Sheriffhall roundabout on 3 April. Transport Scotland is now taking forward the detailed development and assessment of the preferred option, in line with the statutory process.

Miles Briggs: Recent studies have suggested that the city bypass is among the most congested stretches of trunk road anywhere in the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government's figures anticipate 10,000 more vehicles per day using the bypass by 2022. Although the long overdue improvements at Sheriffhall are welcome and must be constructed without further delay, can the minister set out to Parliament in detail what specific plans the Government has and is working on to increase capacity along the length of the

bypass, and whether it supports the use of smart motorway technology to allow hard shoulders to be used during peak times?

Humza Yousaf: The improvements will make a big difference to people coming into and leaving Edinburgh and the surrounding south-east of Scotland area. We have been making improvements since we came into power and became the Government in 2007. In 2008, there was a £2.2 million lane-widening project for Sheriffhall and the £30 million construction of the Dalkeith bypass, which included the Millerhill interchange at the A720.

Smart technology is a big component of what we do in infrastructure improvements. In 2015, we installed road-stud lane markings, which illuminate in conjunction with traffic lights, so we are already doing some of that. Looking at where else we can do that on the A720 will be part of SESplan's cross-boundary study, which we are taking forward with the local regional transport partnership and the local authority.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): With reference to the proposals to improve the Sheriffhall roundabout, will there be provision to allow cyclists to traverse that roundabout safely? Many cyclists from my constituency travel using the A7 into Edinburgh. At the moment, anyone on a bike takes their life in their hands trying to go round the Sheriffhall roundabout.

Humza Yousaf: Yes. Suitable provision for all users, including cyclists, is an important part of the proposed improvements to Sheriffhall roundabout. That will be developed in further detail as we progress with assessment of the preferred option in consultation with local interest groups. The issue has been raised by many organisations representing the cycling lobby, and it is one to which we are giving careful consideration.

Veterans (Homelessness)

6. Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how many veterans it has recorded as homeless in each of the last three years. (S5O-00974)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): In 2015-16, official statistics record 922 homeless applications in which the main applicant applied directly from armed services accommodation, or the application included a household member formerly in the armed services. That is the lowest number recorded to date. It represents 2.7 per cent of all homeless applications. In 2014-15 the number was recorded at 959, and it was 1,008 in 2013-14.

Maurice Corry: I understand that much of the housing that is provided to veterans is through

charitable organisations—Scottish Veterans Residences, Houses for Heroes and others. We are very grateful to those charities for their relentless efforts to keep veterans off the streets. However, charities do not have the funds to be the main providers of housing for veterans. Veterans housing is at full capacity, there are waiting lists and there is little effort being made by the Scottish Government to encourage local authorities to offer more housing to veterans. It is reported that Scottish veterans are 10 per cent more likely to be homeless than veterans in England. Will the Scottish Government therefore look into working more closely with charities and local authorities to close that gap, and to be at least the same or better than England in its treatment of veterans' resettlement and housing?

Kevin Stewart: The Government has worked closely with veterans charities, and has given £1.3 million to the Scottish Veterans Garden City Housing Association. We are also working with local authorities to improve homelessness services for all, and we have our target of 50,000 affordable homes.

I read with interest yesterday's *Daily Record*, in which Calum MacLeod from Who Dares Cares said that the treatment of veterans is "a horrifying indictment of modern Britain."

The Tory Government has presided over a rise in insecure employment, welfare cuts and ideologically driven austerity, all of which have contributed to the major increase in the need for additional homelessness services and food provision across the United Kingdom.

However, with the Scottish Tories being apologists for the rape clause, people should not hold their breath waiting for them to stand up to Theresa May or anyone else, even when it means that veterans, families and pensioners are being pushed into poverty and crisis due to their policies.

Automation and Artificial Intelligence (Economic Impact)

7. Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any assessment it has made of the potential impact of automation and artificial intelligence on the economy. (S5O-00975)

The Minister for Employability and Training (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government continues to monitor the emerging evidence base around automation and artificial intelligence and its implications for Scotland's economy.

In April, Scottish Enterprise published a research report on the potential impacts of automation on Scotland's construction industry, the food supply chain and financial and business

services. The research found that it is likely that, by 2025, automation will contribute to net employment growth, that new industries will be formed to provide and service new automation solutions and that, within user sectors, the company growth that will be realised by automation will require increased employment.

Technological change and issues such as automation will have a significant impact over the next few decades, in creating both challenges and opportunities for businesses and employees across Scotland. As is highlighted in "Scotland's Labour Market Strategy", we will carry out analysis of such issues in the future and will help employers and employees to respond to them positively, with the support of the strategic labour market group.

Tom Arthur: The minister will be aware of the recent report from the Institute for Public Policy Research, "Scotland skills 2030: The future of work and the skills system in Scotland", which highlighted that

"over 46 per cent of jobs (1.2 million) in Scotland are at high risk of automation."

Can the minister outline what action the Government is taking to ensure that Scotland's skills system can continue to support Scotland's workforce as automation changes the nature of work?

Jamie Hepburn: I am, indeed, aware of the IPPR report. I view it as a welcome addition to our understanding of these matters. As I have said, I know that automation and technological change will have profound impacts on how we work in the future, and our labour market strategy recognises that. We do not understand entirely what the impact will be, which is why a range of research has been commissioned. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which takes a different approach from the IPPR, has estimated that about 12 per cent of jobs in the United Kingdom might be affected by automation. That is a rather smaller figure than that which has been given by the IPPR.

I recognise that automation may pose challenges in respect of how we work in the future—in particular, for people in low-skilled jobs. Scotland's workforce is, of course, highly educated, flexible and adaptable and is already responding well to the challenges of the 21st century. Through our enterprise and skills review, we aim to create a coherent enterprise and skills system that can ensure that that continues to be the case. The IPPR report discussed "mid-career provision" to allow people to progress in the workplace. Our enterprise and skills review will play a role in that. The flexible workforce development fund and individual training accounts

can also help, and we will always be willing to consider what else we can do.

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

In January this year, the UK Government published a draft industrial strategy containing a series of measures to capitalise on emerging technologies in the economy, including automation. Leading organisations including the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Scotch Whisky Association have called on the Scottish Government to participate actively in that industrial strategy. Can the minister explain what steps have been taken by the Scottish Government to participate actively in it?

Jamie Hepburn: We will always be willing to engage with the UK Government on such matters. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work has been doing precisely that and will continue to engage.

Teacher and Classroom Assistant Recruitment (West of Scotland)

8. **Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will support the recruitment of additional teachers and classroom assistants in West Scotland. (S5O-00976)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is taking a number of actions to help to recruit teachers. We are spending £88 million this year to ensure that every school has access to the right number of teachers, we have increased student teacher intake targets for the sixth year in a row, and we are setting targets to train teachers in the subjects in which they are needed most. We are also supporting innovative new routes into teaching, including through work with the University of Glasgow and the University of Strathclyde.

The recruitment and deployment of support staff is a matter for education authorities in the light of local circumstances and priorities, including their statutory duties.

Mary Fee: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. Recent Scottish Government figures have highlighted a worrying trend across West Scotland, with class sizes rising and teacher numbers decreasing. In Renfrewshire, the percentage of pupils in primary 1 to primary 3 in classes with 18 pupils or fewer has declined from 33 per cent in 2010 to 13 per cent in 2016, while the average class size for P5, P6 and P7 in Renfrewshire is more than 26 pupils.

Furthermore, over the past decade of Scottish National Party rule, teacher numbers have declined significantly. In North Ayrshire, teacher numbers have fallen by 105 since 2007, while

Inverclyde now has 175 fewer teachers than it had a decade ago.

With those statistics in mind, I ask the cabinet secretary what specific plans the Scottish Government has in place to reverse the worrying trend of larger class sizes and fewer teachers across West Scotland, which results in an increased workload for teachers and decreased contact time between teachers and pupils?

John Swinney: The Government has attached high priority to maintaining teacher numbers. We had to do so because we faced a number of Labour local authorities that were absolutely determined to reduce teacher numbers and I would not have it. [*Interruption.*] I am delighted that as a result of the Government's strong action in this respect, we are seeing an increasing number of teachers in our schools and our classrooms. I am delighted that the £120 million that the Government has made available directly to the schools of our country, which Labour Party members—every single one of them—voted against, is now recruiting more teachers in our classrooms and assisting in delivery of education. I would have thought that Mary Fee would have welcomed that. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: I am glad that the Deputy First Minister has warmed us up. [*Laughter.*] The First Minister and others do not need to follow that example. We turn now to First Minister's question time.

First Minister's Question Time

12:02

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-01239)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Ruth Davidson: Today in Scotland, in a secondary 2 class of 30 pupils, on average five of them cannot write properly. That is double the number just four years ago. When the First Minister sees such statistics, does she feel embarrassed, ashamed, or both?

The First Minister: Actually, what I feel is utterly determined—determined to carry on with the changes that we are making in Scottish education so that we continue to see improvements in attainment and progress on closing the attainment gap.

Ruth Davidson points to the S2 performance in writing findings from the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy that was published this week. I am not going to try in any way to diminish the significance of those findings. However, it is important to say that the survey, which is a sample survey, measures S2 pupils against the standard that they are expected to reach in S3, and what we know now—from the much more comprehensive data that we are publishing through the national improvement framework, which we will continue to publish annually and which will become informed by the new standardised assessments—is that more than 80 per cent of pupils in S3 meet the standard that they are required to meet.

We will continue to take forward measures, guided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recommendations, such as our new attainment challenge, our new attainment fund—which, as the Deputy First Minister has just said, is directing resources to headteachers—and the new benchmarks for literacy and numeracy that have been put in place, backed by a range of targeted programmes, from the attainment challenge through to bookbug, the play, talk, read programme in the early years, the read, write, count programme in early primary and, of course, the reading challenge; and we will continue to take forward the new detailed measurement system through the national improvement framework, which will track progress not just by way of a sample survey, but by using

data on every pupil in primary 1, 4 and 7 and in S3, broken down by local authority and school.

My answer to Ruth Davidson's question is that I feel determined to continue to get on with those reforms to make improvements for pupils across our country.

Ruth Davidson: Ten years—and five out of every 30 pupils cannot write properly. We in Scotland like to pride ourselves on an education system that is the best in the world. After 10 years of the Scottish National Party Government, we can do so no longer.

Last week, I stood here and raised the fact that teacher training places are not being filled. Yesterday, we learned about the standard of that training. On the time that is spent on literacy, one trainee said that it is a single week: one week. Another said—I will quote her directly—that she and her fellow trainees do not have

“sufficient skills in numeracy to be able to teach it to 11-year-olds at a reasonable standard.”

We do not have enough trainee teachers coming through and the ones who are coming through are not being taught properly. That is not their fault, but if they are not getting the proper instruction, what chance do they have of teaching our children?

The First Minister: First, as I said last week, while we should not—and this Government does not—ignore the challenges that we face in Scottish education, equally we should not do a disservice to pupils and teachers across the country.

As I have just said, according to the comprehensive data that we publish, more than 80 per cent of pupils are meeting the required standards in writing. We are also seeing annual increases in the proportion of school leavers who are reaching national 5 level; we are seeing the gap between the richest and the poorest closing; and we have seen a record number of higher and advanced higher passes in the past few years.

I turn to the question of teacher education. On entry to initial teacher education, we have increased the intake as part of the work that we are doing to make sure that the required numbers of teachers are coming into our schools. On the content of teacher education, which is the substance of the question that Ruth Davidson asked and which was under discussion at the Education and Skills Committee this week, I will make a couple of points before I talk about the action that we have been taking.

First, it is universities, in partnership with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, that decide on the content and structure of initial teacher education. Here is a fact that Ruth Davidson will not like to hear because it says

something good about Scottish education: the recently published edition of "The Complete University Guide" rated four Scottish universities in the top seven across the United Kingdom for teacher education.

We have recognised that we need to do more around teacher education, which is why—I am surprised that, from the content of her question, Ruth Davidson does not seem to know this—we committed, in the delivery plan that we published last year, to a review of Scotland's initial teacher education courses. The report of that review will be published in the next few weeks.

On that aspect, as well as on the other issues, the situation is this: there is good performance across education in Scotland; there are areas where we have recognised that we need to do better; and this Government is getting on with the job of taking the action that will deliver those improvements.

Ruth Davidson: Here is a fact for the First Minister: bright young trainees are starting their careers in Scotland without the tools that they need to do the job. It is not me who is saying that—that is what they told the Parliament just yesterday.

As the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills acknowledged this week, we need inspections to flag up issues in our schools, but under the SNP the number of inspections has gone down. Why has it gone down? For one thing, we do not have enough inspectors; and the ones that we do have are being dragged off the job to sort out the complete mess that is curriculum for excellence.

Does that sound like a system that is in any way functioning properly?

The First Minister: In what Ruth Davidson just said about curriculum for excellence, she goes against not only what her party has said previously, but the judgment of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which did a review of curriculum for excellence. It said that it welcomed the reform, and it pointed out the areas where we had to improve further to deal with the challenges that we face.

What we have in education is good performance—and a range of international experts have said that; a number of challenges, not least the ones that the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy highlighted this week; and a programme of reform that is getting on with making the changes, backed by significant additional investment in our schools that is about delivering improvement. It is important that the Parliament scrutinises that on an on-going basis, but I, as First Minister, with the Deputy First Minister, am

going to stay focused on taking forward that reform programme.

As I said last week, what we often find in the chamber is Opposition parties calling for us to make changes who, as soon as we make those changes and some people think that they might disagree with them, run for cover. This Government will continue to focus on making the reforms and making the changes that we think are required to drive the improvements that we are determined to seek.

Ruth Davidson: It is funny that the First Minister has talked about what a range of international experts have said about curriculum for excellence, because she did not actually say what they said, so let me read out what one of them, Professor Lindsay Paterson, said about it:

"CfE has ignored that need for deep knowledge, with the dismaying consequences that we now see."

Every week we stand up here and we hear jargon about cross-curricular this and joined-up that, but it is not much help if we have children in our country who cannot add up, cannot write and cannot read.

Last week, the First Minister accused me of being obsessed with the constitution, but here is her record in this place: since last year, this Government has spent more time debating the constitution than debating education, health, transport and justice combined. We have had enough. After 10 years, do not the people of Scotland deserve a Government that, for once, will focus on their priorities and not on hers? [Applause.]

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Order. That is enough.

First Minister.

The First Minister: Let me share some of the views of the international experts who I was referring to. Page 13 of the OECD review of Scottish education states:

"The *Curriculum for Excellence* ... is an important reform to put in place a coherent 3-18 curriculum ... It rests on a very contemporary view of knowledge and skills and on widely-accepted tenets of what makes for powerful learning."

The deputy director of the OECD directorate of education and skills states:

"We applaud Scotland for having the foresight and patience to put such an ambitious reform as Curriculum for Excellence in place".

That is the support, and it is backed up by the International Council of Education Advisers, which said:

"We have been deeply impressed with the schools we have visited during our ... programme".

We will continue to build on the strengths of Scottish education and to make sure that we drive the improvements through the action that I have been talking about: the attainment fund, putting £120 million into the hands of headteachers; the attainment challenge, driving improvements in literacy and numeracy; and the new national improvement framework, ensuring that we do not just have to rely on a sample survey, the SSLN, but have comprehensive data on every pupil in the relevant school years. We will continue to take forward that programme of reform.

Let me turn to the issue of priorities. First, when Ruth Davidson talks about the time spent in this chamber debating the constitution, what she is trying to distract attention from is the fact that that time has been spent debating the implications of Brexit and the disaster that the Tory party is leading this country into. Secondly, over the past week, the Scottish Tories have churned out press release after press release after press release. In all of those press releases, we have seen health mentioned once, education mentioned 12 times and me, the SNP or independence mentioned a grand total of 153 times. I will get on with the job of improving education, but I will take no lectures on priorities from Ruth Davidson or the Tories.

Engagements

2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the week. (S5F-01249)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Kezia Dugdale: Scotland's nurses need a pay rise. Since 2010, they have seen a real-terms cut of £3,400 in their wages. Our national health service staff are underresourced and underpaid. The Labour Party will always argue for better wages because that means better performance. The reality of today's NHS is that nurses are more likely to leave the profession because the work is not paying as well as it should, and the result is hundreds of millions of pounds being spent on agency staff. Why did the Scottish National Party vote against scrapping the pay cap last night?

The First Minister: The issue is really important not just for people who work in our NHS but for public sector workers generally. We have had a period of pay restraint, and the reasons for that were first the financial crash and then the long period of austerity, which was started under Labour and has continued under the Tories. No Government—and certainly not this Government—enjoys having such pay restraint, but the reason for it was to protect jobs in the public sector and protect investment in parts of the public sector such as our NHS. As I have said previously, we

have more investment in our NHS today, under this Government, than we would have had if Labour had been in government, because it did not even pledge as much as we did.

We require to look carefully at pay now that inflation is rising again. Of course, the independent pay review body makes NHS pay recommendations, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport committed yesterday to working with the health unions to jointly commission work that we will submit to the pay review body for its deliberations for the next year.

We have taken action to make sure that we treat workers in our NHS as fairly as possible. Unlike Governments elsewhere in the United Kingdom, we have targeted low pay, we have always accepted the pay review body's recommendations and we have made sure that people who work in our NHS are not denied the progression that they have sometimes been denied elsewhere.

As a result, while I do not deny for a second the pressure that people who work in our NHS are under, every entry-level NHS support staff worker in Scotland is paid over £1,000 a year more than their English counterparts, and nurses in Scotland at band 5, which is the level for a newly qualified nurse, are paid £300 a year more than those who do the same job in England and—crucially—£312 a year more than nurses who do the same job in Wales. Why do I mention Wales? Because Labour is in government in Wales, and it has not even done as much as we have done to protect nurses' pay.

We will continue to work with our trade unions to get fairness for our nurses and for public sector workers.

Kezia Dugdale: In all that, there is no escaping the reality that, while nurses in Scotland might be £300 better off than nurses in England, under the First Minister's Government they are £3,400 worse off than they should be.

The brutal reality of a decade of the SNP is complete and utter mismanagement of our NHS. Members should take a look at today's *Times* newspaper, which reports that a £400 million contract for private doctors to work in our NHS went out to tender on 1 May. The brutal truth is that our hospitals have to turn to the private sector because they do not have enough doctors in the first place. Labour can reveal today that the number of consultant posts that have remained vacant for six months or more has increased sixfold since 2011.

That is the reality of the complete and utter mess that the First Minister has made of our NHS. Will she tell me why the SNP can find £400 million for private health companies but cannot find the money to pay our NHS nurses?

The First Minister: I will take no lessons on private sector involvement in our NHS from the Labour Party, which signed private finance initiative contracts in our NHS that continue to drain the budgets. The reality is that reliance on the private sector has reduced under this Government, and that is right and proper.

Let us go back to the important issue of pay, not just in the NHS but in the public sector. I absolutely understand why workers across our public sector think that the 1 per cent pay cap must now be lifted, and we will continue to talk to trade unions—I talked to civil service trade unions about this very issue earlier this week—and to ensure that the evidence that we submit to the NHS pay review body properly reflects the circumstances in the economy today. However, we have had pay restraint because we have had an extremely tight public spending environment and we have had to protect jobs in the public sector and investment in our NHS.

Another thing that Kezia Dugdale does not want us to mention is that in Scotland we have had a policy of no compulsory redundancies in the public sector. In the NHS south of the border, there have been 20,000 compulsory redundancies; there have been none in Scotland. I am not standing here saying that it is easy for anybody who works in our NHS, but we have taken action to target extra resources at low-paid people and make sure that people who work in our NHS get access to progression. Because of that, 60 per cent of agenda for change staff will be paid more than the 1 per cent uplift, when their progression and action on low pay are taken into account.

It is not at all fair of Kezia Dugdale to dismiss the fact that we have done more than any other Government in the United Kingdom to help public sector workers at this difficult time, and we will continue to do exactly that. The difference is that this Government stands on the side of public sector workers in the NHS and elsewhere.

