



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Tuesday 12 December 2017**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 12 December 2017*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Our first item of business today is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is the Rev David McCarthy, rector, St Thomas' Church, Corstorphine, Edinburgh.

**The Rev David McCarthy (St Thomas' Church, Corstorphine, Edinburgh):** Jesus said:

"I have come that they may have life and life in all its fullness."

Throughout December, church leaders experience the phrase, "You must be busy at this time of year." We always smile as though it is the first time that we have heard that. At least it is not, "You only work one day a week." We are busy, but we also see it as a time to reflect on what we have learned during the year.

One recent conversation has lingered with me. At the tea after a funeral that I conducted, I sat with a group of west Edinburgh mothers. They gave that, "Uh oh—here comes the minister," look that people often do. It is amazing how a clerical collar can either clear a room or cause people to open up. We got talking about the way in which kids in the area were getting into trouble with the police. I asked the mothers what they believed the causes might be. It is helpful to ask people such questions. They were very candid.

The number 1 cause was lack of respect. They said, "If I ever talked to my mum the way my kids talk to me, one look from my mum would have been enough to shut me up."

Number 2 was materialism. Many children have grown up with a sense of entitlement and a belief that they deserve everything. Parents struggle to provide what they so often demand.

Number 3 was social media. Bullying still exists. In the old days, kids could hide from it when they got home from school, but not now; there is nowhere to hide. Kids are feeling the pressure, and parents are finding it hard to communicate with them as they are so absorbed in their devices.

I was humbled and challenged. The mothers had shared some of the real problems that families face.

We know that there are major challenges in building a society in which everyone can enjoy life

in all its fullness. For me, that involves inviting all to know Jesus Christ, who can forgive sins and who transforms individuals and communities with his love.

That one conversation raised so many questions for me. How can all of us who lead embody in ourselves values that challenge some of the damaging forces at work in our nation? How can we ensure respect for the voices of young and old, live simpler and less self-centred lives and communicate face to face, with deep caring and listening?

## Urgent Question

14:04

### Forties Pipeline

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the impact of shutting down the Forties pipeline running through Aberdeenshire.

**The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse):** The Scottish Government is liaising with Ineos FPS, Petroineos, the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and local resilience partners to monitor the evolving situation. The interests of public safety, worker safety, the wellbeing of local communities that are affected and the environment are all key priorities.

By way of background, I inform the chamber that, on 6 December 2017, a crack was discovered in the Forties pipeline near Netherley, to the north-west of Stonehaven, during routine maintenance. The fact that the crack has extended has required the Forties pipeline system, which carries production from more than 80 fields in the central and southern North Sea, to be shut down to allow for safe repair.

A technical assessment is under way to inform the repairs that will be required and the likely duration of the shutdown. There are no plans to shut down Grangemouth refinery, and no impacts for fuel and gas supplies are anticipated. There are sufficient stocks of crude oil to continue operations in the refinery for more than a week, and Petroineos is developing contingency plans for the importation of alternative supplies of crude oil, if that should become necessary to ensure continued operation. In addition, the company is able to import additional finished products to ensure that there will be no impacts on fuel supplies.

We are very aware that an extended shutdown will have an impact on companies with fields that utilise the Forties export route, and we are seeking clarity from Ineos on the risk of that being necessary. In advance of details emerging on the timescale for returning the pipeline to normal operations, Scottish Government officials remain in close contact with Ineos FPS and Oil & Gas UK to monitor the impacts on the oil and gas sector and the wider economy.

**Mike Rumbles:** I thank the minister for that update, but he will be aware that people who live along the length of the pipeline—especially those in Aberdeenshire—are worried that there might be further, as yet undetected, fractures. What can the

Scottish Government do to reassure local residents about that?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** We have thought and had discussions about how we can give confidence to communities along the route, given that similar problems may arise elsewhere. It is obviously very early in the process. We will seek information and reassurances from Ineos with regard to whether we are talking about a technical failure in part of the pipeline or whether it is an indication that there might be further impacts elsewhere on the line. At this stage, it is not possible to provide any clarity on those points, but the Scottish Government has raised them with Ineos and we will seek further clarity on them.

The fault was identified during routine maintenance, which is carried out on the pipeline all the time. I hope that the fact that a breach was discovered before it became a significant issue will give confidence to the public and to the affected communities that safety measures are in place to protect them from such incidents having an impact on their lives.

**Mike Rumbles:** Considering that the Forties oil pipeline, which is quite an old pipeline, is a critical part of the United Kingdom's energy infrastructure, what are the implications for the oil workers who are affected by the temporary closure which, from what Ineos has told me, I understand is to last for weeks rather than days? What can the Scottish Government do to help those employees and their families?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** In my original answer, I recognised that the potential exists for an extended shutdown to have an impact on those companies that rely on the Forties pipeline to get their product to market and on the livelihoods of the employees of those service and supply chain companies that support that work.