Kezia Dugdale: Two things come from that. First, in all that answer, the First Minister is actually asking us to be grateful that she is not sacking nurses, because of her no compulsory redundancy policy. Secondly, there is a clear difference between our parties. I have a progressive plan to protect our public services and stop the cuts, whereas all that she has is a plan to see the private sector profit from Scotland's sick. That is the reality.

A report in *The Times* today tells us that the amount of private money going into the NHS has doubled in the past two years alone under the First Minister's watch. Let us look at the facts. Our hospitals do not have enough nurses, nurses do not have enough money in their pockets and our hospitals do not have enough doctors, but there is

enough money for private health firms. Is that what the NHS looks like when the Government is more interested in running a referendum than running the NHS?

The First Minister: Let us look at private sector spend. Private sector spend in NHS Scotland fell last year; it represents 0.7 per cent of the total health resource budget. In comparison, in a trend that started under the previous Labour Government, the NHS in England spends 7.6 per cent of its budget on the private sector. We will continue to invest in the public NHS, not in the private sector.

Interestingly, one of the first things that I did when I was health secretary was scrap the private contract for the running of Stracathro hospital that the previous Labour Administration introduced. The problem for Labour is that all the things that it pontificates about in opposition are things that it failed to do when it had the opportunity in government.

I do not expect anybody who works in our public sector to be grateful to any Government, because I recognise that they are dealing with extremely tough times—that is particularly the case for people who work on the front line of the NHS. However, I would expect Opposition parties to recognise that, in these tough times, this Government has done more on public sector pay than any other Government across the UK. That is why agenda for change staff are paid more in Scotland than they are in England and why newly qualified nurses are paid more in Scotland than they are in England or in Labour-governed Wales.

We will continue to take the right action on our NHS, which means that we have record funding in our NHS and that we have record numbers of staff working in our NHS.

The Presiding Officer: I am conscious that we have taken a lot of time for our first two questions, which were on serious issues. A number of members wish to speak and there are a lot of questions. I ask all members to help us to make progress.

There are two constituency questions, the first of which is from John Finnie.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): North West Highlands geopark won its United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization status in 2015 after 10 years of hard work by the local community. That status, which is assessed every four years, is due to be assessed again in 2019. The Scottish Government has provided core funding to the geopark until now, but this year it decided not to provide that. The geopark launched a crowdfunder, which will close on Monday and has thus far raised only £12,767, which is 18 per cent of the total that is required.

Given the effort that went into achieving UNESCO status, it would be a disaster to lose that status. Will the First Minister have her officials examine options for providing the modest financial support that would allow the geopark to work to retain its UNESCO status?

The First Minister: I thank John Finnie for raising the issue. I am familiar with the geopark and its UNESCO status, which I agree is extremely important. As I recall, the Scottish Government provided initial core funding with a view to the geopark then becoming sustainable. However, I am happy to ask officials to look at the matter again and to consider whether the Scottish Government can do anything further to help. I will make sure that we report back to John Finnie once we have had the opportunity to do that.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Ardgowan bowling and tennis club in Greenock is a 175-year-old club that offers vital sporting facilities to the people of Inverclyde. Changes to water and sewerage charge exemption rules have left it facing a bill of up to £2,000 per annum, which it fears could drive up membership costs or even force it to close its doors. I am afraid that it is not the only club in that situation. What comfort can the First Minister give charities, clubs, village halls and sporting groups across Scotland that the Government will look seriously at such charges? Will she commit to a full and open review of the policy?

The First Minister: It is not too long since we had a full review of charities' exemptions from water rates. I remember it well because I was the minister in charge of taking forward the recommendations from it. We put in place a system that is as fair as possible to as many charities across the country as possible. The tests for exemptions are based on charities' incomes and the capital that they hold. Therefore, there will always be some charitable organisations that do not get exemptions because their income or capital is above the threshold.

I am more than happy to have the relevant minister look at the organisation that Jamie Greene cited—I am looking in the wrong direction, because that minister is Roseanna Cunningham, who is sitting on my right—to make sure that the rules are being applied appropriately. The genuine point is that I think that all members recognise that, in any system of exemptions, there will always be some organisations that do not qualify. I know that that is difficult for organisations that are in that position. I will ask Roseanna Cunningham to look at the case that has been mentioned and report back to the member in due course.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-01241)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Matters of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: We have heard yet again about the poor statistics on education. The mother of a 15-year-old schoolboy told me yesterday that she is worried that her son could be one of those statistics because he is struggling with reading and writing. She is anxious about his future and she is angry with the Scottish National Party, which has been in charge for the whole of her son's education. What does the First Minister have to say to that mother and her son?

The First Minister: I am concerned to learn of any parent anywhere in the country who has concerns of that nature about their child's education. I state again how seriously this Government and I take the challenges that we face in education. I will not repeat—as I did in my answer to Ruth Davidson—all the strengths of Scottish education, but it is unfair to teachers working hard across the country not to recognise those strengths and some of the real improvements that we are making. I did not mention earlier the improvements in the attainment of pupils with additional support needs. It is because we recognise some of the challenges that we are taking the action that we are taking.

I do not know what school the child whose parent Willie Rennie quoted goes to, but it is likely that the headteacher of that school has in his or her own hands significant additional resources to invest in the specific areas that they think are required to improve attainment. We are determined to continue to drive forward exactly that kind of action.

I say to Willie Rennie that many of the reforms that we are taking forward are reforms that he opposes. It is absolutely right that members bring concerns to the chamber, but we have to be prepared to do the difficult things that are required to bring the improvements that we all want to see.

Willie Rennie: I am afraid that that answer was just more promises to improve school education at some point in the future. That will not help that schoolboy now. He could be part of a lost generation. He has been at school for a decade, on every day of which the SNP education secretaries have been in charge, and they still sit around the Cabinet table today. They are the education secretaries who rejected a pupil premium for six years, even though it raised attainment in England; delayed nursery education for two-year-olds; rejected a penny on income tax

for education; and cut thousands of places from our colleges.

When the First Minister and her ministers have got it so wrong for years, why on earth should that mother and her 15-year-old son ever trust them again?

The First Minister: First, these are important issues and important challenges that we have to face, but I say to Willie Rennie that it does a real disservice to the young people of our country to use language such as “lost generation”. I think that is pretty disgraceful.

Secondly, Willie Rennie talks about investments that he thinks that we should have made years ago. I simply remind him that those years gone past are exactly the years when the Liberal Democrats were in a Westminster coalition with the Tories, cutting Scotland’s budget year after year.

The last point that I want to make is the most important. Willie Rennie asks what the things that I have talked about will do for the young man and the parent he talked about. The money that I talked about is in the hands of those headteachers right now. I have spoken to headteachers in my constituency who are already talking about the initiatives that they are taking forward with that investment. The additional investment directly to headteachers, the additional investment elsewhere, in our attainment fund, and the measures that we are taking forward to ensure that we can track the progress that has been made through those measures are important, but Willie Rennie repeatedly stands up in this chamber and opposes the things that we are trying to do to ensure that we can deliver those improvements and can be accountable to every parent across this country as well as to the chamber.

We will get on with doing the things that need to be done, even when they are difficult and do not get the support of the Liberal Democrats.

The Presiding Officer: I would like to squeeze in a few topical supplementary questions. The first is from Annie Wells.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Last night, BBC Scotland broadcast a shocking documentary on the human trafficking trade. It provided clear evidence that young girls are being trafficked from Slovakia to Govanhill in Glasgow, where they are forced into sham marriages to local men. That is a scandal and a human tragedy that is going on right under our noses right now. Can the First Minister set out what her Government will do to support girls who arrive here in such appalling circumstances, and what measures can be taken to cut down on traffickers who indulge in this evil trade?

The First Minister: This is an extremely important issue. As Annie Wells rightly says, human trafficking is a terrible crime, and it is also a global problem. It is important that we take robust steps to tackle it by cracking down on the crimes that are being committed and, as Annie Wells says, by ensuring that we support the victims.

With regard to tackling the crime, the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 gives police and prosecutors enhanced powers to detect and prosecute those who are responsible for human trafficking. Police Scotland also uses joint investigation teams that are established under European law to work with Romanian and Slovakian police in this area. It is vital that Police Scotland continues to work closely with United Kingdom immigration services, Europol and other nations’ police forces in order to investigate human trafficking offences and bring those responsible to justice. We will continue to make sure that our police force has the power and resources to tackle what are evil crimes against those individuals.

The second point concerns how we support victims of human trafficking. We continue to support the invaluable work of organisations that offer assistance to victims. In 2017-18, the Government will provide grant funding of £800,000 to specific organisations that support adult victims of human trafficking, and that is an increase on previous funding. It will also continue to work with them to improve the support available to prevent re-trafficking. There is a whole range of work—I do not have time to go into all of it, but I will be happy to write to Annie Wells with more detail of the work that we are doing.

We should all agree that the crime of human trafficking is evil. We have to bring those responsible to justice, but also provide the support that victims need. The Government will continue to focus on doing exactly that.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): The First Minister may be aware that there is huge disappointment and some shock following the decision by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service after a prolonged police investigation—and I am told, nine separate court hearings—to drop the case relating to the alleged illegal killing of a hen harrier in the Cabrach in my constituency in 2013.

The Crown Office appears to have taken the view that the video footage supplied by the RSPB Scotland was inadmissible, despite such evidence being accepted in the past.

Notwithstanding the progress that has been made by ministers in recent years to tackle wildlife crime, will the First Minister acknowledge that that case represents a serious crime against a

threatened species? Given that wildlife crime is very difficult to detect, because most often it takes place in remote areas, will she acknowledge that the law and the approach of the Crown Office must take into account such factors?

I ask the First Minister whether she would be willing to investigate this case, with a view to ensuring that the justice system does not miss any opportunity to hold to account those who illegally kill our endangered species?

The First Minister: I agree with Richard Lochhead. As he well understands, decisions about the prosecution of crime are, of course, decisions for the Crown Office and in that respect law officers act independently of ministers. However, it is important that we take wildlife crime very seriously indeed, particularly in cases where, as Richard Lochhead has highlighted, it threatens a threatened species. I will be happy to ask the relevant minister, Roseanna Cunningham, to meet with Richard Lochhead to look at what more we can do, particularly taking into account his point about those crimes often taking place in remote areas and, therefore, being more difficult to detect.

It is important that we make sure that the policy framework, the law around this and the decisions that are taken by the Crown Office in respect of prosecutions—although, as I say, it is independent of ministers—do everything possible to crack down on those kinds of crime. I assure Richard Lochhead that we will continue to do everything that we can to make sure that that is the case.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): College lecturers have been forced out on strike for the fourth day in the current dispute, impacting on them and their families and on their students' education and exams. For how many days will lecturers need to strike before the First Minister intervenes to ensure that the pay deal is honoured? Does she agree with me that preparation time is essential in order to enable high-quality learning?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree with that last point. I want to see this dispute settled. I do not want to see college lecturers on strike; it is not in their interest and it is certainly not in the interest of college students across the country.

As members will be aware—I will not go into all the detail of this—we have moved to a position of national bargaining and those discussions are about the harmonisation not just of pay but of terms and conditions, moving to a new national pay scale that will see a significant pay rise for the vast majority of college lecturers. That is agreed. The discussions now are about how different college-by-college terms and conditions are replaced with a national system. Talks continue, and I encourage both sides, including—and

perhaps especially—the employers, given their position, to go the extra mile to reach an agreement.

I take the point about Government intervention very seriously, because ministers have spoken regularly with both sides in the dispute to try to make sure that we are doing everything to encourage them to move towards a resolution. The move to national bargaining was, rightly, long campaigned for by the unions and I am delighted that this Government delivered it. If we have a situation where, in order to resolve a dispute, a Government has to step in and intervene, that is not the success of national bargaining, that would be the failure of national bargaining. Ministers will continue to discuss with both sides. We will do everything that we can to bring the dispute to a settlement. Talks are on-going formally and informally, today, I think, and certainly tomorrow, and I hope that we will see a resolution of this. That is in the interests of college lecturers and also college students. I hope that reassures the member that the Government will continue to make sure that it is doing everything possible to bring that about.

The Presiding Officer: We have four more questions; perhaps we can get through them all.

Mental Health Awareness Week

4. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** Before I ask my question, I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government is marking mental health awareness week. (S5F-01257)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I welcome the opportunity to highlight mental health awareness week. It is important that we all do what we can to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health.

To mark the week, the Minister for Mental Health met parents of children with experience of mental health services in Forth Valley, and last night she spoke at an event to discuss mental health stigma in the workplace.

We will hold the first meeting of a biannual stakeholder forum on 23 June. That is a specific commitment in our new mental health strategy, because we know that working with stakeholders will be key to building on the strategy's actions in the years ahead.

Clare Haughey: One of the most important actions that are outlined in the recent mental health strategy is a commitment to introduce a managed clinical network for perinatal mental health. Will the First Minister outline how the

network is being progressed and how it will help mothers who experience mental health problems?

The First Minister: Progress is being made in that regard. Indeed, I am happy to confirm that, just this week, the lead clinician for the managed clinical network for perinatal mental health was successfully appointed.

On Monday, Scottish Government officials attended the Maternal Mental Health Scotland annual conference and heard at first hand mothers' experiences in asking for, and getting, the right help. I expect the new network to help us to get it right for parents and their children by driving up standards of care through integration of services and more collaboration.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Grangemouth)

5. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government has had discussions with SEPA to encourage it to have staff based in Grangemouth on a regular basis. (S5F-01266)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to support its delivery of regulatory and other services, as well as the management of the SEPA estate.

SEPA staff are regularly present in Grangemouth as part of their duties to deliver regulatory functions. I understand that, following discussion with the community council and local elected members, SEPA has agreed to consider the benefits and costs of establishing a Grangemouth site that can support the wider Stirling-based area team.

Alison Harris: I welcome the fact that SEPA is going to have those discussions on Grangemouth.

The Presiding Officer: First Minister? That does not really require an answer, so we will move on.

Planning Authorities (Resources)

6. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government is doing to better resource planning authorities, in light of an increase in planning fees for major applications from 1 June 2017. (S5F-01264)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We need a planning system that supports both businesses and communities to deliver high-quality development on the ground. There has been a general understanding that fee levels are too low and that, in many instances, they are not

in proportion to the work that is involved in processing planning applications.

We have always been clear that fees and performance go hand in hand. Therefore, we are increasing the maximum fee for major planning applications to provide further resources to councils to improve performance. The Government will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure that planning services deliver for Scotland's communities.

Pauline McNeill: The First Minister will be aware that, under the national review of planning fees that she mentioned, maximum fees have risen from £30,000 to £125,000. That is a welcome resource for local authorities. Many planning authorities have done an excellent job, despite cuts to personnel.

Organisations such as Homes for Scotland, the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland and smaller building firms want to ensure that there is a corresponding improvement in the service that those fees pay for. Does the First Minister recognise that the fees could be prohibitive if there is not a dramatic improvement in waiting times? In particular, the house building figures show an average wait of 48 weeks.

I know that the Government has a strong interest in the issue, and that it plans to build 50,000 houses. What can the First Minister do to ensure that the additional fees are spent on improving the planning system itself?

The First Minister: I will make two quick points. First—it is important to stress this point—the increase in the maximum fee only applies to major applications, which account for less than 1 per cent of all applications. Therefore, it would not impact on our plans to deliver 50,000 affordable homes.

The second point is important, too. The fee increase is deliberately designed to give councils resources to improve performance. Improving planning performance and doing it on a consistent basis across the country is one of the things that we can do to boost economic growth in Scotland, so it is vital that the increases lead to that improvement in performance.

We are seeing improvements such as reductions in waiting times, but more can be done. I hope that the fee increase, together with the actions that we will take from our wider review of planning, will very much help with that in the period ahead.

Election Ballot Papers

7. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the First Minister, in light of the local government elections, whether the Scottish

Government will act to randomise the ordering of candidates by surname on ballot papers at future elections. (S5F-01244)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As someone whose surname starts with an S, I can see the attraction in it.

I want to begin by congratulating all the councillors who were elected last week. I am sure that everyone across the chamber will join me in wishing them well in their roles to support our local communities.

Following last week's successful electronic count, randomised ordering of candidates' surnames is one of the innovations that the Scottish Government will consider for future local government elections. I should say that no decisions have been taken, but it is one of the changes that will be subject to consideration.

Kenneth Gibson: As the Scottish National Party randomises its own internal SNP ballot, it seems only reasonable for the SNP Government to introduce such a measure in local elections. The single transferable voting system produces results that are heavily biased in relation to surnames, regardless of the vote management strategies that parties use to try to steer voters from one candidate to a party colleague. In 40 of the 43 contests in Glasgow in which two or more candidates from the same party stood, the individual in each party whose surname was closest to the beginning of the alphabet received the highest number of their party's votes. Glasgow City Council is thus populated by a wheen of Aitkens, Balfours, Cullens and Dochertys.

Does the First Minister agree that after three elections fought under the single transferable voting system there is clearly something wrong when one's surname can prove such a decisive factor in whether one is elected? Furthermore, does she agree that if the issue is not addressed, the very credibility of the single transferable voting system is at stake?

The First Minister: That has to count as a classic Kenny Gibson question. Before I address the substance of it, I want to say that I am absolutely delighted that an Aitken was elected in Glasgow and that Councillor Susan Aitken is set to be the new SNP leader of Glasgow City Council.

On what is a serious issue, I think that we would all agree that it is important that no candidate in any election is at an unfair disadvantage, and that is why we have already said that we will examine the particular issue that Kenny Gibson has raised. However, it is also important that we build consensus around any change to how we hold elections, because it is not for any one party to decide such things. As we consider the matter over the next few years, we will look carefully at

opinion not just across the parties but across civic Scotland, and I encourage everyone not just in the chamber but across Scotland to contribute to our consideration so that we can build maximum consensus as we move forward.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. That concludes First Minister's question time.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. With regard to the selection of questions for First Minister's question time, I note that every week question 3 is allocated as an open question to a leader of an Opposition party in order to hold the Scottish Government to account. Given that the Scottish Green Party is now, in effect, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Scottish National Party, is it still appropriate for the Green Party leader to be granted an Opposition question in that manner? [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Fraser. I think that the chamber's reaction tells you that that is a political point, not a point of order.

International ME Awareness Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-05038, in the name of Gail Ross, on 12 May, international ME day. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges that 12 May 2017 marks the international awareness day for myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), which is commonly known as chronic fatigue syndrome; understands that ME is often labelled as a "silent" illness but can bring great mental and physical exhaustion to those living with it; believes that over 20,000 adults and children in Scotland have the condition and that the effects include cognitive impairment, poor short-term memory, muscle and joint pain, gastrointestinal problems and food intolerance; commends the work of the various charities across Scotland and beyond in highlighting the circumstances faced by people with ME, and commends them on the support that they offer.

12:49

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Tomorrow—12 May—is international ME awareness day. Myalgic encephalomyelitis—or chronic fatigue syndrome, as it is known in the national health service—is a chronic neurological disorder that affects more than 21,000 adults and children in Scotland. We have no idea how many people remain undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. The symptoms range from mild to moderate, and can be extreme in some cases. They include exhaustion and fatigue, particularly after a period of what can sometimes be just mild exertion, chronic pain, sleep disturbance, flu-like symptoms including headaches and sore throat, dizziness, nausea, and problems with memory and concentration, which is known as brain fog. Sufferers can also present with gastrointestinal difficulties, food intolerances, nerve pain and muscle weakness.

ME can affect people in different ways, and the symptoms can fluctuate over time. Some people cope, but some—for example, Emma Shorter from Edinburgh—are forced to use a wheelchair and are rarely able to leave the house. Two thirds of Scottish patients with ME have been ill for over 10 years, and fewer than one in 10 is in full-time work, education or training.

There is no cure, but some sufferers spend thousands of pounds on so-called snake-oil treatments that promise various outcomes, and many are disappointed when their symptoms fail to improve.

Although treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy can help with managing the psychological and emotional impact of symptoms

and many people find them beneficial, we cannot keep up the practice of treating ME as a psychological illness: it is not all in the mind.

We also know that ME is often misdiagnosed. That can be due to symptoms being similar to those that are present in a number of other medical conditions and there being no definitive findings that confirm the diagnosis. That means that there has often to be a process of elimination of other conditions before a diagnosis of ME or CFS can be made.