We are trying to get information from Oil & Gas UK, which is doing a ring-round in an effort to speak to all the businesses that are affected. I am not at liberty to discuss openly those companies that are affected by the existing shutdown, but I can say that we are having dialogue with Oil & Gas UK and Ineos on those matters. As a matter of high priority, we will seek to make sure that we protect the interests of those supply chain companies that might have cash-flow difficulties if they are not able to conduct the work that they have been contracted to do at this point in time.

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** Coincidentally, I spent the whole of yesterday morning at a meeting with senior Ineos management at Grangemouth, at which the Forties pipeline, among other issues, was discussed. I am encouraged by the action that Ineos has taken to safeguard the environment

following the identification of the crack in the pipeline.

Has the minister received any further assurances from Ineos about production at Grangemouth and security of supply for fuel and gas in the coming weeks in light of the repairs that are required? What liaison has there been with the UK Government regarding security of supply?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I welcome the involvement of Mr MacDonald, as the local constituency member, in taking an interest in the welfare of those who work at the Grangemouth plant.

As I understand it, the company has—as I said in my original answer—contingency plans to ensure that it has sufficient crude oil to be able to continue operations at Grangemouth, and it does not anticipate that the closure of the pipeline will affect production. However, it has plans in place so that, if production is affected, it can access the finished product to make sure that there is no disruption to fuel supplies in the Scottish or northern England markets. I think that the company is taking appropriate steps in that respect.

In terms of environmental protection, we believe that the issue has been contained. The company has identified what faults are there and is identifying a solution to repair them. We have every confidence that Ineos is working extremely hard on that at the moment.

The member also asked about engagement with the UK Government. The engagement has been at the level of official to official. We will be keen to engage with UK ministers on the matter if it is necessary, but key powers in relation to the oil and gas industry are reserved, and the security of energy supplies is also a reserved matter. We will be keen to work collaboratively with UK ministers if it proves necessary.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Has the Government been informed about any oil that may have been in the pipeline system, particularly above the site of the repair, before it was closed down overnight? What has been or will be done to remove that oil from the pipeline and make it safe?

Also, what are the financial, commercial and operational implications of the shutdown for operating companies producing that oil, the owners of that oil and other operating companies that are reliant on the infrastructure? By extension, what are the cash-flow implications for companies in the supply chain, in the north-east and across Scotland?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** We recognise the number of important issues that Lewis Macdonald raises. The pipeline's average daily throughput is just under

450,000 barrels of oil and 3,500 tonnes of gas a day. I should stress that we have the assurance that there does not appear to be any threat to gas supplies, as the St Fergus terminal will still be able to supply gas to the national grid. There are no immediate threats to domestic heating supplies and other users of gas.

However, clearly, such a loss of throughput could have an impact on the companies that are affected by it. That is why we are hoping that Oil & Gas UK will be able to assist us by providing data, in confidence, in the course of the day on the impacts on the companies that are affected. We are keen to protect the workforce and the companies that are involved in production on the platforms that have been affected by the shutdown, during what is already a difficult time for the sector, from any further exacerbating effect on employment or profitability.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Does the minister have any knowledge of the nature of the problem that has occurred in the pipeline? More fundamentally, does he know how the information about that failure may be shared with other pipeline operators to ensure that we have the best possible chance of this event being a one-off?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Mr Stevenson makes a very reasonable point about learning lessons from this and relaying any issues around good practice to other pipeline operators as swiftly as can be done. Obviously the Health and Safety Executive is not a devolved agency, but I am sure that it will take a very keen interest in this to ensure that something can be done to prevent a similar risk to safety from occurring in future. That is something that we very much need to take forward.

It appears that there is a crack or breach in the pipe. As yet, we do not have a confirmed cause for that failure, which goes to the heart of what Mr Rumbles was saying about the cause. We have to understand whether it is metal fatigue or another internal cause, or whether something externally damaged the pipe and thereby caused the crack. We do not have an answer to that question yet, but I certainly commit to furnish those answers to members in the chamber who have an interest once we have identified the cause.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** Lewis Macdonald has already asked questions about the commercial impact, so I will not repeat them. Does the minister agree that a temporary shutdown of the Forties pipeline and the attendant implications of doing that have highlighted for all those who live in the north-east that, as those who work in the North Sea already know, Scotland's North Sea oil reserves are hugely important to the UK economy?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** That is a very valid point. I think that we all recognise that the oil and gas industry is extremely important to the Scottish economy, but at times like this we also realise that at least some parts of the job make for a dangerous occupation, which we have seen not least in the north-east in the tragic loss of life in Piper Alpha, although this event is on land and there has been damage to a key pipeline. It also illustrates just how important the north-east of Scotland is to meeting energy needs not just in Scotland but in the whole UK through these critical oil and gas supplies.

Clearly, there is a strong imperative for all agencies to get the Forties pipeline system back up and running and doing the job that it has been doing for many years of helping to meet our primary energy needs, which it very much does on a day-to-day basis and which we often take for granted.