Depression is a common symptom of the illness; many ME sufferers fall into a depressed state because of their symptoms. They yearn for their former life and the things that they used to be able to do, and many have lost jobs and friends, or simply despair at not being taken seriously. The incidence of suicide among people with ME is six times higher than it is in the general population. Most people never know what causes their ME. It is thought that it can be triggered by infection, or it can develop over a number of years. It is also thought to be brought on by periods of extreme stress.

One of my very good friends had hoped to be in the gallery today but, unfortunately, she could not be. However, she has given me permission to tell members about her struggle. Her name is Sally. In 2012, Sally went to a doctor to complain of neck pain and nerve pain. She was also physically exhausted. She has shorn sheep in New Zealand, so she knew that her body was telling her something. The doctor told her that it might be breast cancer or a herniated disc, so she was sent for a magnetic resonance imaging scan. The scan came back clear. She continued to have nerve pain, fatigue and extreme exhaustion, and she also began to have problems with her sight.

She went back to the general practitioner, who did blood tests to rule out anything straightforward. Nothing showed. The GP suggested that it might be something more serious, such as multiple sclerosis, so her parents paid for her to go private for another MRI and a lumbar puncture. However, it was not MS. She was given amitriptyline, which nearly knocked her out, and she was given gabapentin and a mild dose of fluoxetine to help her sleep.

Sally's symptoms continued for two years until she went to see a doctor who specialises in tropical medicine. The doctor diagnosed Q fever, which is a bacterial infection that is picked up from animals. It is so rare that there are no specialists who deal with it in the United Kingdom. She was also diagnosed with ME. There are no ME specialists in the UK, either.

Sally tells me that she is lucky. She is pretty certain now that the Q fever was the cause of her

ME, but most people never know the cause. She had to go to Belgium to see a specialist, and she has started a long course of antibiotics, which will last for three years, cost her in excess of £20,000, and be paid for by credit cards, because she cannot work.

She applied for disability living allowance—now called personal independence payments—but she was told that she does not qualify because she is not ill enough, despite having days when she cannot even get out of bed. She applied for employment support allowance instead and was made to go through what she describes as a humiliating assessment, in which she was made to feel ashamed, as if she was making it all up. The Maximus assessor told her that Maximus does not recognise ME as an illness. She felt degraded, demoralised and looked upon as a liar. What a disgrace. I am proud to say that private companies will have no part in the Scottish social security system, which will have fairness, dignity and respect as its core values.

My friend fully believes that her symptoms would not have escalated as they did if her diagnosis had been made earlier. She copes now, but every day is different and some days are better than others. My friend Sally has few demands, and none that is insurmountable.

In its Scotland manifesto, Action for ME set out the following goals:

“• Training for all professionals providing health, care and support services to people affected by M.E., linked to the establishment of a national professional network.

• Access to a fair and effective welfare system that meets the needs of people with chronic fluctuating and cumulative symptoms.

• Timely and informed support to help those people with M.E. who have capacity to access employment, education or training opportunities.

• All carers have access to timely, holistic support and that their needs are routinely considered by health and care professionals.

• Every person living with M.E. – including the most severely affected – has access to a person-centred care plan including ongoing monitoring and support, and specialist diagnostic and condition management services.”

Tomorrow, an organisation called Missing Millions will be placing pairs of shoes outside Parliament to symbolise people who are affected by ME and the lives that they are missing out on, as well as the huge contribution that society is missing due to their illness. I thank the organisation for helping to raise awareness of ME and the many people who suffer from it.

I also thank Action for ME, Invest in ME, the ME Association, the Young ME Sufferers Trust and all the individual people who contacted me about today's debate, including those who are in the

gallery or watching at home. Their stories are both heartbreaking and inspiring.

I will leave you with a direct quotation from my friend, Sally:

“Society tells us to push through ... and many people do when the best course of action is to listen to your body and rest. Take as long as you need. But sometimes by the time ME is diagnosed the time for rest has passed. When a diagnosis is made you have to accept it. You HAVE to give yourself time. But other people need to accept it as well. So many people with ME struggle on — it's time this so called 'silent illness' is silent no longer.” [Applause.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. As I have said before, I understand why visitors sitting in the gallery want to applaud, but it is not permitted in the Scottish Parliament.

12:58

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to make a speech in this afternoon's debate. I remind members that I am a nurse. I was keen to speak in the debate, not just to support my colleague Gail Ross but because I have received several emails asking me to raise awareness of ME from constituents with family members who have been diagnosed with the condition.

ME is arguably one of the least understood diseases. The most common form in humans is called chronic fatigue syndrome—CFS. It affects young people and older adults. I find it interesting that GPs prefer to call it chronic fatigue syndrome rather than ME, because there are lots of different symptoms that are not necessarily just inflammatory processes around the spinal cord and brain.

Many people do not realise that the disease can be triggered by a bacterial infection or a viral infection, such as glandular fever. It can start suddenly, following the process of infection. It most commonly affects adults in their 20s and 30s, although younger children between the ages of 13 and 15 have also been diagnosed with CFS.

A disproportionate number of women are diagnosed with the disease, which is very debilitating. In the past couple of weeks, I have learned much more about it, as I have been contacted by constituents. I certainly know a lot more about it now than I did as a practising clinician. It does not mean that people are just tired all the time, and that does not give us an answer to the disease or tell us the way to treat it. The symptoms include muscle fatigue, problems with memory and attention span and just feeling under the weather generally. It can affect every aspect of people's daily lives. GPs say that, in managing the illness, it is important to have the correct balance between activity and rest and the correct medication to treat pain and sleep

disturbance. The sensible use of complementary therapies is also recommended.

It is a common view that ME is more of a psychological complaint than a physical one. That point of view is deeply harmful, as ME is not psychological—it is physical. The attitudes of some GPs have been brought into question. The evidence points to a disparity in attitudes and some judgmental processes in the way that people engage in treatment of it. GPs who are empathetic and demonstrate acceptance of their patients' suffering are more likely to make an accurate diagnosis.

I recently read a paper in the *New Scientist* that highlighted the latest evidence that ME or CFS is not psychological and in fact relates to the body's inability to correctly metabolise high-energy carbohydrates. Some people seem to be processing fats and amino acids, which are low energy yielding and release lactic acids when energy carbs are being metabolised. That lactic acid can build up in the muscles and consequently cause pain. The article described ME or CFS as an autoimmune disorder, which was my initial understanding of it. Studies such as the ones mentioned in the *New Scientist* are important to validate the lived experiences of people suffering from ME or CFS, and to encourage a shift in the minds of researchers from viewing the disease as psychosomatic to seeing it as a real physical disorder.

The disease is notoriously underresearched. In 2011, the president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Simon Wessely, told the journal *Nature* that most researchers would rather work on certain images than on ME or CFS. I hope that the recent shift in attitude will in turn bring more funding for vital research. I am pleased that the Scottish Government has funded a 12-month project, inform ME Scotland, which is run by Action for ME and which will reach out to health and social care professionals and engage them in dialogue about how to improve the support that is available for people with ME.

We can see clearly that more needs to be done. I look forward to more research being conducted as we raise awareness of this debilitating disease that many people suffer from in silence, so that we can get them more help.

13:03

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Gail Ross for using her members' business debate to bring this topic to the chamber. I find speaking in members' business debates to be one of the more rewarding contributions to make. They often give us the opportunity to highlight amazing work being done by people across Scotland that might

not otherwise be recognised or, as is the case today, the chance to discuss an important issue that deserves greater recognition.

I hope that today's debate, and international ME day, which is tomorrow, will be a step towards correcting that lack of recognition. Not that long ago, ME was dismissed by many as yuppie flu, and sufferers were written off as lacking stamina or dismissed as malingerers. Arguably, that image has not been helped when ME is often described as chronic fatigue syndrome because, in my opinion, that can leave people with the sense that they understand the effects of the disease.

Almost anyone will say to you that they know what it is like to be fatigued. Speak to anyone after they have run a marathon and you will find someone who thinks that they have a good idea of what fatigue is like. However, for those with ME, that kind of fatigue can be an almost everyday occurrence, often provoked by the most minor physical activity. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for someone without the condition to genuinely understand the impact that it can have on someone's life. We need to encourage greater understanding and recognition of those with ME, because it is only through recognising and understanding the condition properly that we can begin to improve the lives of those living with it.

Like mental illness, ME can be invisible to others. In recent years, though, we have seen our attitudes to mental illnesses evolve and improve, thanks to the work of dedicated campaigners and to politicians who are more willing to speak out. Conditions that were once something to be hidden by sufferers who were fearful of being stigmatised or ostracised through the ignorance of others are now accepted. Because of that, not only are people with mental health conditions getting the kind of help and support that they need, they are able to concentrate on how they are feeling rather than how they are seen.

I hope that this debate can be an opportunity to change how we perceive ME and to help sufferers to make that same kind of progress. Some of that work has already begun, through events such as tomorrow's international ME awareness day and the tireless campaigning by groups such as Action for ME and the ME Association. I also note that the Scottish Government has provided funding towards the mentor ME project that is being run by Action for ME.

However, although those steps are welcome, it is clear that much more needs to be done to give ME sufferers and their families the support that they need. Key to that support is the NHS; the availability of specialised treatment and support in the NHS is, to say the least, patchy. Chronic conditions such as ME will inevitably lead to sufferers having to interact more with the health

service than they otherwise might. That being the case, it concerns me to find that the level of support that is on offer to patients with ME and their carers varies so significantly across the country. One statistic that I found particularly shocking was that Scotland has precisely one ME nurse. To put that into a context that I know we all understand, Scotland has twice as many pandas as ME nurses. Although I must pay tribute to NHS Fife for its decision to provide an ME nurse, I am baffled as to why no other NHS board has chosen to create a similar post.

Beyond the NHS, we need to do more to allow people with ME to lead as normal a life as possible. We have to do more to support people with ME to be active and productive. Employers need education and encouragement to recruit and retain staff with ME, offering flexible hours or home working. Setting goals, having things to do every day and keeping their minds active are all useful tools that allow people with ME to better manage their condition. Having ME should not be a reason to put limits on an individual's ambition.

There are few things in life as disheartening and isolating as dealing with a chronic illness, particularly when that illness is not easy to see or well understood. I began by suggesting that members' business debates are a way of drawing attention to less well-known issues and I hope that we have succeeded in doing that for ME. However, in this case recognition is not enough. We need action too, and I hope that both the Scottish Government, and the Scottish Parliament more widely, will take action to change the lives of Scots living with ME.

13:08

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I join other speakers in congratulating Gail Ross on bringing this important debate to the chamber and shining a light on ME. Tomorrow we will mark international ME awareness day, and the reason why that date was chosen is that it was the birthday of Florence Nightingale; it is believed that Florence Nightingale was a sufferer of ME. By coincidence, because of the link with Florence Nightingale, tomorrow is also international nurses day, in recognition of the immense contribution that healthcare workers make to people, not just in the United Kingdom, but right around the world. It is an important day on which to mark the challenges faced by people with ME.

As Gail Ross said, 21,000 people in Scotland are believed to have ME and almost a quarter of a million people across the whole UK. ME is also commonly known as chronic fatigue syndrome and, as has already been mentioned, is quite often misdiagnosed because many of the symptoms, such as fatigue, painful muscles and joints,

disordered sleep, gastric disturbance, poor memory and poor concentration, are the same as for other conditions. An ambition that all of us share is for all individuals, regardless of any conditions that they may have, to live full and fulfilling lives. That should be an ambition for all sufferers of ME, too.

One good way in which ME has been described to me is as being like having a battery and having to work out how to preserve your energy—which sometimes will be high and sometimes will be low—to maintain the battery whenever it might be in the day. The functional ability scale, as it is known, is something that young sufferers of ME, in particular, use to get by day to day.

On days such as this, it is important to recognise the work of the third sector organisations that do so much to highlight causes such as ME. I pay special tribute to the ME Association, Action for ME and, in particular, the Young ME Sufferers Trust, which helps to provide information to young sufferers of ME about how they can make a difference in their own lives.

I am sorry that we will not be here tomorrow for the Missing Millions protest. I hope that the issue is highlighted both in the media and, in particular, on social media, so that we can share the message.

I want to reflect on a piece from an ME sufferer, Emma Shorter, which I read this morning in the Edinburgh *Evening News*. Emma is just 23 years old and she was highlighting not just the everyday challenges that she faces as an ME sufferer, but what we, as parliamentarians, and the Scottish Government can do to make a meaningful difference, including the need for a “dedicated helpline and website”, funded by the Scottish Government. That would be welcome and, I know, was part of a strategy published by the Scottish Government in 2011. She spoke also about the need to directly

“fund biomedical research into ME”

right here in Scotland, to provide the gold standard for challenging ME and supporting ME diagnosis and treatment for other parts of the world. That would be a very welcome commitment from the Scottish Government.

We have also heard about a lack of knowledge on the part of healthcare professionals and clinicians because of how rare the condition is, so there is an issue around how we can properly educate our healthcare professionals at all levels so that they can adequately diagnose, treat and manage ME.

I want to highlight some of the daily impacts that ME has, particularly on children and young people but also on adults later in life. It has an impact on

their health and their ability to access their GP; the GP having adequate knowledge to support the individual is also an issue. It has an impact on their education, whether on their studying, their concentration at school or their exams, and the consequences of that can have an impact later on in life. A related point is how we properly educate schoolteachers, lecturers and others on how they can support students who have ME, so that they, too, can maximise their potential. It has an impact on their family life, for example on parents and siblings—it must surely cause parents anxiety when they realise that their child has ME—and it affects their social life.

The one plus, perhaps, is that the majority of young people and children go on to recover fully from ME; they do not live with it for the rest of their lives. If someone has ME when they get into adult life, however, it has an impact on employment and employability. It is a matter of how we can better educate employers to help them to support any sufferers of ME that they may have in their workforce in relation to their day-to-day work and the impacts on leave and sick leave.

I again thank Gail Ross for bringing this important topic before the Scottish Parliament. I hope that we can all resolve to highlight this important cause, to challenge the stigmatisation of chronic fatigue and ME and to work harder to provide better diagnosis and treatment for all.

13:13

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to contribute to this debate on a subject that affects thousands of fellow Scots and almost 250,000 people across the UK. There is no known cure for ME and no proven treatment that can be guaranteed to work for everyone. Some people do recover from ME, but their recoveries may not be directly attributed to any particular regime or treatment. However, it is recognised that there are treatments and services that can offer real relief to some people with ME.

ME awareness week began on 10 May, and the toxic legacy of McEvedy and Beard must be revisited. A paper written by the two psychiatrists in 1970 has influenced medical, public and media perceptions of ME as an illness for decades. For ME awareness week, the press officer Sarah Staples argues that it is a story that every patient with ME needs to know and share. It has been claimed that it would almost be funny if its effects had not been so tragic.

ME is a disease defined by a flawed 40-year-old study, in which no patients were interviewed and which concluded that ME was mass hysteria, because many of those affected were women. McEvedy and Beard even suggested that the

disorder be called “myalgia nervosa”, which is quite unbelievable when one starts to realise the suffering that affected people endure. Ask anyone—male or female—who has ME and they will tell you their own horror story of the day when a doctor told them to go home, take an aspirin and rest or the time when a taxi driver taking them to college joked, “It’s only a short walk,” implying that they were lazy.

One sufferer in Falkirk described how, on some days, she could only get down the stairs by bumping down on her behind and get back up by crawling on her hands and knees. Others cannot even get out of bed. Another sufferer in my own region described it as like getting up after a night on the tiles with a bad hangover.

ME—also sometimes referred to as chronic fatigue syndrome—affects about 250,000 people, children as well as adults, here in the UK. About 25 per cent are severely affected, meaning that they are wheelchair-bound, house-bound and, in some cases, bed-bound.

For children and adolescents, ME is the most common cause of long-term sickness absence from school. That means that there could be about 400 people in my region alone who are suffering from but are not necessarily diagnosed with ME. Many people with ME or CFS experience long delays, sometimes of over a year, in obtaining a formal diagnosis. As a result, they are often given inadequate or even inappropriate or harmful advice on management. That is because medical education on both the diagnosis and management of ME at undergraduate and postgraduate level is often inadequate and sometimes even non-existent.

For the 25 per cent of people who have severe ME, resulting in being either house or bed-bound, domiciliary services and in-patient facilities are almost non-existent. Like my colleagues, I have tried to illustrate how ME can have a huge and life-changing impact on sufferers, yet it remains a condition for which we are no closer to having a clinical diagnosis.

With only four out of 14 health boards providing any sort of service to ME sufferers and, as Brian Whittle has already said, just one dedicated ME nurse in Scotland, it is clear that much more needs to be done to assist those who are suffering and that much more vital research is needed to understand this illness. We must look worldwide at the whole issue surrounding ME.

I thank Gail Ross for lodging a members’ business motion on this vitally important issue and I hope that the debate and all the events that are scheduled around ME awareness week do much to raise awareness of the issues that ME sufferers endure daily.

13:17

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): I am pleased to have the opportunity to close today's debate marking international ME awareness day 2017, which is on Friday, and ME awareness week. I thank Gail Ross for bringing the issue of ME to the chamber, and I thank Anas Sarwar for providing valuable context on why the date was chosen by explaining the link to Florence Nightingale.

It is clear from listening to members' speeches that ME remains a condition that many people do not understand, and many do not appreciate the impact that it can have on the lives of those who live with it. Gail Ross articulated very clearly the severe and significant health implications for those who suffer from ME, including the physical deterioration—which, in the case of Emma Shorter, means that she is physically unable to leave the house—and the mental health issues that the condition can cause. We need to recognise sufferers' wellbeing needs by treating those mental health issues.

The story of Gail Ross's friend Sally is an illustration of how the condition presents itself. We heard about the long, unfortunate journey that Sally had to embark on until diagnosis, the escalation of her condition, and the physical, mental and financial toll that it has taken on her. She is finally on a path that will, I hope, help her to get better.

All members' contributions are important in ensuring that, together, we can raise awareness of ME and the issues that it causes. As a Government, we believe that everyone who lives with ME should have access to the care and support that they need. That should be aided by our £2.5 million recurring investment in specialist nursing. I concede and accept that there are issues, but that investment should help to bring about improvements. Of course, we need to do more. We recognise that support is needed for the families and carers of those with ME. To that end—again, this is an issue that was raised by Anas Sarwar—third sector partners also play a crucial role and that role should be recognised. They act as powerful advocates for people with ME, and they deliver high-quality services and support to people who have the condition.

The Scottish Government has a good relationship with Action for ME, which is the UK's leading third sector organisation in the field. Over the past year, we have been working closely with Action for ME, and I am pleased to say that we have recently been able to provide funding to the organisation and to support its inform ME Scotland project, which will reach out to health and social care professionals and engage them in discussions about how to bring about positive

change in the health and social care support that is available to people with ME. Gail Ross and Emma Harper spoke about the real need for greater understanding and knowledge of ME among our medical and social care staff. I hope that Gail's friend Sally will take some comfort from the fact that her words can help to influence how medical professionals respond to the condition.

That is why the funding that we have provided to Action for ME to help to support a project that aims to improve healthcare pathways and health outcomes for people with ME is so important. The project also aims to promote education on the condition among healthcare professionals, including through round-table discussions, the production and dissemination of professional briefings, and the delivery of specialist webinars. It will seek to bring about positive change in the health and social care support that is available. Again, I am happy to keep Gail Ross updated on how that work progresses.

Action for ME is also about to undertake a five-year peer mentoring project, which has been made possible with substantial grant funding of more than £300,000 from the Scottish Government's transforming self-management fund. The aim is to build confidence and reduce isolation among people who are affected by ME and—just as importantly—among their carers. The project will develop a peer-mentoring, self-management support network across the country. I believe that Government support for both those projects should be seen as a sign of our commitment to improving health outcomes and quality of life for people in Scotland who live with ME.

At national level, our national advisory committee for neurological conditions is looking at models of care that represent the improvements that we want, such as person-centred care and support, with care provided by skilled nurses, therapists, doctors and care teams; better access to specialist services; and opportunities to participate in research into new treatments. Action for ME recently met officials from the national advisory committee and it is currently exploring how it can work collaboratively going forward.