## Topical Question Time

14:15

### Police Governance

1. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland and Audit Scotland on police governance. (S5T-00813)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** The Audit Scotland report highlights a number of improvements made by the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland, while also highlighting areas that require to be addressed. In contrast to previous years, the Auditor General has not expressed a modified opinion, reflecting

“an encouraging improvement in the quality of accounting records and access to information.”

That is a key sign of progress.

In addition, the Auditor General has highlighted that the

“process for setting the 2017-18 budget was more transparent and comprehensive”,

and that the development of three-year and 10-year financial strategies

“provides essential context and understanding for the organisations’ future financial sustainability”.

The report also highlights issues where best value was not achieved and governance has been poor. I therefore welcome the commitment from the new chair of the SPA to learn lessons from the issues that have been identified and to ensure that further improvements are made. I expect the SPA to respond to the issues that have been highlighted and to drive improvement to ensure that similar issues cannot happen again in the future.

As HMICS has acknowledged, the findings in the report were based on a review in February to March 2017. Since then, the joint programme board has made progress in a number of key areas. In particular, it has been agreed that officers and staff will retain their current terms and conditions, including access to their current pension schemes. The board will publish a question-and-answer briefing for British Transport Police officers and staff in Scotland this week. A progress report on the work of the joint programme board was provided by the Minister for Transport and the Islands to the Justice Committee on 31 October this year.

**Liam McArthur:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. In the report that was published last week—sadly, just after the Liberal Democrat



debate on policing—the Auditor General said that there had been

“a number of instances of poor governance and poor use of public money in the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland.”

Ms Gardner also warned that realising the policing 2026 vision “will be immensely challenging” and predicted that the force will face financial trouble for many years to come. Does the cabinet secretary agree with the Auditor General?

**Michael Matheson:** As I set out in my original response, the Auditor General correctly highlighted a number of areas where performance in the SPA has not been as adequate as it should have been, particularly in the way in which some of the SPA’s governance operations have been taken forward, and in ensuring best value. However, Liam McArthur will want to acknowledge the very significant progress that the Auditor General has identified in improvement of overall financial management in the SPA and Police Scotland. That significant progress is based on the section 22 order that was issued the previous year.

Alongside that, Liam McArthur is correct to say that there will be challenges in taking forward some of the financial aspects of the 2026 vision, but that is exactly why the financial strategy has been broken into key component parts—in particular, the three-year strategy, which is to ensure that the organisation gets into financial balance, and the work being taken forward over the next 10 years to deliver the 2026 strategy. I recognise that there are challenges in that, but I think that the member will recognise that any reasonable person who reads the Auditor General’s report will acknowledge that significant improvements have been made in the overall financial situation.

**Liam McArthur:** I turn to pay-offs and expenses. The cabinet secretary might recall that the First Minister told the Parliament’s Conveners Group recently that some very important tests have to be applied—public confidence, value for money and reasonableness among them. It is vital that those tests run through decision making. Does Mr Matheson therefore believe that paying £67,000 in relocation expenses and £53,000 in tax liability for one senior officer; spending £345,000 on appointing three people who were, ironically, meant to get the police’s finances back in order; paying the golden goodbye for the chief executive; that same chief executive offering, against procedure, a position to someone, then withdrawing the offer and running an apparently open competition before disqualifying the competitors and installing the original appointee, are in keeping with the tests that were set out by the First Minister?

**Michael Matheson:** I will pick up on each issue that Liam McArthur has raised.

On the relocation expenses that were made to a deputy chief constable in Police Scotland, the member will be aware that those expenses were awarded in accordance with the terms of the individual’s appointment when they joined the organisation. The SPA has said that it is committed to a review of the relocation payment procedure in order to ensure that it will deliver value for money in the future. The matter has been referred to the Police Negotiating Board because it relates to terms and conditions for police officers, and the board has agreed to review the guidance and procedures that relate to removal expenses for police officers.

The appointments of three individuals to key posts in the SPA and Police Scotland were interim appointments. The SPA is taking those forward as permanent appointments, in order to address the concerns that have been raised by the Auditor General in the report.

On the package that was offered to the former chief executive of Police Scotland, he retired under the terms of the SPA’s early retirement scheme, which covers all SPS staff, rather than through any individual settlement agreement. The terms have to comply with the “Scottish Public Finance Manual”, and the new chair of the SPA has sought to learn the lessons from the way in which that matter has been handled. Liam McArthur should acknowledge that the package of the former chief executive was taken forward under the SPA’s existing early retirement scheme.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** In 2012, the Scottish Government promised that police reform would achieve greater scrutiny of spending. Since then, for five years in a row, Audit Scotland has reported on poor use of taxpayers’ money—most recently, £53,000 to pay an individual’s taxes. Why does the Government not cut such waste and cut the examples that were highlighted by Liam McArthur, rather than hiking the public’s taxes?

**Michael Matheson:** Liam Kerr may wish to reflect on his question, because relocation expenses are an issue of terms and conditions for police officers. If he is suggesting that we should just tear up the terms and conditions of police officers, that is another matter. That is why the SPA has referred the issue to the Police Negotiating Board, which is the body that we established in Scotland to consider such matters through due process. That is unlike the position in England and Wales, where the equivalent body was abolished, so there is no longer a negotiating forum for that procedure.

Liam Kerr should also recognise that, when he refers to five years of the SPA and the creation of Police Scotland, the Auditor General highlights in last week's published report the significant progress that has been made over the past year to improve financial management within Police Scotland and the SPA, with greater transparency and accountability around that process. I would have thought that Liam Kerr would welcome that.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The Auditor General has said that the audit

"identified a number of instances of poor governance and poor use of public money",

which "is unacceptable".

Following the report, there is no doubt that John Foley is being rewarded for failure, with significant additional payments having been made. Who agreed the payments, and can they be challenged at this stage?

**Michael Matheson:** As I have mentioned, the SPA former chief executive retired under the terms of the Scottish Police Authority's early retirement scheme, rather than through an individual settlement. The agreement was reached between employee and employer—that is, between Mr Foley and the Scottish Police Authority—and that had to be approved by the board. As such, the Scottish Government had no role in authorisation of the terms of the package.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that the addition of substantial experience of public service and of Government to the SPA will greatly enhance its oversight responsibilities. In particular, will he expect of the new chair that improvements will continue throughout her term of office and that quick fixes will be suspect?

**Michael Matheson:** It is worth reiterating that last week's report from Audit Scotland has already demonstrated the significant progress that has improved overall governance and financial accountability in the Police Scotland and SPA budgets. This is the first time that the audit report has not modified their accounts, which recognises the progress that has been made in accountability and transparency in the accounts' processes.

The new chair of the SPA has already said that she intends to address the issues that Audit Scotland raised in the report in order to ensure that the SPA drives forward further improvement on the issues, and that she intends to learn lessons where they can be learned. I have no doubt that Susan Deacon will bring to the organisation considerable leadership and skill that she has gained from her time in Parliament and in the public and private sectors over recent years.

Alongside that, Kenneth Hogg, as the new chief officer in the Scottish Police Authority, brings considerable experience from the public sector and of transformation of public agencies. I have no doubt that both will bring considerable leadership to the organisation. Members should be reassured by their commitment to learning lessons and to addressing the issues that were highlighted in this year's Audit Scotland report.

## Year of Young People

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-09498, in the name of Maree Todd, on celebrating our future: Scotland's year of young people.

14:26

**The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Maree Todd):** I am delighted to open the debate and to speak to the motion in my name, which is my first as a minister. I am also pleased that there is broad support across the chamber for the motion and, indeed, for 2018 as Scotland's year of young people—or bliadhna na h-òigridh, as we say in Gaelic. I promise to learn the British Sign Language and Scots versions of that by the time that we kick off in 2018.

I am happy to support Labour's amendment and to welcome the awards network's work in recognising young people's achievements and encouraging volunteering. When I was a brownie leader, a number of young women helped us out while working towards a Duke of Edinburgh award. Their commitment and natural leadership qualities made my job as an adult volunteer much easier—not to mention much more fun.

If there is one aspiration that I hope we might share for 2018, it is to ensure that our young people feel and believe that they are valued, wanted and vital to our country's future and that their voices are heard and listened to. Recent research suggests that young people today believe that others view them negatively simply because of their age. That has a real impact on their wellbeing and self-esteem. Changing perceptions of young people and the country's relationship with our young people must therefore be a key aim in 2018. Young people make a significant contribution to our society and our communities, and we should celebrate that contribution.

Our young people are often way ahead of the rest of us. I will give members a wee example of that. Since I became an MSP, marine litter has been among the issues that I have been contacted most about. Long before "Blue Planet II" brought the country together on Sunday evenings, the children from Ullapool primary school lobbied me about marine litter. They are a formidable force, especially when they team up with the ocean defenders from Sunnyside primary school in Glasgow. They have not only organised beach cleans together; they have been very effective in getting tourism businesses to give up plastic straws. It has been an absolute pleasure for me to watch the rest of the world coming round to their way of thinking.

Since I became a minister, I have really enjoyed meeting more of Scotland's young people. I was recently in Fife on a children's rights road trip—it is quite hard to say that—with members of the Scottish Youth Parliament. I met a group of confident and articulate young people at Levenmouth academy and young parents from the gingerbread teenage parent project. It was a privilege to hear about their experiences although, sadly, not all of those experiences were positive. The young mothers whom I met are doing a fantastic job in raising children in often difficult circumstances, so I was saddened to hear that some of them feel that they are not listened to by adult services. Those young mums spoke about taking their own mums along to health service appointments in order to be taken seriously. They need to be heard in their own right, not just for their own wellbeing but for that of their children.

I have also been to Shetland to help to launch the year of young people. There, I met dozens of enthusiastic and optimistic young people for whom next year is very important. I heard that their members of the Scottish Youth Parliament have started to attend council education meetings and that they are planning a big takeover of arts venues. Some members may be aware that the Twitter banter between the Shetland and Orkney libraries is the stuff of legend, so I particularly look forward to seeing how the youngsters get on with that.