Some members raised the topic of research as particularly pertinent to ME. I reiterate that I recognise the work of third sector organisations, including Action for ME, in raising the research profile of the disease. Officials from the chief scientist office would be happy to meet the charity to discuss areas of mutual interest. Applications for research on the underlying causes, diagnosis and treatment of ME are welcomed; in common with all other applications, they would go through the CSO standard independent peer review

process. I hope that that offer from the CSO will be taken up.

Gail Ross referred to the often heartbreaking interaction that ME sufferers have with the Department for Work and Pensions. I am proud of this Government's commitment to build a fairer system by designing an assessment process that prioritises the needs of the person rather than the needs of those who are delivering the assessment. For those with long-term conditions such as ME, we will introduce long-term awards and, wherever possible, assessments for those awards will be paper based rather than face to face. We will stop the revolving door of assessments that have caused so much stress and anxiety, and which certainly do not do any good for people who suffer from conditions that are exacerbated by such stress and anxiety. That is in stark contrast to the experiences that people recount in relation to the DWP, and that is why we will continue to develop a system that puts equality and respect at the heart of our approach.

In closing, I thank members for their thoughtful and very personal remarks throughout the debate. It is important that we continue to strive for improvements in all aspects of care for people with ME, and there is certainly much more that we need to do. We must—and we will—keep looking at how we can do better; how we should transform and improve care; and how we can equip ourselves to deliver even better health and social care services in the future for those who live with ME or any other long-term condition.

We have a hugely committed and professional workforce in our national health service. With the continued support and hard work of everyone who is involved, I am confident that we can continue to improve care and provide better support for people who are living with ME. I hope that we can ensure that there is no longer silence on the condition and that, by working together across party-political boundaries, we in Parliament can say loudly that we are committed to making improvements for people with ME.

Once again, I thank Gail Ross and other members for a very informed, insightful and illuminating debate.

13:24

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Keeping Children Safe Online

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The first item of business is a debate on motion S5M-05515, in the name of Mark McDonald, on keeping children safe online. I call Mark McDonald to speak to and move the motion.

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): On behalf of the Scottish Government, I am pleased to open this debate on child internet safety and to move the motion in my name.

On 21 April this year, I launched the “National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People”, which sets out 23 actions for the Scottish Government and partners to improve internet safety for children and young people. In developing the action plan, we worked across Government with third sector organisations, Education Scotland, Police Scotland and, importantly, with children and young people themselves.

The action plan has two overarching aims: first, that children and young people are able to enjoy the internet, show resilience and take advantage of the many opportunities that it has to offer, with a key priority to equip children and young people to stay safe online; and secondly, that children and young people are protected, safe and supported in the digital world. Priorities include ensuring that parents and carers feel empowered to support their child's online activity, supporting children and young people who have suffered abuse online and deterring potential perpetrators from committing online abuse in the first place. The plan also emphasises the role that wider society, including the online industry, must play in enhancing internet safety for children and young people.

I will highlight some of the actions from the plan in the chamber this afternoon. Before I do that, however, it is important to highlight that the internet and mobile technologies have positively transformed the lives of children and young people, bringing vast opportunities for learning, empowerment, communication and support. We must ensure that we equip our children and young people to benefit from those opportunities and to do so safely.

The amount of time that children and young people spend online has more than doubled since 2005, and they spend more time online than they do watching television, using apps such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp, to name only a few. The ways in which

young people are online continue to develop, with new apps and developments in gaming allowing greater interaction online than ever before. I recognise that for many children and young people, there is less and less distinction between the online and offline worlds. Many young people no longer understand the concept of “going online” in the way that many of us in the chamber do; their lives and identities are inextricably linked to their ability to interact and exist across the internet.

However, increasing reliance on online technologies makes us all—especially children and young people—potentially vulnerable to those who seek to exploit those technological advancements for malicious, fraudulent or criminal purposes. Being aware of the risks associated with that changing behaviour is important to ensure that our children and young people feel confident when going online and that we feel empowered to support them effectively.

Unfortunately, we are all aware that the internet is increasingly being used as a cover and a vehicle for those who wish to harm and abuse children. To understand the scale of the issue, over a six-week period in summer 2016, 523 children were identified as victims, or potential victims, of online child sexual abuse or other related abuse during Police Scotland’s operation Lattise, which was the first national operation of focused activity to tackle the many forms of online child sexual abuse. Extrapolation of those figures means that more than 4,500 children a year are being harmed or potentially harmed online, and potentially many more. Online child sexual abuse is a national threat, and the reality is that it is happening now to children of all ages.

As part of the action plan, we will work to ensure that professionals and communities have the appropriate skills and knowledge to provide support to children and young people, including those who have suffered abuse online. We will work with the Marie Collins Foundation, a UK charity, to pilot the “Click: path to protection” training module in Scotland, which is targeted at all professionals charged with safeguarding children who have been sexually abused and exploited online. Although the Government is already committed to progressing child protection training for professionals working with children and young people, including teachers, I take on board the need to ensure that that includes equipping teachers who have skills and knowledge in online safety to teach digitally—as they will increasingly do in the future—with confidence, so I am happy to accept the amendment in Tavish Scott’s name.

We should not single out any one group of professionals or one part of our population. We must all see the protection of children as our collective responsibility; we must all work together

to ensure that children and young people are protected online.

Importantly, the industry—and social media providers in particular—must also see the protection of children as a core responsibility. The NSPCC and O2 recently found that four out of five children consider that social media companies are not doing enough to protect them from pornography, self-harm, bullying and hatred on their sites.

The children and young people who were surveyed said overwhelmingly that social media providers need to do more to protect them from inappropriate or harmful content. That makes it clear that children and young people do not feel that they are protected from inappropriate and upsetting content online, and that social media companies need to do more to protect them.

I recognise the efforts of the online industry, including internet service providers and social media providers, to keep children safe online. Many have made efforts to provide support for parents, have run campaigns to address key issues and have developed responses to the changing challenges faced by those using their platforms. I also acknowledge and welcome the engagement by industry with those in the third sector and Government. However, I strongly agree with children and young people that the online industry needs to do more.

As part of the action plan, we have committed to working with digital media providers and industry to ensure that parents, carers and families, as well as children and young people, have access to appropriate information and support.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Mark McDonald: I will happily give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can allow extra time for interventions, minister.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the minister give us further information about how we might support parents in particular? I note that actions with parents and carers are highlighted. Adults will be one of the most difficult groups to educate and to reach. Of course, we all recognise that children are probably, in many senses, more expert than the adults are in the environment that we are talking about.

Mark McDonald: I thank Mr Stevenson for his intervention. He has somewhat pre-empted what I was going to speak about a little later, but I will respond to him directly now. I absolutely agree with him and I recognise the situations that he describes. As a parent, I sometimes find it difficult to relate to my daughter’s online activity on her tablet device. I would not class myself as being all

that old, although others may disagree. At the same time, I recognise that the internet and how it is being used has moved on substantially over a short period and we must ensure that all society is able to cope with the pace of change and that we protect children as part of that work.

Our on-going engagement includes UK-wide discussions with social media companies, technology firms, young people, charities and mental health experts, focusing on industry responsibilities to society, how technology can improve safety, helping parents face up to and discuss dangers and how to help young people help themselves.

As we developed the action plan, we spoke to children and young people. They told us that one of their main concerns online is bullying. Any bullying is totally unacceptable and we should intervene early and deal with it quickly, whenever and wherever it happens.

Importantly, it is clear that online bullying should not be treated any differently to offline bullying— young people have told us that themselves. Online bullying—or cyberbullying as it is often referred to—is the same behaviour as offline bullying and it certainly does not feel any different to those who experience it.

The Scottish Government continues to fully fund respectme, Scotland's anti-bullying service, which provides direct support to local authorities, schools, youth groups and all those working with children and young people.

We expect all schools to develop and implement an anti-bullying policy, which should be regularly reviewed and updated. A school's policy should reflect the overarching local authority policy and our refreshed anti-bullying guidance, the "National Approach to Anti-bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People", which will be published later this year.

We want all children and young people to learn tolerance, respect, equality and good citizenship to address and prevent prejudice, as well as to learn about healthy relationships, which are all relevant to both online and offline environments.

Education is one of the most important areas where we can work to promote internet safety for children and young people and we are committed to making sure that child internet safety is properly recognised in Scottish education. Children and young people will learn about the safe and responsible use of different technologies, including the internet and social media, as part of their broad general education under curriculum for excellence.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
rose—

Mark McDonald: I will give way in a second.

As part of the action plan we have committed to working with the South West Grid for Learning to promote and update the 360 degree safe tool that is used by schools in Scotland to help ensure that schools continue to have robust, up-to-date e-safety policies in place.

I give way to Daniel Johnson. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Johnson. Your microphone is not on. [*Interruption.*] Ah! That will be why—your card is not in. Obviously you are not very good with technology.

Daniel Johnson: I am still making rookie mistakes one year on, Presiding Officer.

I welcome the minister's comments about incorporating those elements into the broad general education, but can he elaborate on and provide some details about the training that will be undertaken by teachers who are already practising?

Mark McDonald: Mr Johnson makes a fair point. The Government is committed not only to ensuring that we review initial teacher education but to looking at the continuous professional development that is available to teachers and how we can make that more relevant. We have a number of programmes under way that focus on how we empower pupils and teachers in this regard, and I am more than happy to write to Mr Johnson with more detail on the specific programmes that are in place and to keep that matter under review.

Although I have made it clear that education is one of the most important areas where we can work to promote internet safety for children and young people, I also believe that, as I have highlighted to Mr Stevenson, empowering parents and carers to guide and support their child's online activity is most definitely another. Smartphone and tablet ownership among children and young people is on the increase, and it means that they are accessing the internet everywhere they go, including their home. Ofcom recently reported that more than half of three to four-year-olds and 75 per cent of five to 15-year-olds use a tablet in their home, and that is in addition to their owning a smartphone and having access to a smart TV, game console, a desktop computer or laptop. It is therefore more important than ever that parents and carers feel confident in engaging in this activity.

In addition to its anti-bullying service, respectme delivers parent training sessions on internet safety across Scotland, providing practical advice to parents and carers on online settings and security. Indeed, there is a wide range of resources and opportunities out there for parents and carers that

is provided by industry, third sector organisations and Police Scotland, but not all parents and carers are aware of those resources or know which ones to use. I have therefore committed to engaging with parent and carer organisations across Scotland to host a series of events aimed at empowering parents and carers to support their children's online activity. That includes enabling parents and carers to feel confident about having open conversations with their children, encouraging them to communicate responsibly with their children and, through the promotion of the vast array of existing resources that I have outlined, letting them know where to go for help if they need it.

We also need to equip children and young people themselves to stay safe online. For a start, we need to ensure that all children and young people are fully armed with the knowledge of their rights and the skills that they need to use the internet safely. That includes an understanding of cyber-risks and threats at a time when we are experiencing unprecedented rates of cybercrime. Children and young people told us that the most important thing that would improve online safety for them would be support for building their personal resilience, so we will work with our partners to ensure that children and young people are supported to build their resilience online.

Young people also told us that talking about staying safe online through peer networks was one of the most effective ways of reaching them, and we continue to support Police Scotland's choices for life be smart peer mentoring programme and to fund the mentors in violence prevention programme, both of which encourage young people to think carefully about their behaviour online and ensure that they remain safe and supported.

As we work to improve internet safety for children and young people, it will be vital for us to listen to their voices. The Scottish Government is proud to support the 5Rights campaign and has awarded £100,000 of funding to Young Scot to help place young people at the heart of the 5Rights coalition in Scotland and to support them in developing insights and making recommendations about rights in the digital world.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): One of the rights that the 5Rights coalition has set out is the right to remove. What analysis has the Scottish Government done on the specific legislative powers that the Parliament—or indeed the UK Government—has with regard to enforcing that right? One of the key issues is that when content goes out into the public domain and is shared numerous times, it becomes very difficult to trace who actually owns it. How do young people know where to go to get that content off the

internet once it has gone into the public domain? That is a really big area.

Mark McDonald: Jamie Greene is quite right to highlight the issue, and I thank him for his intervention. As he will be aware, much of the underpinning legislation remains reserved to Westminster, but we remain in constant dialogue with our UK Government colleagues on how best we can ensure that inappropriate content is removed from the internet as soon as possible.

I have had a very constructive discussion with the Internet Watch Foundation, which is actively working to remove inappropriate content. I believe that it sent a briefing to members ahead of the debate. I certainly encourage members to enter into discussion with it and help to highlight its work and how people can contact it in their local communities.

The 5Rights coalition has identified a youth commission, which consists of 19 people from across Scotland, to develop informed insights, ideas, recommendations and solutions in relation to how Scotland can become a nation that realises and respects children's and young people's digital rights. I look forward to its final report in the coming weeks, and we will carefully consider its findings in future policy development.

As the Minister for Childcare and Early Years and a father of two, I want all children and young people in Scotland to be protected, safe and supported in the online world and able to enjoy the internet, show resilience and take advantage of the opportunities that it has to offer. That is not just the responsibility of industry and social media providers, parents, teachers or other professionals; it is the responsibility of us all as a society. It is everyone's job to do all that we can to keep our children and young people safe, whether in our local communities or in the virtual world.

Although there is no doubt that the digital world that our children and young people inhabit now and will inhabit in the future does and will contain risks and challenges for their wellbeing, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is a fundamental part of their lives. It is a fantastic source of education and entertainment and is often the first place that they go to talk to their friends. I encourage young people to embrace the internet's huge potential.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the publication of the Scottish Government's *National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People*; supports the right of children and young people to be safe and supported online; recognises the positive uses of the internet for children and young people, including the vast opportunities for learning and communication, and agrees that everyone has a role to play in keeping children safe online.

14:46

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives will support the Government's motion and Tavish Scott's amendment.

As an Internet Watch Foundation champion, I welcome the debate and acknowledge the excellent work that the Internet Watch Foundation carries out. Undoubtedly, it has one of the most successful hotlines in the world. It has reduced the amount of child sexual abuse content that is hosted in the UK from 18 per cent in 1996 to less than 1 per cent, since 2003. I thoroughly recommend that every member sign up to be an IWF champion. As Mark McDonald said, it carries out amazing work. I strongly urge people to do that.

The internet is one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century. I am sure that we all agree that we would be lost without our emails, social media and online shopping. People can access information in milliseconds in volumes that are beyond the capacity of our minds to quantify. The internet is a fantastic tool for educating children and young people, who can be virtually transported to the four corners of the world—to deserts, polar ice caps and mountains high—just with the use of Google Maps. They can watch inspirational speeches from the likes of the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King and Winston Churchill and can watch other monumental events in history on YouTube. They can learn to cook, learn a new language or videocall a friend on the other side of the world. The internet provides endless opportunities to broaden children's minds and let their boundless imaginations flourish.

Although the internet provides that vast sea of opportunities for children and young people, we know that it has a sinister side, which has brought us here to have this debate. From the start, we need robust and concrete guidance for teachers, parents and guardians to ensure that children and young people are not harmed by the internet and the people who abuse it. I welcome the "National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People", which is a step forward in developing an effective way of supporting children and young people while tackling head on the problem of abuse on the internet. I hope that it helps children and young people who are affected by bullying. As the minister stated, that is at the core of the issue.

We must tackle the ever-increasing problem of cyberbullying, which has emerged over the past few years. According to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, one in three children has experienced cyberbullying. It is a serious problem that blights children's lives, and it must be nipped in the bud. In years gone by, bullying mostly stopped at the school gate:

children went home and could escape the problem. Sadly, in the digital age, the threat now reaches beyond that and into our homes. Children and young people can be bombarded with harmful texts and offensive messages on social media 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Explicit and inappropriate media have been sent to children and young people using apps such as Snapchat.

Underlying all those issues is the impact on children's mental health. Children and young people who are abused online are often silenced by their abusers and are too scared to turn to their parents for help. The anxiety and stress that build up in children and young people are often things that they cannot describe or explain. That can leave them in the awful position of bottling things up, which results in mental health issues later down the line. Given that, I welcome the plan's list of actions to tackle online grooming. Children and young people need to be informed of how to be aware when someone is not who they say they are.

If we are to ensure that our children and young people are safe online, it must be done in a collaborative way, with parents and teachers working together. We must properly implement the national action plan, but we must go further than that.

It is often easy—particularly for those of us who are of a generation that is slightly older than that of the minister—to be passive and not take an interest in how our children use the internet and social media. It is imperative that we strike the balance between monitoring our children's activities and allowing them the freedom to explore the internet with the necessary knowledge to spot dangers and know how to avoid them. A robust set of guidance and advice would work well to ensure that we can educate parents, too, on the dangers that can arise from misuse of the internet.

Moreover, the guidance should encourage parents to learn which social media platforms are appropriate for their child. Given that one in five eight to 11-year-olds has access to some form of social media, it is more important than ever to make sure that parents are aware of what potential problems could arise from young children using social media platforms. Children and young people are often unaware of the pitfalls of having an online presence, so their parents have a duty to inform them and keep track of any posts.

On a constructive note, although the action plan is a positive step forward, it should go further. In order to support and assist parents in the ever-changing world of social media, the Scottish Government should provide a parent-friendly website, which could give advice on topics from social media security to spotting signs of online abuse.

As the plan mentions, teachers must also be better informed to educate children and young people on internet safety. As recently as yesterday, in the Education and Skills Committee trainee teachers highlighted the point that there is very little or nothing on internet safety in the postgraduate diploma in education course. I welcome the minister's commitment today to provide proper training.

Another significant problem on which the action plan could go further is revenge pornography—the abhorrent and cruel act of sharing inappropriate images without permission. It has a massive negative impact on children's self-esteem, mental health and perceptions of body image. Sexting and the issues associated with sending explicit images must be addressed.

During 2015-16 there were 1,392 counselling sessions on sexting, which is a 15 per cent increase on the previous year. That is very worrying and we simply cannot allow it to increase any further. Younger children who are forced to send images to an abuser often struggle to turn to a parent or teacher for help for fear of being given into trouble. As part of the plan, advice for children and parents must be available to help children who are victims of revenge pornography and sexting.

In conclusion, I welcome the plan that has been put forward by the minister. However, although it should be commended as a very positive step forward, it is delivery and implementation of the plan that are important. In the Conservative amendment, we mention that Parliament must be updated regularly on progress on implementation of the national action plan. That is crucial to ensure that real progress can be measured, and in order to identify areas where improvement needs to be speeded up.

It is vital that we can report back to constituents on the plan, because many parents want to see real action being taken on the matter. Furthermore, we would welcome a delivery timescale so that we can determine whether the action plan is being delivered on time, and to give better clarity to the public.

The plan does not mention the cost of implementation, so we would like that to be published in the near future. We have a duty to ensure that the plan is well adopted by all stakeholders in order that we can tackle and stop the problems that can arise so that our children and young people are safe online.

I move amendment S5M-05515.2, to insert after first "Young People;"

"expects that the Scottish Government will update the Parliament regularly on the progress of the implementation of the plan;"

14:55

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I broadly agree with Mark McDonald and Annie Wells on the broad thread of internet safety for children and young people. I will concentrate my brief remarks on how young people grow up and learn as much as on the legal aspects and the issues of safety and prosecution that the minister and Annie Wells mentioned.

Without question, social media, the internet and the online presence that everyone now has are a double-edged sword. I do not know how many parents my colleagues across the chamber share time with, but parents will say that the internet is on the one hand the greatest thing that we have ever had and on the other hand the greatest pain in our lives, as we deal with the pressures on our children and young people and encourage them to have the resilience that we expect of them.

When I started looking into the issue last night, I found a *Times Educational Supplement Scotland* investigation into it that began with a point that is important to bear in mind, as it gives us context. It stated that, in 370 BC,

"the Greek philosopher Socrates warned that this new-fangled business of writing would lead to forgetfulness in students if they no longer had to remember everything. The advent of the printing press in the 15th century and television in the 20th century sparked the same moral panic: technology was a dangerous force set to rob our young of their senses, turn brains to mush and leave society in ruins."