The First Minister travelled to Dumfries to officially launch the year of young people. The year is a global first—a groundbreaking, themed year that will celebrate all our young people in Scotland, wherever they live.

Young people have been involved right from the start. Planning began in 2015 with hundreds of young people aged eight to 26 determining the issues that matter to them. Young people agreed the aims and the objectives for 2018, and they have tasked the Government with creating a mechanism to let young people achieve those objectives in 2018. They have also agreed—after much debate—who we mean when we talk about "young people" for the purposes of 2018: it is everyone aged eight to 26. That does not mean that younger children will not be included but that the primary focus will be on that broad age group, which we know has a diverse range of needs and interests.

I thank Young Scot, Children in Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament for the role that they have played in the planning of and preparations for the year, and I look forward to continuing to work with them throughout 2018.

The year of young people also sets a challenge for the Government, and the Scottish ministers have committed to giving young people a stronger

voice in policy making and in the co-designing of improvements to services that affect their lives. To that end, a group of 35 dedicated young people are our co-design leaders for the year. That inspiring group, which is called *communic8*, is ready and available to help everyone to ensure that young people are at the heart of everything they do.

There are also more than 500 ambassadors based in every local authority area, and I am pleased to advise the Parliament that they will all receive certificates from the First Minister marking their contribution and achievement. Young people do not have to be ambassadors to receive a certificate, though—we will recognise contributions from nominated young people from right across the country throughout 2018.

Young people have identified six key themes that will underpin the majority of the year's activities. The first theme is participation. We want Scotland's young people to have the confidence and the skills to influence decisions, to participate effectively in wider civic society and to shape the future Scotland that they want to live in.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I congratulate the minister on making her first ministerial speech to the chamber.

In the programme for government, the First Minister outlined plans to consider the incorporation of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law as a means of extending and enshrining that participation into every decision-making process in our country. That was very welcome. Will the minister restate that commitment and tell us how it is progressing?

**Maree Todd:** The member is right to identify that we have committed to do that in the programme for government, and it will be a key theme of the year of young people.

It is important that young people have the opportunity—and the right—to influence the decisions that are made about their lives from day to day. From 10 January 2018, eligible children who are aged 12 to 15 will be empowered by having largely the same rights as their older peers and parents under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. That will be of particular benefit to looked-after children and young carers.

It is perhaps unsurprising that education also emerged as a key theme. Raising standards in education is key to giving young people a platform to succeed not just at school or in education but in life. The year of young people provides a prime opportunity for Scotland to lead the way internationally in its approach to giving young people a voice in their education, and we will

include provisions to that end in the forthcoming education bill.

Young people also identified health and wellbeing as a priority theme, with mental health highlighted as a key issue. The Scottish Government has a 10-year strategy to improve access to mental health services that is backed by an additional £150 million over five years. It is also committed to preventative and early intervention approaches, and it is investing in children's and young people's health and wellbeing, which we know makes a big difference to their risk of developing mental health problems.

Last week, we announced the establishment of a youth commission on child and adolescent mental health services. Young Scot and the Scottish Association for Mental Health are receiving funding to recruit young people who have experience of mental health services to be young commissioners, who will do their own research, identify issues and speak to experts, policy makers and service providers about solutions.

Sportscotland, active partners and young sports ambassadors are all embracing the year and planning activity to help young people to have active lives, which is an important aspect of health and wellbeing. We look forward to a great year of sport in 2018—in particular, the European championships, which will take place here in Scotland in August.

It might surprise some folk in the chamber to hear that young people chose enterprise and regeneration as a key theme. That probably says something about us and our perceptions of what motivates and interests young people. Why would young people not want a stake in their economic future? Why would they not want to use their curiosity, creativity and innate ability to challenge, find solutions and influence our economy and their communities?

Earlier this year, I visited Kinlochleven high school and heard about the flourishing social enterprise—the beautifully named Kinlochlovin'—which has at its heart health and wellbeing, social inclusion and social justice. Just last month, Kinlochlovin' won the highly acclaimed dragons glen prize from Lochaber Chamber of Commerce, so it is a pretty healthy business.

We need to nurture enterprise, celebrate success and give young people a voice and a say in their communities. Let us use the year of young people to better understand young people's interests and give them a platform from which to succeed. We can all agree that a desirable outcome for 2018 and beyond would be to have our young people emerge into adulthood with a strong sense of who they are and an

understanding that their talents are appreciated and their creativity will be encouraged and not curtailed.

There is evidence from the Scottish household survey that people who engage in cultural activity in earlier years are more likely than those who do not to participate in and attend cultural activities as adults and to report better health and greater life satisfaction. Scotland's year of young people provides an opportunity to ensure that more young people can participate in culture and shape the future of the arts in Scotland. In line with our commitment to co-production, young people will have a meaningful role in the development of the new cultural strategy for Scotland.

Perhaps the single most important theme that young people identified, from which so much else follows, is equality and discrimination. Currently, too many young people do not feel equal or fairly treated. We know that equality of opportunity is denied to some because of poverty or because of their gender, sexual orientation and identity, disability or minority ethnic background—or because they are somehow different. We must change that. Difference must be recognised as a strength, not a deficit, and we must encourage our young people to embrace and value difference and diversity.

There is a key role and responsibility for Government in that regard. On Sunday, we marked and celebrated international human rights day. As the First Minister said, we have come a long way in Scotland and have achieved much, but there is more—much more—that we need to do. That is how we will approach this fundamental issue in 2018. We will build on the good work that is under way and we will face up to the challenges and, no doubt, some uncomfortable truths along the way.

The year of young people provides a space in which to generate intergenerational dialogue, break down barriers between age groups and ensure mutual respect and understanding. Crucially, it provides a space for parents and families to be recognised for their key role in young people's lives. They are the most important resource and players in young people's lives, and they shape the adults that our young people become. We need to value their contribution, celebrate their achievements and ensure that they feel supported, empowered and enabled.

At the launch of the year of young people, last month, the First Minister announced a busy and exciting events programme with 60 new or enhanced events across Scotland, all of which have been co-designed with young people. The programme is supported by a £1.2 million events fund, which is administered by VisitScotland.

With young people at its heart, the nationwide programme spans the country, from a youth festival in Shetland to a science takeover at Helix park, which is the home of the magnificent Kelpies, and, in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland's biggest youth festival, at which more than 40,000 visitors are expected over a weekend.

Young people have the opportunity to apply for funding to run their own events and activities throughout the year, developing skills and engaging their local communities. The create 18 fund is still open for a second round—it closes in January—so members should encourage young people from their local areas to apply.

No doubt, members will have noticed that I am very excited about Scotland's year of young people and the possibilities that it offers for our young people. In 2018, we have the chance to show that Scotland is a dynamic, welcoming, open and inclusive country. Perhaps the biggest opportunity and challenge is to explore that for ourselves and, vitally, to demonstrate those values to young people. The year of young people gives us a unique year-long opportunity to reset our relationship with our young people, change their perceptions and show that we believe in them and value the contribution that they make now and will make in the future.

There will be little point in the year of young people if we get to next December, put away the toolkits and pack away the activities with no fundamental shifts to point to or to take forward. Changing attitudes is perhaps the single biggest ambition that we can have for 2018. We can do that by celebrating young people's achievements, holding events that put them front and centre and giving them platforms on which to succeed. We must put young people, their voices and their views at the heart of that activity. By pausing to listen to how young people perceive the world and how they are perceived by others, we can seek to create a better future for current and subsequent generations. That would make a fine legacy from Scotland's year of young people.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that 2018 has been designated as Scotland's Year of Young People; notes that it will provide an opportunity to showcase the achievements and talents of all young people in Scotland and to ensure that their views are heard and acted on; welcomes that the themes for the year have been designed and agreed by young people themselves, and agrees that the Parliament has a key role to play in celebrating the contribution that Scotland's young people make to society and their communities.

14:42

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I welcome Maree Todd to her place as a minister and to the

first debate that she has led in that capacity. I am not sure whether it is her civilising influence, but I rise to support the Government motion, as well as to move the amendment in my name. Perhaps that will not last, but it is a good start.

As someone for whom the personal highlight of 2017 was receiving his bus pass—I was particularly pleased to slip in under the wire before Mr Yousaf could mess with the qualifying age—I cannot help but feel a little ill-placed to be helping to open a debate on the year of young people 2018. As that cliché of a grumpy old man, I feel that I should be haranguing the youth of today for their general fecklessness. Perhaps I should point out, for example, that when I was young I even had to do my paper round on Christmas day, because those pre-smartphone days meant that we had real newspapers, even on 25 December. However, I cannot do that, fun though it might have been, because as is the case for every other member here—the minister alluded to this—my work as an MSP is constantly enlivened and enlightened by contact with the energy, empathy and achievement of the youth of today.

Those young people include individuals such as the incredible campaigner from Prestonpans, Grace Warnock, who, at the age of 10 and suffering from Crohn's disease, launched a campaign that has revolutionised signage for accessible disabled toilets. Grace sometimes has to use accessible toilets and she had often felt the disapproval of people who thought that she was not entitled to use them, because she was not in a wheelchair and did not have a disability that they could see. Rather than simply feeling bad, Grace designed a new sign for accessible toilets that recognised that some disabilities are invisible, as a picture of a wheelchair does not cover them. She found a designer to produce the sign and we installed the first sign right here in the Scottish Parliament building close to the public entrance. Grace's sign can now be seen everywhere, from airports to football grounds, and a version of the sign can be seen in pretty well every supermarket in the country.

Heather Cameron of Dunbar—a little older than Grace Warnock—is an East Lothian member of the Scottish Youth Parliament and a global development goals ambassador who has lobbied in this Parliament and at Downing Street for those global goals to be pursued and achieved.