Well, none of that happened—the opposite happened—and it will not happen with the internet, either. However, Mark McDonald and Annie Wells are right that, arguably, we need to put in place more safeguards with the internet than we have had to with learning to write, with the printing press or with television.

I am struck that not much research has been done on young people learning and growing up on the internet. The Government might wish to consider that for the future. However, the *Times Educational Supplement Scotland* article that I referred to mentioned one social scientist who has observed that one problem area that is linked to the growth in the use of the internet is linguistic skills—the basic skills that we expect of our young people, such as the ability to listen to someone, concentrate on what they are saying, make eye contact and have human interaction. They said:

"It's ... about the social cues that you get from people when they're talking to you: non-verbal cues, body language, negotiation skills and turn-taking. You can't get that from a computer."

The same is true of a tablet or mobile phone, even when a parent is on FaceTime to their seven-year-old—or maybe especially then. There is much merit in those arguments.

The evidence is important to consider in thinking about how we develop the proposals in the action plan that we have heard about. We could go as far as the new President of France, who said in his election campaign that he would ban mobile phones in schools for all children under the age of 15—children would leave them at home and not take them to school. We could do that but, as we have lowered the voting age to 16, I suspect that it would be an extremely unpopular policy that no Government of any political persuasion would bring in. However, Macron makes a serious point, which teachers have also reflected to us, about the use of mobile phones in schools, what it means and how it invades life—and, more to the point, classes—and about the dangers that Annie Wells rightly highlighted. How do parents, carers, teachers and, above all, young people cope with the vast influx of information that is at their beck and call?

As has been mentioned, training and guidance are vital. That is why I was slightly taken aback by the evidence from young teachers to the Education and Skills Committee yesterday that their courses did not include training on internet safety—none of them dissented from that. That is not in the training of the cohort of men and women who will be the teachers of the future.

I am grateful for the point that the minister made, but I am looking for a change in the action plan or at least for consideration to be given to having an action point that specifically and clearly draws out the need for some kind of module in teacher training. All the controversy yesterday was about the fact that literacy forms only one component week of teacher training. Online safety could be said to be an equally important matter for training.

Page 14 of the minister's action plan says:

"Children and young people will learn about the safe and responsible use of different technologies, including the internet and social media, as part of their broad general education under Curriculum for Excellence."

The action plan is right about that, but it does not say from whom children will learn. I want the Government to ensure that teachers are properly supported in the future, which means supporting existing teachers, but as importantly, it means that knowledge and understanding should be built in earlier—during teacher training—and that should take place in time for the start of the new academic year.

The action plan describes the importance of resilience, and I hope that considerable attention will be given to exactly how that will be taken forward. That leads me to the second area in which I suggest to the minister that change is necessary, which concerns the use of youth workers to assist in secondary schools, both in

broad general education and in the senior phase. Across most, if not all, of our secondary schools, pupil support structures and guidance tend to be provided by promoted teachers at the moment.

There is a strong argument for the use of youth workers, given not just the need to address internet safety during school but the challenges of addressing mental health, suicide prevention and other social challenges that we lay on schools all the time. I hope that the Government will consider carefully how youth workers can be more involved in relation to internet safety and those other areas, particularly in the context of the clusters, which are the right approach to the future delivery of education.

The point about youth workers was best made to me by Jim Sweeney and YouthLink Scotland, which provided three points for me to use in the debate. YouthLink Scotland said that there is a need for

"further resources for the development and delivery of up to date training for youth workers on supporting young people's safety and wellbeing online."

I am sure that the minister would readily accept that point, although I understand the usual challenge of resources.

YouthLink Scotland rightly argues that

"There is a range of training out there and guidance around child protection and policies around social media, but there is not a consistent picture across the sector. All youth work organisations will have child protection policies in place"—

that is absolutely the case in Shetland—

"with varying degrees of incorporation of social media."

There is an argument about consistency.

With Young Scot, YouthLink Scotland co-hosts the digital youth network of practitioners, which will look at how to future proof digital and social media policies in the coming months.

That takes me back to the start. To argue for better teacher training, as I hope that I have, means recognising that the world never slows down or stops; it keeps evolving and developing. That means that no part of teacher training and course design can ever lie in aspic—it must steadily evolve. That in itself is a challenge, but I hope that our teaching institutions can work with the Government, YouthLink Scotland, other agencies and young people—as the minister rightly said—in designing the broad thrust of a proposal that can make the difference that we will all depend on for young people's safety.

I move amendment S5M-05515.1, to insert at end:

“; is concerned that teacher training does not adequately cover online safety for children and young people, and calls on the Scottish Government to work with education

institutions to rectify this emerging requirement in training classroom teachers.”

15:04

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): This is an unusual debate in a lot of ways. It is an incredibly difficult topic, but not because we differ on its importance, on the analysis, or even on what the solutions might be. None of us will disagree that our children are at risk—all children, rich or poor, urban or rural, boys or girls—and none of us will argue anything except that we must act to protect them. The problem is that we are all struggling to understand those risks, and struggling even more to develop our responses. Where we normally divide, driven apart by our competing certainties, in this we unite, drawn together by our shared bewilderment.

Yet this issue goes to the heart of the human condition: the challenge of how to be a good parent and to ensure the safety of the next generation. It also goes to one of the core dilemmas of modern life: the balance between privacy and security on the one hand, and connectivity and interaction on the other.

Parenting has never been easy. There has always been a contradiction between keeping our children from risk and allowing them to engage and grow in the world. That is as true of cyberspace as it is of physical space. We are, after all, just beginning to understand that we have perhaps become overprotective of children in the real world, curtailing their freedom to play and learn outside the home, when it seems to many of us, quite suddenly, that the greatest risks appear to be in that very home—in their bedroom, their school or even the pocket where their smartphone lies.

As Barnardo’s pointed out in its briefing for today, and as the Government motion acknowledges, the rapid development of digital technology is an incredible opportunity for our children, not just a danger. It can provide access to knowledge and information for them in a way that we could not have imagined when we were young. However, the risks are real, and they are not exaggerated. They are risks that we struggle to understand, often conducted in a language of acronym, abbreviation and slang that is opaque to us. They are risks that seem to multiply every day.

Just as we come to terms with understanding the potential of the digital world for predators who groom children for their own ends or who multiply the abuse of their victims exponentially online, we are confronted with the reality of sexting and cyberbullying, where the risk lies in our own children and grandchildren’s actions and the malice of their peers, not with strangers.

How, then, do we proceed? We have to start by admitting that we find those risks frightening and difficult to understand, but we have to confront them and find a way to gain that understanding. Back in 2011, a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “The Protection of Children Online”, provided some first-class analysis of what the OECD calls the “typology of risks”. It shows us that the risks are multifaceted but they can be understood as a first step to addressing them.

The diversity of risks takes us to the next principle to which we must aspire, which is that absolutely everyone has a role to play here: parents, Government, teachers, police, social work—everyone, not least children themselves.

The Scottish Government’s action plan recognises that, with a series of resources and events that are aimed at increasing parent awareness, with participation in the work of Parent Zone International and the Internet Watch Foundation. I wonder, however, how many parents are aware of those initiatives and how many are engaging with them.

Mark McDonald: I accept that point—and I think I did so in my speech. That is why I have committed to working with parent and carer organisations, which are often those that are best placed to reach out to some parents who will perhaps not access some of the opportunities that already exist but which are perhaps not as well publicised as they could be. That is why I have made that commitment to engage with those organisations: to attract more parents to take an involvement.

Iain Gray: I very much appreciate that response from the minister. I do not mean this as any kind of criticism, but it is crucial that we find a way to go beyond ticking boxes. The danger for all of us is that we allow ourselves to be satisfied with that. That is heartening to hear.

The action plan contains a crucial commitment to the training of professionals in recognising and responding to inappropriate behaviours, bullying or predation online. As Mr Scott made clear, however, the Education and Skills Committee heard only yesterday from trainee teachers who do not believe that their basic preparation for their profession covers that at all. My colleague Daniel Johnson will say more about that evidence later, but it makes the amendment in Tavish Scott’s name both sensible and desirable. I hope that the Scottish Government will take that on board this evening—I think that it will.

For all of us, one of the hardest realities to come to terms with is the degree to which children themselves can put themselves at risk or can become the perpetrators of abuse. As Barnardo’s

tells us, children and young people are increasingly turning online for information about sex and relationships. The truth is that we have to be prepared to create an open and realistic attitude to sex if we are ever going to expect them to be open about the problems that that may lead them into. We have to find ways, legislative if necessary, to ensure that every child receives high-quality, age-appropriate education about sex and relationships. Every day that we fail to do that sees the risk to children exacerbated by their own uncertainty about finding their way in this aspect of life.

The minister is right—we have to demand much more in the way of responsibility from the companies that provide, create and of course profit from the digital technology that is the platform for these risks. How we do that is a whole other vast and difficult topic. No one can deny that, as the minister indicated, the companies have engaged with the likes of Internet Matters, the Internet Watch Foundation, and other partnerships. However, that seems to me only to scratch the surface of the fundamental responsibility that those corporations have because they are, unavoidably, the enablers of the risks that we are discussing.

I said that this is a difficult and often bewildering topic. That does not mean that we should talk about it less; rather, we should talk about it more. We in this Parliament cannot allow this debate to be a box-ticking exercise and the Conservative amendment is right to demand that we return to the topic regularly. After all, given the rapidly accelerating development of digital media and the fleeting nature of those wonderful but vulnerable years of childhood, time is not on our side.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Although speeches generally are six minutes, we have some time in hand, so interventions are available and perhaps welcome.

15:12

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): The past two decades have seen a tremendous growth in internet use, in no small part thanks to the combined proliferation of social media, ever-increasing broadband speeds and exponential improvements in hand-held technology. Most of us in the chamber might recall the days of dial-up modems 15 or 20 years ago, when getting even a low-speed internet connection could largely be a game of chance. However, nowadays we rely on the internet for almost everything—shopping, travel or even booking a haircut.

As internet use has risen, we have seen the arrival of a criminal element who take advantage

wherever they can. Termed cybercrime, the actions that these individuals and groups take include the theft of intellectual property, attacks against essential services or critical infrastructure, identity theft and fraud, bullying and, finally, sexual exploitation. In the context of Scotland's young people, it is likely that those last two points will be the most relevant and the most emotionally damaging.

The 2015 report by Barnardo's and the Marie Collins Foundation, "Digital Dangers", examined some of the ways in which children can be sexually exploited or groomed online, in a few cases without even realising exactly what is happening. The case of a 14-year-old girl who was groomed online by an older man and subsequently had sex with him may sound typical, but the facts of the case make for surprising reading. The perpetrator was no less than a medical professional who worked with children and young people, while the girl herself is described as a high achiever at school with supportive parents, a close extended family and a good network of friends.

Then there is the devastating case of Mary, a 15-year-old who was raped by her boyfriend twice. On the second occasion, the rape was watched by the perpetrator's friends and sexually explicit photos were taken and subsequently passed around Mary's school. As a result, she has disengaged from education entirely, has been diagnosed as clinically depressed, has a total lack of self-confidence and motivation, and spends her days on social media, messaging unknown males and sending explicit images of herself on request. It seems that Mary is comfortable only in her online persona and cannot engage with the offline world. I am sure that everyone in the chamber will feel tremendous empathy towards Mary and anyone else in a similar situation.

The teenage years are formative, and whatever experiences we undergo during those years shape us for the rest of our lives. It is very difficult to transcend the effects of an experience as overwhelmingly upsetting as that which Mary endured.

A major part of protecting young people online is the need to build up a layer of trust with parents. Teenagers want to feel independent and parents want to respect their freedom, but there are pitfalls when it comes to knowing where to draw the line. The "Digital Dangers" report describes several cases in which parents intervened. Some did so in the nick of time to stop abuse, and others did so when the abuse had already started. The report gives some of the reasons why young people did not tell anybody about the abuse that they had suffered before it was discovered. Those include:

"the highly sexualised nature of the communications sent by the young people, both written and pictorial; feelings of

complicity; lying about their age; being in love and having emotional dependency on their online”

so-called partner, as well as

“fear of peer group and family responses to”

their actions. In some cases to which the report refers, the young person remained supportive of their abuser even after discovery, which highlights how comprehensively and insidiously someone can be groomed, particularly when they believe that they are in love and they are afraid of the response from family and friends.

From the evidence in the “Digital Dangers” report, it is clear that keeping children safe online is a highly complex issue with a range of factors to be taken into account. Much of that is reflected in the Scottish Government’s recently published national action plan, which builds on the actions that were set out in the 2010 document “Scotland’s child internet safety action plan” and in the 2011-12 “Scottish Action Plan on Child Internet Safety and Responsible Use”. The commitments were structured under three general aims: giving everybody the skills, knowledge and understanding to help children and young people to stay safe online; inspiring safe and responsible use and behaviour; and creating a safer online environment.

In the creation of the recent national plan, the views of a wide range of stakeholders were taken into account, including—crucially—the thoughts of young people as gathered by Young Scot, YouthLink Scotland and the 5Rights youth commissioners. That feedback has proved invaluable in enabling us to find out how Scotland’s children and young people see the internet. The point was made that the internet provides many opportunities, but that is tempered by a feeling that the online and offline worlds are not distinct and that it can be difficult to log off or otherwise disengage from social media.

A key issue that came up in the consultation of young people, and which was considered in the national plan, is the possibility of requiring social media providers to make it easier for people to report and block material. For all the background support and information that we can provide, there needs to be a clear and straightforward method to allow end users to report unsuitable material directly to providers so that appropriate action can be taken. I am pleased to see that the national plan confirms that the Scottish Government has successfully made links with the likes of Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Google to discuss internet safety for the young people who use their various platforms and how safety can be better promoted on those media.

To date, the Scottish Government has taken a range of steps to help to promote internet safety.

For example, it provided £100,000 of funding to the 5Rights coalition, which

“believes that children and young people must be empowered to access the digital world creatively, knowledgeably and fearlessly.”

We can support those rights as we move forward by taking a number of the measures that are outlined in the national plan. The Government will work with Parent Zone International on the planning and delivery of an internet safety summit for professionals who work with parents. It will promote and update the 360-degree safe tool, which is a programme that

“enables schools and organisations to self-evaluate against a detailed set of e-safety criteria.”

It will

“work with the Marie Collins Foundation to pilot the CLICK: Path to Protection training module in Scotland, which is targeted at all professionals charged with safeguarding children who have been sexually abused and exploited online.”

In addition, it will work with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to deliver a summit next month on sexual offending and young people. Those are just a few examples that have been outlined in the Government’s national action plan.

When all the evidence is examined, there can be no doubt that protecting young people on the internet is a complex issue, with many factors to be taken into account. The internet has become a near-essential facet of modern life, especially for those of a younger generation. As with many things that become significant at a pace that outstrips legislation, Governments can find themselves playing catch up. However, although internet safety is not an issue on which we can stand still, I believe that the right steps are being taken to ensure that Scotland’s young people can browse the web and use social media safely and without fear of exploitation.

15:19

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): Ensuring that our children and young people are safe online is incredibly important. I say that as a parent with three daughters and a son who seem to live permanently on their internet devices. However, I must say that they act very responsibly—it certainly seems that way, thank goodness.

Stewart Stevenson: Seems.

Maurice Corry: Thank you.

As more and more young people spend their time online and as the internet continues to play an increasing role in our society, ensuring that young people are safe online is becoming a larger part of looking after the overall welfare of young

people. Access to the internet in the 21st century offers young people incredible opportunities that my generation were unfortunate to miss out on. Children today can benefit from access to unlimited educational resources, the ability to communicate with friends and family members across the globe, and the chance to organise social events among friends. We can see that, across the board, youngsters are taking full advantage of their access to the internet: one in five eight to 11-year-olds and seven in 10 12 to 15-year-olds now have a social media profile.

On the whole, activity on the internet by youngsters is conducted in a positive and safe manner. Unfortunately, however, the online environment is not always a welcoming one. That is highlighted by the fact that one in four children has experienced something that was upsetting on a social networking site or has come across racist or hate messaging online, and the fact that one in three has been a victim of cyberbullying. Those figures are based only on what children admit to having seen online, and there are undoubtedly many children who will be unwilling to speak openly about their experiences, even to their parents.

The area of online activity by our young people is a big issue and I, for one, am glad that we are debating it in the chamber today. The NSPCC has noted that there was an increase of 13 per cent between 2014-15 and 2015-16 in the number of counselling sessions in which cyberbullying was mentioned. That is a huge rise and one that we have to take very seriously. I firmly believe that education will play a big part in helping young people to deal with the issues that they will face online. That is why I am glad that the “National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People” includes measures to help boost education on the issue. Pre-empting the issues and helping young people to build their own resilience, as the plan suggests, is a good idea.

In particular, the promotion of the 360-degree safe self-review tool is an excellent way to help to ensure that our children are safer online. The tool allows schools’ and organisations’ online systems to be rated on a scale of 5 to 1 on various aspects of internet safety. That will help schools, especially, to home in on areas that need to be improved in order to allow their pupils to continue to enjoy safe access to the internet. Further, if young people know how to identify the issues and understand how to address them, they will be able to keep themselves secure and safe online, and to continue to reap the benefits of having access to the internet.

The work of Parent Zone International is also worth mentioning at this point. It is an organisation that offers digital parenting training courses that

aim to educate parents and others on how to make sure that children use the internet in a responsible and safe manner. Educating parents as well as children is hugely important so that they can set a positive example for their children to follow. I certainly welcome that, because I was not a parent who had training on the issue. Although my children are now slightly older than the targeted group, I would have appreciated the online teaching resources for adults, and I know that they would have helped me to teach my children how to use the internet safely. I understand that there are many adults in the same boat as me, who might not have grown up with regular access to the internet and who, even today, need a bit of extra support on using it safely.

It is great that Parent Zone International is offering that service, and I am glad to see that the Scottish Government is going to hold a parent internet safety summit alongside Parent Zone International, which will hopefully be a stepping stone towards helping all parents look after their children online.

We welcome the Scottish Government’s national action plan, and we strongly encourage the Government to continue to work closely with charities, schools and parents. However, we note that the key to success in this area lies not in publishing the plan but in ensuring that it is actioned and that it works for every child in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that we still have some time in hand. The alternative is that we all rely on Mr Stevenson, so think on. [*Laughter.*]

15:24

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): People who have teenagers walk a fine line between giving them freedom and trust to find their own path and keeping a watchful eye to protect them, as many members have mentioned. I am a mum to a 14-year-old, who does not like me mentioning her in my speeches, so you ain’t seen me, right? [*Laughter.*] My speech today comes from a personal place—that of a mum who is struggling to know how safe my child is online and what I can do to protect her.

I commend the Government for taking action with the measures that the minister has outlined today.

Last month, in my constituency, a very brave young girl went public about her experiences online. She went to the press, with the assistance of her mother, because she wanted what had happened to her to act as a warning to other young people. She was coerced by an older boy

into taking naked photographs of herself and sending them to him via Snapchat. The images were then circulated widely by the boy and his friends. On realising what had happened, the girl went to her mother for help. What the mother found on her daughter's phone were messages of an inappropriate nature from quite a few older boys, and there was constant badgering for nude images. Very quickly, those boys had the police at their doors, and investigations are taking place. The girl is only 11 years old.

What happened to that girl prompted me to have a discussion on the subject with my daughter and her friends who were round at my house that night. They told me that "nudes for nudes" was something that a lot of people at their school did—not them, of course—and it turns out that the exchange was not just about an adolescent thrill between teens flirting with one another online, but that it could lead to bullying, as those with images would threaten others who had sent them. Girls would threaten other girls, they told me. They spoke of one girl in their school who had a collection of images of her so-called friends that could be deployed at will should she ever feel the need to humiliate them online.

That very frank, illuminating and—to be honest—terrifying conversation prompted me to get together with my constituency's newly elected members of the Scottish Youth Parliament to work together on a project. We are planning a closed forum after exam time to allow young people from all the schools in our area to highlight the issues that they face online. As a result of the forum, we are going to put together an action plan on how we can raise awareness of online bullying, which is rife, and how we can help young people, teachers and parents—me included—to know how to tackle the problems.