It is not just individuals. There are groups, too, such as the streetsahead children in Tranent who, working with the Children's Parliament, created a visual vision—a mural of the future that they want to see for their hometown. The children took that mural, and their vision, all the way to Geneva to present to the United Nations and, importantly, brought it back again to their own streets, which

have already begun to change in line with some of their ideas.

The list goes on. The Amnesty International group in Dunbar grammar school, which campaigns for the rights of political prisoners in the darkest corners of the world, was started by the young people, is run by the young people and is promoted in the school by the young people. Recharge in Tranent, a youth project that touches almost every young person in the town, is delivered by generation after generation of young leaders, paying on the support that they got to their younger brothers and sisters in turn.

I am sure that we will hear many examples of the positive contribution that young people are making to our communities. The year of young people is our opportunity to celebrate that. I am perfect to open the debate for Labour, because the obligation on older, supposedly influential curmudgeons such as me to begin to properly understand, acknowledge, support and, above all, listen to young people is exactly the purpose of the year of young people. To the credit of the Government and all the partners involved in planning the year, it has been a good example of what happens when we listen to young people and allow them to determine the shape, purpose and programme of the year.

The interim planning group, facilitated by Children in Scotland, Young Scot and the Scottish Youth Parliament, went to considerable lengths to ensure that the group's report was driven by young people and their aspirations for the year. That augurs well for a Government programme or initiative that might reach the parts that Government initiatives do not usually reach. Only a few weeks ago, while speaking to a secondary 1 group from Knox academy in my constituency, who were visiting the Parliament, I was surprised to be asked in the question and answer session how much money the Government was making available for the year of young people 2018—a question to which I did not know the answer. However, I asked a parliamentary question and, happily, have been able to provide the answer, which is a creditable £3 million, or in fact rather more than that.

The themes that emerged from that process—participation; education; health and wellbeing; and equality and discrimination—are all the stronger for having emerged from the regional and national workshops that were organised by the planning group. The group's overarching aim was the celebration of young people's achievements. We have to consider that in the context of the underlying concern in the group's report that young people's achievements are not acknowledged, that they face discrimination just for being young and that they are subjected to

negative stereotyping as unproductive, disrespectful or even intimidating.

I made light of older people's bad and ignorant attitudes to young people, but it is no laughing matter, and it lies at the heart of those themes for the year. Those attitudes can leave young people feeling unrepresented and voiceless, underinvested in when it comes to education and opportunity, and even undermined in ways that can damage their very health and wellbeing. The briefing that was provided for the debate by the Prince's Trust reminds us that half of young people do not believe in themselves at school and more than a quarter do not feel in control of their lives; indeed, 16 per cent go as far as to say that they think their life will amount to nothing.

The year of young people has to be serious about changing those negative attitudes and beginning to turn around that intergenerational discrimination that can be so harmful to young people and their life chances. As the minister said, that is a big change in culture and attitude, and it will not happen in one year.

In its message to members of the Scottish Parliament for today's debate, Barnardo's Scotland makes the point that the year must leave a legacy. Some of that is about redoubling our efforts on core priorities for the Government and Parliament as a whole, such as raising educational attainment and cutting the attainment gap. It is also about finding new ways to embed the recognition of young people's achievements in society more widely so that they are recognised, respected, understood and rewarded.

That is the thrust of our amendment. We already have a platform for recognising young people's achievements in the awards network. That allows recognition of informal opportunities through schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh awards, the John Muir awards, scouts, the Boys Brigade, the brownies and so on. All those things can be recognised through the awards network. That is a work in progress. Awards need to be placed much more rigorously on the Scottish credit and qualifications framework. The scope needs to be widened to include more schemes and good-quality but less-formal achievements in volunteering and work experience.

We then need to find a way to pull together every young person's achievements. Not only exam results but youth awards, volunteering, work experience and all other experience in the round need to be presented in a way that employers, higher education, further education and society more generally recognise, value and acknowledge. For example, in the past, we have suggested that there should be a graduation certificate for all 18-year-olds, after the ideas of

ex-headteacher Danny Murphy from Stirling. There might well be other ways.

Such a mechanism would include exams, which are already respected and recognised, and place alongside them with the same esteem those other experiences and achievement.

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** I agree entirely with the direction of Mr Gray's comments about the broader recognition of achievement. I highlight the Government's willingness to engage constructively on how we can use the year of young people to better record and capture for the benefit of young people and society the very achievements that Mr Gray has raised today.

**Iain Gray:** I welcome the cabinet secretary's remarks, and certainly our amendment is couched in broad terms rather than making a particular proposal. It is an example of how we might do this.

The key is to find ways of celebrating young people's achievements next year and every year, and the minister made that point. We need to recognise achievements that mark the breadth and diversity of a young person's activity and action, not just those that come with an exam certificate attached. For too long, those exam passes have been the only achievement for which young persons have been given respect and acknowledgement—the only thing that we have paid attention to. The year of young people is a good chance to change that, not just for one year but for the future.