Children need to be made aware that what they might do impulsively for fun can have serious repercussions. Once that photo leaves their phone and is sent to someone else, they have no control over where it goes or how many people see it. Additionally, we have to make people who solicit these images aware that they could face criminal charges. Those people are not just the bogeyman or the monster. They are not just the older man or the child sex predator. They are young adolescent males who really think that they are doing no harm. I am not making any excuses for them but, as a parent of a 19-year-old boy, I would be absolutely horrified if he was in a position where the police were at my door for something that he thought was innocent or just a joke.

The schoolchildren who encouraged that 11-year-old girl to pose for those photographs must surely now be regretting their actions. Just yesterday, a man was convicted in Aberdeen

sheriff court for sending a nude image of himself to a young girl via Snapchat. Not only do young adults put themselves at risk when they send such images, but they could face criminal charges for both sending and receiving images of an underage child.

I asked my two members of the Scottish Youth Parliament to contribute to my speech, and I am going to end with their words. Josh MacRae MSYP, who goes to Inverurie academy, said:

"Many young people are unaware of the consequences of posting an inappropriate photo of themselves or a peer and how quickly an embarrassing photo or video can spread online."

The contribution from Evie Robertson MSYP, who goes to Oldmeldrum academy, nails the issue. She says:

"Nowadays young people often feel pressured to say or do things, and often broadcast them on social media. Often seemingly harmless at first, however it can then escalate to very hurtful comments, and this often has a very damaging effect on the victim, and their mental health. There is also the looming pressure to send indecent images to other people via social media. There is often very little that can be done to prevent the spread of images once they are sent, but if we can educate younger children before they reach their teenage years then we may have a chance to reduce incidents of images being sent in the first place."

Before I sit down, I am afraid that I am going to frighten the life out of everyone with one statistic. The Federal Bureau of Investigation in the US has said that, by its estimation, at any given moment there are 750,000 child predators online. Images can end up on their screens. Evie is right: educating children before they reach their teenage years is vital to protect them. As with many things, education is the key.

15:30

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Today we are debating the "National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People". The document mentions lots of good local, Scottish, UK and international projects that are doing work in this field. It is a very complex picture, and, to be honest, I was not always convinced that the work is co-ordinated. That is not to question the dedication and commitment of the people and organisations that are working on the issue or the positive contributions that they are making in relation to children and young people, but there is a lack of a strategic framework or strategic intent. The minister says in the foreword that the action plan is "an important step", but I would appreciate a clearer analysis and a stronger statement of intent from the Government.

The report says that, in 2019, a progress report will be published, which

“may set out further actions that will reflect the rapid evolution of online technologies and our need to ensure we respond appropriately.”

I am concerned that that timeline will not keep pace with the challenges that we are facing.

I will focus on a few aspects of what is a wide-ranging document. For all the positive aspects that the internet brings to our lives, it is too often used as a destructive tool. The internet can facilitate and support child abuse and exploitation, through grooming, the sharing of images and videos, and abusers’ use of the internet to contact and create networks with other abusers. The internet gives greater potential for all that activity to happen. Although the action plan focuses on Scotland, we know that such child exploitation is often focused on some of the poorest countries in the world—countries that sit outside the reach of our legislation.

Alongside that vile industry—clearly, that is what it is—is a more complex picture of our society, where certain things are normalised among young people and young adults and there is an intersection between what is legal and what is criminal. We have a society where it is common for celebrities to record sex tapes and for sexuality and self-worth to be interpreted and judged visually, where intimate images are leaked—it is acceptable and expected that they are taken—and where pornography is much more widely available and the regulation of the internet is pretty ineffective in restricting access to it by children and young people.

The risks that the majority of children in Scotland face on the internet relate to bullying and the ability to access inappropriate materials. We must ensure that there are comprehensive services to support the children who are most at risk: those who are victims of child exploitation and abuse. We must always be vigilant.

In this country, the young people who are sexually exploited by adults are largely teenage girls, although Gillian Martin gave the example of an 11-year-old girl, so we should be aware that pre-pubescent girls are at risk. Those girls are sometimes exploited by criminal gangs or organised groups, so they need the intelligence and prioritisation of our police force, and they need the intervention of the criminal justice system. They need authorities to recognise their vulnerability and they need all of us not to turn a blind eye to that behaviour.

The experience of young people—say, those aged 13 to 17—is quite different from ours. Their social platforms are a significant part of their lives. The document tells us that young people who responded to the consultation felt that the online and offline worlds are not distinct and they do not differentiate between the two. Seventy-eight per

cent of 12 to 15-year-olds have a mobile phone, and 65 per cent of them have a smart phone. Such phones must fundamentally change human interactions and relationships from those that any of us experienced as teenagers. Maybe the action plan needs to distinguish between what “protected online” means for children and what it means for young people. If one accepts the primacy of the image, sexting just becomes part of the culture. That is a complex issue when it comes to dealing with young people and their relationships.

We have legislated to address some of those issues. The Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016 criminalised non-consensual sharing of intimate images, while the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 focused on preventing the sexual exploitation of children and young people.

As the action plan recognises, we face a complex set of circumstances. It describes an example of online exploitation as

“the sending and sharing of indecent images, including self-produced images”

and states that

“once the child or young person begins to participate in such activities they leave themselves open to being blackmailed into further participation. This coerciveness might not always be obvious to the child and young person as the grooming is so powerful they can come to believe it is acceptable behaviour”.

Within that small set of circumstances is the scenario where an image is self-produced but is lifted from its intended space and then promoted through child sexual exploitation websites. Then there is the scenario where an image is willingly sent to another young person who then decides to share it with their friends. Gillian Martin accurately described the reality for some young people, the severity of bullying that takes place and the criminality of some behaviour that has been normalised by youth culture.

We need to have a more sophisticated understanding of young people, the pressures that they face and the extent to which the internet has changed their relationships. I was aware of the research that the University of Edinburgh is carrying out into self-produced sexual images of adolescents. It is an important piece of work on how we respond to the issue. Interesting research is being done in Canada, where academics have consistently monitored young people’s behaviour over a number of years to study their changing attitudes towards relationships and sexuality.

When I became a justice spokesperson for Labour I had a meeting with the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General for Scotland to discuss some of these issues.

I am pleased that a summit on sexual offending and young people will be held later this year—that will be important. Young people below and above the age of consent are getting themselves into serious criminal trouble because they either do not understand the law or are ignoring it. There are situations where alcohol is involved, filming takes place and social media and the internet are widely used. Actions that seem acceptable to the perpetrator, and often to their peers, are in fact unlawful. The summit will be an opportunity to raise the profile of those challenges.

How do we make sure that young people understand that the legal framework is relevant to their lives and their experience? Are young people not so much accepting but more tolerant of the hypersexualisation of young women and hypermasculinity in young men? Is their understanding of relationships a cause for concern or just a sign of the times?

We must be clear about the legal framework and firm when the law is broken, but any action plan for internet safety must operate in our society. The way that young people use, manage and live with the internet is a symptom of our society, so we need to take a societal approach to changing attitudes, empowering young people in their relationships and limiting exploitation in relationships in order to equip young people with the understanding that they need in the modern world.

15:38

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): In one sense, the internet and I have grown up together. It all started with emails, painstakingly typed out and then sent to the sound of the dial-up's muffled shriek. Then in my mid-teens, we would all go home from school and resume our school chat on MSN Messenger or the first online social media sites such as Bebo. Since then, through my later teens and into my 20s, there has been a never-ending stream of enterprising means for communicating and sharing our lives more freely than we could ever have in the physical world, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. All that has grown hand in hand with mobile devices, which means that they are easier to access anywhere—except in the not spots of the Highlands.

The internet is now thoroughly embedded in children's daily lives. It has transformed play and education and, as the minister said, it has overtaken children's television viewing. Children are going online at younger ages, largely at home and then at school. I still find it remarkable to watch toddlers navigating an iPad for only the second time with greater speed and skill than their parents who have been using it for years.

To a greater extent than the physical world, the virtual world brings out the best and the worst in people. There is greater potential to raise money for charities, raise awareness of global injustice and raise the educational attainment of people everywhere—literally everywhere. However, the ease of access to the internet, the speed of its development and its unregulated nature mean that there is less restraint in its use. I want therefore to touch on three very different risks and challenges: the accessibility of explicit content; the abuse of children, particularly in other countries, to meet demand in Scotland; and, finally—and something that is quite different—the normalising of perfect lives on social media.

The internet facilitates and enables pure evil to flourish in the darkest corners. At the heart of the most sinister, ominous evil online are real people—perpetrators and victims. Tavish Scott mentioned the important role of research in the use and regulation of the internet. Research by the independent comparison service uSwitch.com a few years ago, in 2014, showed that 3 million UK families had discovered their children viewing violent and explicit material on the internet, with the youngest age quoted being two years old. Perhaps most worryingly, uSwitch's research found that three quarters of parents could not name any of the parental control tools that can be applied to internet-enabled devices, and that four in 10 said that they had none installed. Therefore, the Scottish Government's commitments in the national action plan, first, to engage with parents and carers to empower them to support their children's online activity and, secondly, to deliver an internet safety summit in Scotland are important.

Children who view inappropriate material on the internet are victims, but that is even more the case for those who are trafficked to be sexually abused online. Cybersex trafficking is the live-streamed sexual abuse of children, viewed over the internet. It is growing at an alarming rate, fuelled by the behaviour of people in Scotland and around the world. Some of us went to an eye-opening event that was hosted by Jenny Marra with the International Justice Mission. My colleague Gillian Martin has lodged a motion that I urge all members to sign condemning cybersex trafficking. The IJM has rescued some of the trafficked victims, and 54 per cent of the victims who are rescued in IJM cases are between one and 12 years old. Victims can be exploited in any location where there is a computer and an internet connection, or even just a mobile phone. As the IJM states, slavery and freedom are in the power of our phones, and the #notonmyscreen conversation needs all our voices.

In the time remaining, I will bring the issue home and talk about something that is quite easily

overlooked when we talk about the damaging effects of the internet. It is important that we are aware that it is not just the obviously unacceptable and explicit content that is of concern, but the way in which social media can distort normality. Social media allows us all to present the best of ourselves—the best filter for the best photograph; the best description of the best moments; or the best new outfit for the best body image. There are great risks around cultivating personas and perfect lives on social media, which can lead to anxieties around body image and self-esteem—that goes for men and women as well as boys and girls. Such anxieties allow the pro-self-harm and pro-anorexia sites, as well as cyberbullying, to thrive, because reality never matches the soft glow of Nashville or Sierra—just two of the many Instagram filters. Parents and teachers have a challenging job to remind our young people again and again that their value is not found in the number of likes for their Instagram picture or the number of friends they have on Facebook—this is perhaps a good reminder for politicians, too—but in their inherent dignity and worth, with their unique characteristics and talents. As a number of speakers today have done, the national action plan is right to highlight that only collaboration—with parents at its heart—between schools, families and Government policy can meet the challenges. Nobody can do it alone.

15:45

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I feel even older now than I did before Kate Forbes spoke. When I left school, one computer had just arrived and only people like geeky mathematicians got to use it. I certainly have not caught up with the internet; it is way ahead of me.

This is a deeply serious subject. Like others, I welcome the debate this afternoon. I am an IWF champion, like my colleague Annie Wells. All of us receive briefings from the third sector and companies regularly, and perhaps the most harrowing one that I received was from the IWF about the impact that child pornography has on so many vulnerable lives—less in Scotland, fortunately, but across our world.

The internet has turned our world upside down and revolutionised communication. It is now the preferred medium for most young people. My two five-year-old girls can switch on my iPhone and find a YouTube programme quicker than I can stop them. At the moment, we are left with “Fireman Sam” or “Teletubbies”, but as they grow older, that concerns me as a parent.

Cyberbullying goes on. All forms of bullying are wrong, as we debated a couple of weeks ago in the chamber, but cyberbullying goes with a person into their bedroom and their house, on a Saturday and a Sunday. Sadly, my niece, who was living not

in Scotland but in Norway, was badly bullied on Facebook. As a young teenage girl, she had nowhere to hide and could not leave it behind at school. There is a responsibility on educationists and on parents, uncles and aunts to be aware of what is going on and not simply to say, “Well, it has always happened”; today, it has become a lot worse, and the breakdown of the basic privacy of one’s bedroom can never help anyone.

Along with my party, I welcome the launch of the “National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People”. We agree with and want to see the protection that we hope it will give. I am pleased that the minister and the Scottish Government have not only sought the views of experts, parents and teachers, but have gone out of their way to find out what young people think. After all, they are the ones who know far more about technology than anyone in the chamber, excluding Kate Forbes perhaps.

We need to develop a plan that is appropriate, that works and that has the support of the majority of our country. The Thinkuknow website targets children in different age bands and empowers young people and gives them information. Perhaps as importantly, it gives information to adults as well.

We all welcome the number of action points identified in the action plan. I welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to work with digital media providers and industry to ensure that parents, carers and families, as well as children and young people, have access to appropriate information and support. There is still more that the digital industry can do to lead the way. They are moving in the right direction, but perhaps we need carrots and sticks as we go on this journey together. Awareness is perhaps key to that. It is not just the few but the majority who need to know about this topic.

I welcome my colleague Annie Wells’s amendment. I ask the minister to reflect on whether we need to review the plan within a shorter timescale. I accept that, in some ways, 2019 does not feel too far away—after all, it is only two years from now. However, in IT terms two years is probably too long to wait. As Iain Gray said, we do not want to get bogged down by ticking boxes and filling out forms, but there needs to be a review sooner than the plan allows for, so that we can see what progress we are making.

As I have said, I welcome the plan—it is the right step forward—and I am very happy to be able to support not only the Government motion, but the two amendments this evening.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I call Stewart Stevenson to be followed by Monica Lennon. I do not know whether I should

say this to you, Mr Stevenson, but I can be generous with the time available to you. I am sure that you will have an anecdote somewhere.

15:51

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): That is generous, and I will try not to abuse your trust. Two presiding officers have made that offer to me, so it would be impolite not to make use of it. [Laughter.]

When we go online, we are confronted with a series of risks. It is worth saying that I worked on my first online system in the 1960s, I sent my first email in 1980 and I first did my online banking using a public network in 1983. I have a long online history; others, similarly, will have a long online history, although mine might have begun even before some of the previous speakers were born. [Laughter.]

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I will, yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I trust that your intervention is about Stewart Stevenson's long history, Mr Johnson.

Daniel Johnson: It is, indeed, Presiding Officer. I was just wondering whether, given his recent remarks and in the context of Tavish Scott's remarks about Socrates, Stewart Stevenson could confirm that he was, indeed, alive when Socrates was first consternated about writing. [Laughter.]

Stewart Stevenson: My great Uncle Socrates has said many wise things and we will continue to draw from the well of knowledge of the Greek—and Roman—philosophers. [Laughter.]

Let us return to matters more local and, in particular, the internet. Many of us will know nothing of the risks in going online; and, even if all the risks were explained to us, we might not understand what they are. New risks are being created—deliberately or accidentally—every single day.

One thing that I believe—I will return to this topic in more detail later—is that we should detect better those who are creating risks, so that we can hunt them down with the force of the law. For children, who are the focus of today's debate, there are special risks. Being presented with material beyond their age carries with it the potential of psychological damage that could endure throughout their lives.

Children's brains are plastic. The future operation of a child's brain is more affected by present and past experience and knowledge than is an adult's brain. Children have not yet acquired an adult set of critical faculties that enable the filtering out and discarding of inappropriate

material. Comparatively, their brains lack the power to discriminate.

To oversimplify, probably, a complex piece of science, I should explain that until about puberty, many of our memories seem to be literal. We remember pictures and sounds—that is eidetic memory. As we become adults, our memory moves to an interpretive memory and we remember the meaning of our experience in preference to simply retaining a picture in our brain. That is much more convenient, because it enables us to create an index from which to retrieve information.

Just as we protect youngsters from physical danger, we need to protect them from psychological danger. What, therefore, are the particular dangers? As in the physical world, we want our young to avoid unsavoury characters who might exploit, abuse or otherwise harm them as individuals; we want them to avoid engagement with potentially corrupting material; and we want to protect their personal assets, however modest they may be.

As adults we—mostly—have the wherewithal to monitor and to guide, to a fair degree, a youngster's contact with the world and the people in it. We understand the physical world pretty well. The focus of the plans that we are discussing today is on helping our children to access the internet safely. Doing so is both necessary and helpful, but the online story is highly complex and rapidly evolving.

There are about 4 billion people online and many more identities than that; multiple identities abound on the internet. The same will be true for most of us here, but anyone who chooses to interact with me on Twitter, where my handle is @zsstevens—I will repeat that in case members want to hear it again: @zsstevens—will see a little tick in a blue circle next to my name, which means that Twitter has verified that I am who I have said I am. That is quite important because, as far as Twitter is concerned, the ability to rely on that symbol removes a source of ambiguity of identity, which is what enables much—though not all—of the risk in the online world.

All responsible media providers need to make available similar identity-proved facilities. A certification system is already available for websites, the best of which are accessed via hypertext transfer protocol 1080, under which an S goes at the end of the "http" abbreviation and a lock appears that makes it clear that the website is certified. We now need robust and unbypassable software—perhaps required by law and perhaps enforced via ISPs at an appropriate point in the future—that can restrict communication only to verified online entities, in particular those that purport to be real people.

Let me give the chamber some international examples. Some 10 years ago, Estonia suffered the most extreme cyber attack from Russian-based hackers. The history of that is more than I have time to explain, but today the e-resident and other initiatives that this small Baltic state has put in place are transforming it into a world leader in creating a safe online world for citizens in their business lives. At €100 a pop, it remains too expensive for mass deployment to all—what I am holding up at the moment is a paper copy of an Estonian e-resident card; I have not spent €100 on one—but in the post-Brexit world, many UK citizens are looking at becoming Estonian e-residents, because of the advantages that it gives. Jamie Greene did not refer to this directly, but the system gives people the ability to electronically sign anything that is put on the internet, protecting the integrity of both the communication that is sent and those who receive it.

The Wired website describes Estonia as “the most advanced digital society in the world”,

and other small nations that are our near neighbours—Macedonia, Serbia, Albania and Croatia—are carrying out legislative work in this area and are looking at electronic systems. They have something that appears to be a disadvantage but which, in this circumstance, is an advantage—namely, comparatively undeveloped infrastructures—and are leapfrogging present technologies into different futures.

We can look to India for another approach. In 2009, the Indian Government launched a massive project called Aadhaar to provide to everyone a digital identity based on an individual’s fingerprints and retina scans. As of 2016, the programme had issued 12-digit identification numbers to 1.1 billion people. It is believed to be the largest and most successful information technology project in the world and has created the foundations for a digital economy. Although it is voluntary, almost everyone from the totally illiterate to the billionaire banker wants to be part of it. Indeed, those involved in the system are currently running a competition for youngsters to produce 30-second videos that will support other youngsters in getting engaged with the internet and the Aadhaar system in an appropriate way.

By possessing unambiguous proof of identity and appropriate technology, Indian citizens can effect cashless transfer of value without banks, without central record and without worries. They can, for example, open bank accounts without the hassle that we have to go through, because they have an assured identity that they can use. Aadhaar is the kind of initiative that creates the potential for a safer online environment for adults and children alike.

The technology is already here so, although it just ain’t being implemented in this way, what could it make possible? For a start, every image, every text block, every blog—indeed, everything on the internet—could be marked incorruptibly and verifiably so that we would know which individual produced it. If we required that to be done, that would create for law enforcement the possibility of hunting down wrongdoers. We could require internet service providers, through which all internet traffic flows, to always check that they pass through to their subscribers only things that have been digitally signed. Of course, there are some difficulties with that. We would need anonymous hotlines as checks and balances on our system. Could that be dealt with? I will come back to that in a moment.

Software, verified identity and law can complement the plans in our Government’s paper. There is no time to waste. We could be world leaders, although others have got out of the starting blocks fairly easily. I am very happy to support the Government’s plan as it is.

Let me talk a little bit about how to deal with hotlines and whistleblowing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you a little bit more time. I feel that I am at a seminar, which is very interesting, but I want to give other people extra time.

Stewart Stevenson: I am nearly there, Presiding Officer.

One of the ways in which we could deal with the proper use of anonymity is, of course, to license a restricted number of services that can receive unsigned material. They would then have responsibility for looking at that material and republishing it with their signature, having verified that it is appropriate to do so. Therefore, even in a world in which we require everyone to have an identity, there are ways to protect the rights of those who properly need to be anonymous.

In my speech, I have simply tried to say that there are some things that we could do in the long term. I could certainly speak for hours on the subject, but the Presiding Officer’s generosity is much appreciated. Members should be aware that there are many simplifications in what I have said. If they really want a seminar, I shall be in the bar at 5 o’clock.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is what I call using up extra time.

I call Monica Lennon—Ms Lennon, follow that!

16:01

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I fear that I will not be anywhere near as interesting as Stewart Stevenson—so no pressure.

I, too, welcome the Government's motion, as well as the amendments that have been lodged by Tavish Scott—I do not know where he has gone—and Annie Wells.

The publication of the “National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People” will play a crucial role in ensuring that our children and young people can be protected when they are online. Scottish Labour is committed to developing a comprehensive strategy to increase online safety in partnership with charities, internet service providers, parents and other stakeholders, so the Government's publication of the national action plan is very welcome.

As we have heard, the internet is now part of the daily fabric of life for the vast majority of people, and children who are born in today's world will never know life without it. As we have already heard from many other members, a range of new opportunities and risks that must be navigated come with that, of course. On the positive side—there are many positives—the potential that is opened up by smartphones and the internet for our young people is boundless. They have so much accessible information at their fingertips—more than any previous generation has had—and the benefit that that brings in the potential for increasing their knowledge and education is almost immeasurable. I see those benefits for my daughter and her friends. I might go home tonight and set my 11-year-old the task of fact checking Stewart Stevenson's speech. Perhaps she can come back with his family tree. That would be most interesting.

That unfettered access to information and to the rest of the virtual world needs, of course, to be balanced against the responsibility that all adults have to ensure that our children can be protected. As Barnardo's Scotland outlined in its briefing for the debate, and as other members, including Iain Gray, have mentioned, the concern around children's safety online is often characterised as relating to stranger danger: the fear that an adult stranger will use messaging apps or social media to groom a young person for sexually exploitative purposes. The immediate analogy that always seems to come to mind is that a parent would never let their young child go out on their own unsupervised to a place where they would be surrounded by adult strangers and would be in a potentially dangerous situation. However, with access to smartphones and the internet, even where there are parental controls on access, the outside world and its potential dangers are suddenly much more accessible to young people

in the very places in which they should be most safe—at home and in school.

I can think of many examples of children in my constituency who I know have set up accounts on platforms such as Snapchat or Instagram that their parents have no knowledge of and to which they have not given consent. Ensuring that parents, professionals and young people themselves have the ability to recognise and respond to the potential issues around online behaviour is crucial, which is why the actions that are contained in the latest plan are very welcome.

As others previously have, I welcome the amendment in Tavish Scott's name. Teachers must be properly trained, supported and equipped to deal with issues around the online behaviour of young people. Listening to today's speeches, I have heard several members talk about the impact on young people's mental health and I am reminded of Scottish Labour's proposal for school-based counselling—a plan that is supported by Barnardo's Scotland. We all want early intervention to ensure that young people get the support that they need, ideally within the school setting.

Young people's lives are inextricably intertwined with ever-changing technology. Parents, teachers or any other adults who are involved in the care of children cannot properly help or support young people to face the challenges in their lives, if we do not also understand the methods that they use to communicate with each other.

Whether they do so through apps such as Snapchat or Instagram, the way in which young people communicate is key to many of the issues that can be potentially damaging to them. The sharing of nasty or abusive messages, or the creation and sharing of exploitative or embarrassing images over social networking sites and smartphones between young people, can pose just as much of a risk to our children as stranger danger. The fact that young people have access to such ways of communicating at such a young age, when they are still developing and maturing, makes the case for age-appropriate relationship education all the more pressing.

I pay tribute to Gillian Martin—she is not in her seat, but I hope that she is still listening—because she gave an excellent and insightful speech. I commend the steps to tackle the issue that she is taking in partnership with the members of the Scottish Youth Parliament who represent her area. I have an 11-year-old daughter—she is the same age as the constituent to whom Gillian Martin referred. Although we are not naive about the things that go on, when we hear a very real example it sends a shiver down the spine: it is horrible.

We all have a responsibility to make sure that young people understand the consequences of sharing sexually exploitative images of themselves or their peers. We have heard why there needs to be greater understanding, through the curriculum, of young people's rights, about consent and about what makes a healthy relationship.

Given that young people are more and more likely to turn to the internet for information on sex and relationship matters, it is imperative that the education system keep pace with that. A rounded education is only possible if it is set in the context of understanding the pressures and expectations that the internet brings, as well as understanding how our young people perceive the world through that prism.

I know that the Scottish Government has committed to a review of personal and social education in the 10-year mental health strategy. It is crucial that the review reflects the concerns that have been raised in the debate and that there is cognisance of that in the action plan. It would certainly be a welcome move to have the curriculum updated to reflect the fast-paced changes in technology in recent years, so that our teachers have the support that they need to deal with such issues. Perhaps that is something that the minister can elaborate on in summing up.

The publication of the national action plan is a welcome step forward in the attempt to improve the safety of our young people when they are online. I look forward to seeing its progress over the coming months.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jamie Greene, to be followed by Ruth Maguire, who will be the last speaker in the open debate.

16:09

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I refer members to a voluntary statement on my ownership of internet domains in the register of interests.

The challenges in keeping young people safe online stem from the fact that the pace of change in technology has been so fast—in particular, over the past 10 years. When I was young, we had no internet, no mobile phones and—dare I say it?—we used to write letters to each other.

Members: Oh!

Jamie Greene: I know.

It is fair to say that, as well as all the benefits that technology brings, it brings many dangers, and we have spoken about those at great length. Just this week, I welcomed to the Parliament's education service a group of primary 7 students—11 and 12-year-olds—from Glengarnock primary

in North Ayrshire. Knowing that I had this debate coming up, I asked how many of them owned a smartphone, and every single one of them had one. When I told them that I was going to speak in a debate on what the Government is doing to try to improve online safety for children, and that they should know that not everyone on the internet is who they say they are, I was quite surprised by the response. Lots of them nodded in agreement, but some looked confused and bewildered. Therein lies the problem, and I support the action plan for that very reason. There are still many young people out there who have access to the internet, smartphones and tablets and who are possibly using apps that their parents do not know exist—never mind that they are downloaded on to their children's devices—but who are not familiar with the concept that not everyone is who they say they are.

The word “collaboration” has been used many times today, and it is absolutely key. I welcome the Government's commitment to work with the UK Government on the age verification provisions in the Digital Economy Act 2017, which recently went through Westminster. That is a positive step. Collective responsibility falls on all Governments to ensure that the internet is a safe environment—or is, at least, as safe as it can be. I also welcome the minister's commitment to engage on legislation or other measures in respect of the right to remove data. My personal view is that much more can be done on that problem, formally or informally.

The action plan talks a lot about working with various organisations and people. Of the 23 action points in it, 18 start with the line:

“The Scottish Government will work with”.

That is laudable and I commend the Government for it, but I would like to see more detail on what “will work with” means in those cases. It is a good document, but it is not long enough. I hope that, in the minister's closing speech, he will expand on some ways in which the Government “will work with” specific organisations, because the devil is very much in the detail.

We should consider additional legislation. If the action plan does not suffice or if, in a few years, we as a Parliament think that we have not made improvements, we could consider legislation. I am very open minded on that.

The internet is home to many innovations. I want to draw members' attention to one—dating apps on smartphones. They have become quite the norm, but they often fail on age verification. It is easy to bypass the safeguards on some—some simply ask for a date of birth, which to me is not a safeguard—and some have no safeguards at all. It is all too easy to hide behind the anonymity of an internet profile. Unfortunately, there have been a

handful of tragic cases where things have gone horribly wrong. When I lived in London, the gay community was rocked by the needless deaths of four young men who met their tragic fate at the hands of someone whom they met on a dating app. That really brought home to me and my friends the seriousness of the issue.

We have to be realistic and accept that young people use the internet in the same way as adults do. It is right that much of the focus is on child exploitation and the fact that adults produce disgusting indecent images, but we should also have a conversation about the fact that many such images are created by teenagers and shared with other teenagers. In the context of the Parliament, we use words such as “evil” and “wrong”, but in the context of the online world, perhaps the creators of that online content do not associate what they are doing with words such as “evil” or “wrong”. I mention that for the specific reason that we have to think about that in considering our approach to education. As I think Iain Gray and Gillian Martin mentioned, we should not go into that with a sense of fear and shame about the subject matter—in general, there are too many taboos when we talk about sex—or a lack of understanding of why young people create such images.

I should briefly mention the fact that some people are targeted by sharing of images. I have heard of tragic cases of young people committing suicide as a result of bullying and threats that were directed towards them. Many of them got to the stage at which they did not know who to turn to. There is so much shame and stigma associated with telling someone that there is a problem. They did not want to tell someone that they had taken that type of photo in the first place; therefore, they found it difficult to seek help.

We talk about Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as social media, but the worlds of Snapchat, Tumblr and Vine, and even online gaming communities, are the real environments that many 21st century teenagers inhabit. Those are where many of the dangers lie. That said, one in five eight-year-olds has a Facebook account. We all know that that is completely in breach of the site’s rules, but many parents allow it, so we must educate parents as well. However, is prohibition or persuasion better? It is the age-old conundrum.

There is no magic bullet in legislating to regulate online content, but it is worth noting that a report from the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee criticised internet giants for not doing enough, and said that they were “completely irresponsible and indefensible”. Some of those companies, to their credit, have responded to that criticism by announcing investment in new staff to monitor online activity. One large social media site

announced 3,000 more people on top of the 4,500 that it already had—that makes 7,500 people working for one company just to monitor activity online. That sounds great, but that same site has 1.9 billion users.

That is also the site on which someone recently broadcast a murder live on their smartphone. It sounds like something out of a horror movie, but it is happening. It is happening on the same sites on which we post pictures of kittens and our lunch. That is the reality of how technology has changed.

I will conclude by saying that the online world is hard to police, because it is ever changing. With many more of our children online, the action plan is a really good start and I welcome it. However, its implementation must be monitored closely. We cannot just pay lip service to the subject; we should be more frank about the discussion and we should do everything that we can as parliamentarians to support the Government on it.

16:17

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Keeping children safe online is an important issue that should concern each and every one of us; we all have a role to play. There is no doubt that the world of children and young people today is pretty radically different from the world in which most of us in the chamber grew up. I share Iain Gray’s reflection that we are perhaps overprotective outdoors in the real world and not protective enough online.

So much of young people’s time is spent online, on multiple devices and forums, and for multiple reasons, often simultaneously—whether that involves chatting to friends or family, doing homework, finding out what is going on or just playing games and watching videos for fun—that the online world and the offline world are one thing to our young people. There are many positive, or even just benign, aspects to the spread of the internet. However, as we have heard this afternoon, along with all the opportunities there are risks and dangers to young people. I will focus on a couple of those: bullying and the negative impact of the internet on young people’s understanding of healthy relationships.

As has been powerfully set out, cyberbullying allows bullying to take on a whole new dimension. As many children and young people are constantly attached to their phones, they are never free from being attacked or persecuted. There is no safe space, even in their own homes and their own rooms.

In addition to explicit bullying that takes place online, the dominance of the online sphere creates new measurements of popularity and self-worth

that are based on who has the most likes, the most followers and the most friends, and who is in what group chat. For children and young people whose posts do not get liked, while others do, that can lead to feelings of low self-worth. Other speakers have also touched on the unrealistic images that young people see.

I will move on to healthy and respectful relationships. The Education and Skills Committee, on which I sit, has recently considered personal and social education, with sex and relationships education as a core issue in that. As part of its investigation work, the committee noted the increasing sexualisation of young people through their exposure to sexual images and information from the media and popular culture—and that is before we even get to the easy availability of internet pornography.

It should be of huge concern to everyone that the internet, including pornography, is such a significant source of information about sex for many of our young people. In evidence to the committee, the NSPCC quoted worrying research that showed that, by the age of 14, more than 90 per cent of young people had seen pornography, and about half of boys thought that it was an accurate representation of sex. It also reported that girls were articulating that they were worried that boys' impressions of and attitudes to women were negatively impacted by their exposure to pornography.

The dangers that that represents when it comes to issues such as consent, contraception and the basic respect and treatment of others can hardly be overstated. As we are all aware, portrayals of women in the media and in pornography reinforce negative gender role stereotypes, and they seriously risk our young people developing unhealthy and negative expectations of sexual relationships. On the one hand, the issue can be approached in a straightforward manner by working closely with social media providers, mobile operators and internet providers to try to prevent access to harmful content for young people. On the other hand, overturning dangerous false perceptions of sex and relationships that are based on pornography is much more difficult.

Good and fit-for-purpose personal and social education clearly has a role to play in combating the messages that are received online and ideally in preventing young people from feeling that they need to go online to further their knowledge. I trust that the forthcoming report from the Education and Skills Committee will contribute to that effort.

It is the responsibility of all of us—of society and not just of schools—to speak to our children and young people about such issues and ensure that they have positive and accurate information to counter things that they might stumble across

online. As well as talking to them—such conversations are sometimes difficult—we have to be good at listening, and we will sometimes hear things that we do not want to hear. My colleague Gillian Martin's speech illustrated that starkly.

Entrenching an understanding of consent is crucial in all this. In general, there is a need to ensure that young people and children are aware of what healthy and respectful relationships look like.

Police Scotland has been doing great work across the country to keep young people safe online. Throughout North Ayrshire, officers are working with schools and other partners, including the North Ayrshire child protection committee, to promote responsible use of the internet and to keep children safe. Earlier this week in my constituency, PC Young spoke to the 1st Kilwinning guides about staying safe online.

We all know many other organisations that are working hard to protect our young people, including the girl guides, respectme, Barnardo's, the NSPCC and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. Those organisations all have helpful information for parents on the topic. I welcome the Scottish Government's "National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People" and in particular the emphasis that it places on working in partnership with other organisations to ensure online safety.

I look forward to continuing to do what I can in my roles as an MSP, mum, auntie, family member and friend to protect our young people and children online.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the closing speeches. I call Tavish Scott to close for the Liberal Democrats. You have a generous six minutes, Mr Scott.

16:23

Tavish Scott: Safe in the knowledge that there is no one in the media gallery and that nobody in the media offices will be watching on their tellies, I say how well everyone has spoken in the debate. Ruth Maguire just did so—she made an excellent and thoughtful contribution, with many strong points.

I will touch on three of this afternoon's themes in the six minutes that I have. Presiding Officer, I take it that that is not a Stewart Stevenson six minutes but a Tavish Scott six minutes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is a Tavish Scott six minutes, which means seven minutes.

Tavish Scott: Everything is stretching these days. I will touch on those themes in the six or seven minutes that I now do not have.

The first of the three points goes to Iain Gray's philosophical—as always—introduction to his remarks, regarding relationships and sex education in schools. What Iain Gray was rightly driving at—and what the Education and Skills Committee, which a number of us, including Gillian Martin, are on, has been looking into—was how best to ensure, and how we are ensuring, that citizenship and the challenges of being a teenager or young person in 21st century Scotland are being addressed through the support structures that we have in place.

In a sense, that is at the heart of the debate—it concerns the balance between privacy and the need for knowledge about what is going on. What is the appropriate way to teach, encourage and help relationship and sex education in schools, and who should do it? Perhaps my one plea to the minister relates to that. I entirely endorse the view of many colleagues across the chamber that this is a good action plan that does the right thing and rightly draws out many of the issues that need to be addressed. However, the key to any action plan, as I well remember from the past, is who implements it.

Given the importance of Iain Gray's philosophical point, I suggest that PSE in schools should involve a balance of teachers and of trained, able youth workers, as well as parents, whom many members have mentioned. I am a parent and we have to accept as parents, never mind anything else in life, the challenges of ensuring online safety because of how we all use mobile phones, tablets and the rest—and, more to the point, because of how young people use them.

People have made sensible remarks about the dangers of sexting and of bullying and about the mental health scars and psychological pressures that exist for young people. I simply want to note how accurate those remarks are. Gillian Martin made a powerful contribution. I thought of a highly comparable example from my part of the world while she described the story that she related. Such experiences are—arguably—some of the more arduous ones that we deal with as elected representatives.

What do we say to a mum and dad who come to see us at a constituency surgery and who have been through such a situation, other than telling them to have a discussion with local police, the youth work team and others to seek the best way forward? School is what we always end up going back to, which is why I have made the point—I apologise to Mark McDonald for labouring it intensely—about teacher training for the next generation of bright and able men and women we expect to look after our children.

The second theme has been about criminal activity. Many colleagues have drawn attention to

the Internet Watch Foundation, which works to minimise child sexual abuse content online, and to the range of important work that many organisations—not least of which is Police Scotland—carry out.

One of the action points that the Government is absolutely right to stress is the point that Mark McDonald made about the digital economy legislation. He will have to refresh the memory of members in the chamber. I believe that the bill became an act in the wash-up before Westminster finished for the election—I was about to say that it collapsed for the election, but that might be a little unfair.

The particularly important point that was made by the minister, as well as other members, is about ensuring that the industry in the round sees the protection of children as one of its core responsibilities. I thought about that when Stewart Stevenson gave us somewhat of a tour de force on Europe, although it was the point that he made about India that prompted my thought. He said that in India, 1.1 billion people—he will correct me if I have got the number wrong—are enshrined in a programme that gives them a digital identity. That goes to the heart of Iain Gray's point, which is about where the balance is between individual rights and privacy on the one hand and, on the other hand, the state having a role in an individual's future because it has the ability to assess where they are.

Stewart Stevenson: I say for clarity—I think that I said this in my speech—that the Indian system is voluntary at this stage. Signing up is not mandated, but its success has been that almost everybody seems to have signed up.

Tavish Scott: I entirely accept that point.

The third aspect of the debate, which concerns any Government's responsibility in this area, is about what the vast growth in digital and in online use means for reading and writing, which are the core responsibilities of our education system. There is not much evidence on that, but I found work by one academic that I will share with members. Pasi Sahlberg from Finland has looked into whether information technology and online content are damaging literacy. That is interesting because, if we leave aside the political debate about literacy, everyone is putting a huge amount of pressure on the need to improve literacy.

On his website, Sahlberg states:

“According to some national statistics, most teenagers in Finland spend more than four hours a day on the Internet”.

He highlights that

“the number of heavy Internet and other media users ... is increasing”

in that country

“as it is doing in the U.S., Canada and beyond.”

He also says:

“emerging research on how the Internet affects the brain—and thereby learning—suggests three principal consequences: shallower information processing, increased distractibility, and altered self-control mechanisms. If this is true, then there is reason to believe that increasing use of digital technologies for communication, interaction and entertainment will make concentration on complex conceptual issues, like those in mathematics and science, more difficult.”

I do not know whether that is true, but it is the kind of judgment that researchers need to look at closely.

Annie Wells used the phrase “sea of opportunities” to describe the internet. I thought that she was talking about the common fisheries policy; we could mix a lot of metaphors here. The internet is also a sea of danger and, if there is a specific danger to anything, it may be to literacy. I ask the Government to bear that in mind and to be aware that, if ever there was a need to commission research, it is on exactly that issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Daniel Johnson, who also has a Tavish Scott six minutes, if we can remember what that was.

16:31

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer—any comparisons with Tavish Scott are, of course, welcome.

This is an important debate on a very important issue that any of us who are parents will recognise as a huge concern, and which is a concern for the whole of society.

At the risk of using what is perhaps unparliamentary language, I want to say that it can really suck being a teenager. You have concerns about whether or not you are friends with the right people, whether you are being invited to the right things and what people are saying behind your back—it is almost as bad as being a parliamentarian.

The reality is that we all know about the pressures of being a teenager, as we have all lived them. Those of us of a certain age are thankful that we did not go through that stage while the internet was around, and that we did not have the additional pressures of technology to amplify the effects. I call on all members in the chamber to condemn Kate Forbes for reminding us all how much more recent those memories are for her than for the rest of us, and I thank Stewart Stevenson for moving the context back in the other direction.

Internet safety is a serious issue, whether we are looking at the broader impact on adolescent

mental health, which Tavish Scott discussed very well, or more serious cases such as that of 14-year-old Breck Bednar, who was using an online gaming platform and was introduced to another, slightly older boy who subsequently groomed and then murdered him; that is the most serious end of the spectrum.

Other members have done an excellent job of discussing various issues and concerns, and I thank Gillian Martin for doing an excellent job of highlighting some of the contemporary issues that young people face at school around sexting and the use of social media.

Our task is to look at the role of technology and at how we can adapt it. The minister has been absolutely right to acknowledge the pervasive nature of technology and the fact that, in the eyes of many people who use it, it is not separate from real life.

Of course, technology has advantages and possibilities. The opportunity for people to learn and acquire knowledge is huge, and we cannot ignore that. There is a need to embrace the concept of digital citizenship. I thank the Scottish Government for bringing to the chamber its useful action plan.

As Iain Gray said, the subject area can be difficult to understand, and it can therefore be difficult for us to know what we can do and to reach everyone who needs to be reached. The plan enshrines the need for us to ensure that children have an understanding of the opportunities and risks. It seeks to equip parents and carers; takes a holistic, wider-society view; seeks to support children who have suffered and—most importantly—to deter perpetrators. Those are the right areas to look at, and the plan is a very important start.

Internet safety is a serious area, but it is fast moving, and it is right that members on all sides of the chamber have pointed to areas in which the framework can be improved and enhanced. The rest of my comments will be made in that tone and tenor.

I join other members in pointing out that the Government could go further in specifying who should be taking the actions and what they should be. Jamie Greene spoke well on that. My research on the topic took me to a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, “The Protection of Children Online”, which made a number of important points about the way in which policy should be made and implemented. The report highlighted the importance of policy co-ordination, consistency and coherence, and of evidence being at the heart of the matter in terms of both measuring and evaluation. The issue is fast moving, and unless measuring and evaluation

are at the heart of the policy approach, it will never keep pace with what is happening.

With that in mind, I believe that the Government's national action plan is a good start because it has much of that policy coherence and consistency that the OECD pointed out is important. Point 12 in the national action plan, however, is about exploring whether there could be more co-ordination. I suggest that there must be more co-ordination. In addition, more evaluation must be embedded in the action plan and we would like to see the Government go further in that regard. Annie Wells's amendment indicates the important point that there would need to be measurement to establish what progress is made under the action plan.

Claire Baker referred to the need for a wider, more encompassing strategy. The OECD report produced a taxonomy that is a useful framework for understanding the broad range of risks and other aspects that we need to protect our children from and equip them for dealing with. This debate has focused on cyberbullying and online grooming, but the OECD framework looks also at consumer-related risks and information privacy and security risks. Consumer-related risks are things such as children's access to gambling and their ability to buy alcohol. Those might seem mundane, but they are nonetheless significant risks that we need to ensure that the action plan encompasses. Similarly, regarding information privacy and security risks, we must ensure that we are preparing our young people to be responsible and well-equipped digital citizens, rather than focusing wholly on protecting them against the bigger and more obvious risks that we see and have heard about in the debate.

Tavish Scott's amendment raises very important points indeed. As many other members have pointed out in the chamber this afternoon, the Education and Skills Committee has been looking at teacher training. The evidence given in the committee's meeting yesterday raised a lot of alarming concerns, not least those around the difference between the expectations for teacher training and the reality of what is being delivered. It is about the focus, time and attention that is being given in teacher training to important issues such as literacy and numeracy. With regard to this debate, however, perhaps the most alarming evidence from yesterday's committee meeting was given by a teacher who said that their teacher training had no information and communications technology content whatsoever. I asked the teacher to clarify whether she meant ICT specifically in the context of cyberbullying, but she said that they had had no ICT training at all, which is deeply alarming.

I welcome the minister's commitment to look at how student teachers are prepared for their roles, but I think that we have to look very carefully at teacher training in the round. It is of huge concern that as important a topic as ICT is not being covered at all in teacher training, because technology is pervasive. Teacher training needs to approach technology as a means of delivering teaching, a medium for learning and expression and as a subject in itself. Above all else, it is vital that teachers have the time to focus on protecting children and training them to be responsible digital citizens. I hope that the minister takes that point away and that it is looked at with great care and sensitivity.

What is most important is that we have a coherent plan that enables everyone to work together, with collective responsibility. The Government's action plan is an excellent start. I have made a number of criticisms, but they have been made with a genuinely positive intent. Again, I thank the minister and I welcome the amendments, which we support.

16:39

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): First, I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, in which I declare that I am a director of, and shareholder in, two online communication and collaboration platforms but do not receive any remuneration for those posts. I am also a board member for the west of Scotland NSPCC.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to close for the Conservatives in this important debate. I thank Mark McDonald and the Scottish Government for bringing the debate to the chamber.

It has been a consensual debate with a variety of thoughtful speeches. Kate Forbes told us of her journey through technology. I compared it with mine, and I can let her know that she has made a happy man feel very old. I also very much enjoyed Stewart Stevenson's speech, which he delivered, in his own informed and inimitable way, in words and erotic movements, some of which I actually understood.

To me, the debate highlights the dilemma that we have as parents in allowing our youngsters access to the internet. That was brought starkly to light in Gillian Martin's testimony and by Colin Beattie and Jeremy Balfour.

I thank Tavish Scott for bringing up Stewart Stevenson's Great Uncle Socrates. In a speech of the high quality that I expect from him, he highlighted the learning capacity that we have in new technology. The internet can be a wonderful learning tool. For example, at the weekend, as many parents do, I was reading a bedtime book to my youngest. It was about diving for treasure in

the south seas, and it started to talk about a sunfish and a moonfish. My daughter asked me rather sceptically whether those are real things and, 30 seconds later, via an iPad, we were in the south seas as we watched videos of sunfish and moonfish. What an incredible way of bringing words to life. If I had tried to describe those rather strange-looking creatures, she would immediately have thought, “Dad’s at it again.” There we go—the internet is a tool to prove that dad is not at it. However, we should be warned because, of course, the converse is also true. Our children are better online than we are and they can just as easily show us up when we try to pull the wool over their eyes.

What is really interesting to me about mobile technology and the internet is that it is now encouraging outdoor learning and activity. Members will know that I talk about that a lot. With gamification and outdoor activities, kids are now taking their mobile technology outdoors. What a fantastic way to learn.

However, as Iain Gray highlighted, it is a struggle to quantify the risk of our children being online in our homes and outside. As a parent, I get nervous when the iPad becomes a tool for communicating between friends or even with unknown people, perhaps even in interactive online gaming. We think of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, Skype and YouTube as some of the main communication platforms, but there are many other easily downloadable platforms and apps that allow unfettered video, picture and text communication. That is the dilemma that we have discussed today. As Mark McDonald asked, how can we ensure that our children get access to this wonderful educational tool while we protect them from the worst in online behaviours?

I faced the issue when we were building a sports social media and internet protocol television platform several years ago. How do we allow subscribers to freely share training videos, pictures and conversations and to live stream events while ensuring that the platform is not used in an abusive manner? There are off-the-shelf software solutions that are quite sophisticated—they can identify skin tone to such a level that they know whether a person is wearing a pair of shorts or not and they can decide remotely whether the image is appropriate for upload. There are also some simple software solutions that can prevent bad language and any derivatives of bad language from being used and uploaded.

However, the truth of the matter is that, for any fledgling or small company, the expense can be prohibitive. That is not such an issue for those platforms where a stringent gateway to access is the paramount selling point, such as legal, medical

and accountancy portals. They can afford to make access to their platforms a more demanding process, because high levels of security are their users’ primary concern. Platforms and apps need to strike the right balance between safety protocols and simplicity of access and use. The more safety and security protocols are put in place, the more likely it is that there will be an impact on the ease of use.

Some of the major mainstream social media players are undoubtedly reluctant to enhance safety and security for fear of driving their users off to their competitors, as I think Stewart Stevenson highlighted. That inevitably leads to a reliance on a level of self-policing on platforms whereby users are expected to report behaviour that is not in keeping with their rules and regulations. There are hugely differing levels of protocols and success. We have reports of abusive content being reported but not being removed for a considerable time, as Jamie Greene alluded to in an intervention. Unfortunately, that does little to protect the most vulnerable.

To protect this user profile, the education of parents and carers is still going to be the most effective strategy, as Tavish Scott said. We need to ensure that, when children and young people have access to and are using mobile and other internet devices, parents and carers are aware of the dangers and understand how to enable parental locks and safety features, as Monica Lennon said. To that end there are some excellent awareness-raising initiatives currently operating, which need more publicity and which people need more encouragement to adopt.

I think that Ruth Maguire and Monica Lennon spoke about children knowing what a healthy relationship looks like. The NSPCC is currently running a programme in our primary schools on recognition of abuse. The reality is that often children who are being abused do not realise that they are being abused. As a member of the NSPCC board, I was rather concerned about that and reluctant to think about how to teach primary school children about sexual abuse in sex education, so I went and sat at the back of one of the classes to listen to what the programme does. How it takes place is fantastic; I came out of the class quite buoyed. My own eight-year-old daughter, who is soon to be nine, went through that programme. She did not know that I did not know that she was going through it, and on the way home in the car, she asked, “Do you know what sexual abuse is, dad?” As father to three daughters, I have to say that it was quite enlightening to hear my eight-year-old already starting to talk quite openly about that. Those are the kinds of things that we need to highlight and advance.

It is incumbent on this Parliament to make our voice and views known to bodies such as the UK Council for Child Internet Safety technical working group, specifically with regard to technical and regulatory standards, and classification and rating of content. We also have a role to play in encouraging the continual driving of innovation in the area of protective tools and services because, frankly, I feel that we are always playing catch-up.

When considering and developing online safety and security for the most vulnerable, especially around social media and communication tools, we must all be aware of the dangers of cyberbullying, accessing inappropriate content, having online identities hacked and stolen and much more sinister behaviour towards child internet users. It is therefore an on-going fight to ensure that technology around child online safety and security is given the attention that it needs and keeps pace with the development of software platform technology, which is why this debate is so important. It helps to keep the topic at the forefront of our minds and reminds us to keep the pressure on the online developers and the bodies that regulate content, standards and protocols for access, so that child safety and security is paramount. Support for the Government's national action plan on internet safety for children and young people will help to maintain that vigilance in our drive to ensure that being online is a positive experience for our children.

Let us keep talking, and let us keep taking and demanding appropriate action. I am happy to have spoken in the debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I echo Tavish Scott's comments: this has been an interesting and informed debate. That does not mean that the minister will not be interesting; I call Mark McDonald to wind up for the Government—as a hostage to fortune. [*Laughter.*]

16:48

Mark McDonald: I note that you got the compliments in before I speak, Presiding Officer.

I hope that Tavish Scott has paid attention—as I know he does—to the fact that, yet again, I have brought to the chamber a debate that will unite us in commonality of purpose. I am sure that he will be keeping note of that. I apologise that, in this debate, I was not able to facilitate his getting away for the early flight to Sumburgh, as I have done previously.

In his closing remarks, Tavish Scott mentioned Pasi Sahlberg, one of the International Council of Education Advisers to the Scottish Government; Mr Scott will have heard the Deputy First Minister citing the body of evidence to which he referred. We recognise that there is a lack of evidence out

there, but what evidence there is points to a need to ensure that internet use is balanced in education and in the home environment. I am sure that other studies are being commissioned. The Government will pay close attention to them.

Brian Whittle spoke about self-policing and keeping pace with change—an issue that came up a lot in the debate. It is becoming easier to create apps if one has the skills to do so, which means that companies do not require a significant back-room operation to launch a networking app. The challenge for companies is that they run the risk of not being able to support large uptake of the app. We have to ensure that individuals or organisations that launch apps see protecting children and young people as part of their core responsibility as a business.

The debate has been constructive and consensual. I want to address a number of points in the time that remains.

Annie Wells asked me to consider looking at the timescales in the action plan. I am afraid that I have to advise members that one of the timescales in the plan has already slipped. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service summit, to which action 22 refers, will no longer take place in June 2017 but will be delayed until September 2017. We had to change the date as a result of the snap general election, so I am more than happy to blame the Tories for that target being missed. Members will acknowledge that we want to ensure that the appropriate individuals are involved in the summit. Overall, I am happy to reflect on where we can pin defined timescales to actions, because some of the work will be iterative and on-going.

Annie Wells also talked about developing guidance for professionals and parents. The guidance on digital citizenship will include information on respectful behaviours, rights and responsibilities, resilience and where to go for support. It will also consider issues around self-produced sexual images or sexting.

If members will forgive me, I will highlight two contributions in particular. The first is my friend and colleague Gillian Martin's speech, which was an essential and powerful crystallisation of the issues that young people face. She highlighted those issues through the prism of a case in her constituency and highlighted the positive work that she is doing locally with incoming members of the Scottish Youth Parliament to listen to young people's voices and consider what actions can be taken on the back of that. I would be interested in hearing more about the work that is being done and I will be more than happy to meet Gillian Martin and her MSYPs in the aftermath of the event that she mentioned to find out what they learned and how we as a Government can work

alongside them on the issues that they have identified.

I also highlight Kate Forbes's contribution. That is not because it made everybody in the chamber, including me, feel really old, but because she made the important point that social media projects a false image of the perfection of individuals' lives and affects the image that young people have of themselves. Many people who are friends with me on Facebook would be forgiven for thinking that my house is very tidy, because of the way that I strategically position any photographs that are taken in the building. I was interested in the notion of filtering photos: my wife says that there is no Instagram filter that can improve my image. I have chosen to take that in a positive sense.

A number of other points bear repeating. Many members raised the issue of young people's resilience and said that we must ensure that they are made aware of the risks that they face. I take on board points that were made on that. I will accept the Liberal Democrat amendment, because I agree that we need to look at how young people receive that information through education. We must not only educate young people about the risks that exist online, but ensure that they understand better the nature of consent, which Iain Gray mentioned. They need to understand what is appropriate and the kind of information and images that they should be sharing, whether with somebody they have never met or with somebody they know well. Gillian Martin made that point clearly when she spoke about the individual she was told about who holds images of her friends that she can then potentially use to bully or blackmail them. That sort of thing is a worrying development and shows that we need to ensure that young people are aware of what it is appropriate to share, even within what they assume is their circle of friends.

Stewart Stevenson highlighted a number of interesting international examples. They might have stretched beyond the issue of the safety of children and young people, but they touch on wider issues of internet safety and internet resilience. He also spoke about the need not only to protect children from physical harm but to be cognisant of the psychological harm to which they can be exposed. That is something that the issue of internet safety should be very focused on.

Monica Lennon followed up that speech by saying that she is going to set her daughter the task of researching Stewart Stevenson's family tree. Those of us who have been in Parliament long enough to have heard a number of Stewart Stevenson's speeches would suggest that it is probably more of a forest than a tree, so I wish her daughter luck.

Monica Lennon also highlighted the fact that we need to ensure that young people are cognisant of risk and are resilient enough to deal with it. Those of us who have spoken in the debate from the perspective of parents recognise that we have a role to play in making sure that we are as up to speed as possible on how the internet affects our children's lives and how our children interact on the internet.

There are a number of apps that provide what we might term child-friendly versions of more regular social media applications. The organisations that created those filters are to be commended. However, we recently saw, through a BBC report, that not all those apps are entirely safe from being infiltrated by inappropriate content. Therefore, even in those supposed safe spaces online, we have to be aware that many children and young people face potential risks, and we need to understand how we can tackle that risk and prevent harm in that regard.

Jamie Greene started his speech by telling us about his ownership of a number of internet domains. That piqued my natural curiosity, so I checked online and it turns out that he owns a number of ".london" internet domains, which suggests that Mr Greene is waiting for a future enterprising mayor to announce that he is going to launch ".london" in the same way as we have launched ".scot". At that point in time, Jamie Greene will be launched into the stratosphere as an internet multimillionaire. When that day comes, as it no doubt shall, I want him to remember that I spotted that during this debate.

On a more serious note, Mr Greene asked me to expand on the action that we will take and who we will work with on that action. In relation to parents, carers and families, we will be working with parents and carers organisations to bring together the different summits that we want to attract parents to because, as was pointed out by Iain Gray, we want to ensure that as many parents and carers as possible take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about their children's internet use and how they can support it.

We will also remain engaged with the UK Government as it develops a new internet safety strategy that is looking at tackling the online dangers that face children and young people, and we will consider implementation of the age verification provisions in the Digital Economy Act 2017. Tavish Scott was right to point out that that legislation has become an act in the extremely recent past, which speaks to the pace of change and the progress that has been made beyond the point that we were at when the plan was launched in April.

We will also be piloting the Click: path to protection training module in Scotland with the

Marie Collins Foundation, which is targeted at professionals who are charged with safeguarding children who have been sexually abused and exploited online. We will be engaging with the University of Edinburgh and the Stop it now! Scotland programme as they undertake research into deterrents to viewing online indecent images of children. Police Scotland is developing a standard operating procedure for online abuse, which will develop and enhance the existing indecent images of children standard operating procedure.

Those are examples of the range of actions that we are taking and some of the different partners that we will be working with to take those actions forward.

Jamie Greene: On that specific point, the Stop it now! Scotland project, which I believe has Government backing or investment, is somewhat controversial. Perpetrators go to the service and all the information that is shared with it is passed to the authorities, whereas Germany has trialled other services that are completely confidential. Does the minister have a view on which is the best model?

Mark McDonald: I do not have specific views on the best model, but we want to cut down on the opportunities for online abuse and, where that abuse takes place, we want to prevent it as quickly as we can.

I finish by highlighting a point that Ruth Maguire made. She praised the work of Police Scotland with its choices for life peer-mentoring programme. I had the opportunity to see first hand that work at Hampden Park and to speak to young people who were taking part. We have to recognise that children are at risk not simply from adults online; they are sometimes at risk from their peer groups—Gillian Martin pointed that out, as did a number of other members. Iain Gray raised points about getting children to better understand how to respect one another and respect specific boundaries, and peer-to-peer education will help young people to understand how to protect themselves against such behaviours, and prevent some young people from undertaking those behaviours in the first place.

Standing Orders (Rule Changes)

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion SM5-05456, in the name of Clare Adamson, on the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016 standing order rule changes. I call Clare Adamson to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

17:01

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The committee has proposed new procedures in standing orders. The Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016 establishes a registration regime for lobbyists, including an online register that will be introduced and administered by the Scottish Parliament. It is anticipated that the formal commencement date for the act will be in early 2018. The lobbying act gives certain delegated powers to the Parliament. The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has carefully considered what new procedures are required in standing orders to allow the Parliament to give directions and make resolutions under the act. A new chapter 3C is proposed that contains the necessary rules, and I am pleased to move the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 5th Report, 2017 (Session 5), *Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016 - Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 125), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 18 May 2017.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are four questions today. The first question is, that amendment S5M-05515.2, in the name of Annie Wells, which seeks to amend motion S5M-05515, in the name of Mark McDonald, on keeping children safe online, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-05515.1, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S5M-05515, in the name of Mark McDonald, on keeping children safe online, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-05515, in the name of Mark McDonald, as amended, on keeping children safe online, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the publication of the Scottish Government's National Action Plan on Internet Safety for Children and Young People; expects that the Scottish Government will update the Parliament regularly on the progress of the implementation of the plan; supports the right of children and young people to be safe and supported online; recognises the positive uses of the internet for children and young people, including the vast opportunities for learning and communication; agrees that everyone has a role to play in keeping children safe online; is concerned that teacher training does not adequately cover online safety for children and young people, and calls on the Scottish Government to work with education institutions to rectify this emerging requirement in training classroom teachers.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-05456, in the name of Clare Adamson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016 standing order rule changes, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 5th Report, 2017 (Session 5), *Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016 - Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 125), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 18 May 2017.

Meeting closed at 17:03.

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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