I move amendment S5M-09498.1, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the work being done by the Awards Network in recognising young people's achievements; recognises that there are barriers in society that prevent some young people being able to fully participate in volunteering opportunities, and calls on the Scottish Government to work with educational bodies, employers and the young people themselves to build on the network to ensure that these awards are recognised to be as valuable as traditional qualifications, as a legacy for Scotland's Year of Young People.”

14:53

**Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con):** I am glad to open for the Scottish Conservatives today. I, too, welcome Maree Todd to her position as Minister for Childcare and Early Years. It is good to hear her speaking today. In that spirit of togetherness, we will also support the minister's motion and the amendment. Our young people are a talented, diverse and intelligent group who are the future of our country, and it seems only appropriate that we should celebrate their contribution to our society.

Speaking as someone who spent a large part of their career working with young people, and as the mother of six children, I never fail to be surprised by their achievements and particularly their ingenuity. Their ability to adapt and their enthusiasm for learning is never ending in the right circumstances. That is precisely what the year of young people hopes to highlight. It provides a platform for young people to have their views heard and acted upon. It helps to develop better understanding between the generations. It recognises the impact that teachers, youth workers and other supporting adults have on young people's lives and it creates opportunities for young people to express themselves through culture, sport and other activities.

The year is also an opportunity for young people to participate in decision making. By including young people in these choices, we encourage them to take responsibility for their actions while providing them with the skills that they need to succeed in later life. That is why I welcome the role that young people have played in the creation of this—their year. In designing, promoting and running the year, the level of participation is staggering, and I have no doubt that it will prove to be a rewarding experience for all those involved.

However, there is more to this year than just celebration. One of the official themes—as Maree Todd pointed out—is equality. It is a theme that has come through very strongly. Everyone in Scotland deserves the right to go about their daily life free from discrimination and abuse. Sadly, it is still all too easy to discover prejudice and bullying in our schools and communities.

I would like to touch on the story of Samena Dean, a youth worker with the grass-roots organisation Scotland against criminalising communities. Speaking to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee last year, Samena highlighted the growing level of Islamophobia being faced by Muslim children in Scottish schools. In her survey of 100 Muslim children, Samena found that 6 per cent of those in high school and 14 per cent of those in primary school had experienced physical Islamophobia, including being punched, kicked, pushed and having their hijabs pulled off.

Whether it is to do with sexuality, disability, gender or body image, children and young adults are routinely subject to abuse if they are perceived to be different. In Stonewall's recent "School Report Scotland", the charity identified that 48 per cent of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people are bullied at school for being LGBT, while the time for inclusive education—TIE—2016 survey, "Attitudes towards LGBT in Scottish Education", found that over a fifth of LGBT young people in Scotland had attempted

suicide at least once as a result of prejudice-based bullying.

This is a year in which we have an opportunity—as Maree Todd quite rightly pointed out—to change attitudes and I hope that our young people will take the lead on that. I welcome the Scottish Government's objectives, which are laid down in the national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people, but it is clear that entrenched issues remain within our schools, which must be urgently addressed.

In a year in which we intend to celebrate the confidence, diversity and equality of our young people, those figures are more than a statistical blip; they are indicative of a deep-rooted culture of bullying in our schools. I hope that in the year of young people, we will see some change take place in that culture.

In the year of young people, there is an emphasis on understanding and reinforcing the importance of mental health. We need to make sure that we understand the causal factors and that we have in place timely and appropriate support to prevent the deterioration of mental health and wellbeing. In this age of social media, where an image can be shared with an entire class in an instant, the mental health of our young people can come under attack anywhere, anytime. Who better to lead us and guide us in addressing some of those issues than young people themselves?

For the past 12 years, I have been actively involved with charities that support young people with mental health issues, and the lack of preventative and early intervention funding to support mental health and wellbeing in children and young people has been a constant source of frustration. I apologise for raising this, but Scotland has fallen behind England in this area, with the Scottish Association for Mental Health leading calls for child and adolescent mental health services funding to be increased threefold just to bring it in line with spending in England.

Last week, I was privileged to attend the Corra Foundation's reception, "Everyone has a Story". It is about those voices—those young people—whose lives and mental health have been blighted through circumstances beyond their control. It is those young people who have found the courage and the support to tell their stories—through art, photography, and film; they are looking not for rewards or acknowledgment, but for the strength to meet the challenges that life brings.

We must remember in the year of young people that celebrating success does not always mean a trophy, a recording contract or a great job. Sometimes, success is just about being able to meet each day with a smile; sometimes, success



is finding your own voice and the confidence to use it.

The Scottish Government has made some headway in the area by introducing its mental health strategy. We must ensure that services have the resources that they need to do the job properly and prevent a future crisis from growing.

The year of young people 2018 is a chance for us to celebrate Scotland's children and young adults and to show the world the best of what they have to offer. However, we would do well to remember that it is also an opportunity to reflect on the treatment of young people and to remind us that there is still a long way to go before we can claim to have a truly equal society that values and respects all our young people, regardless of orientation or identity. Any celebration of young people will be entirely superficial if we do not work together and work hard to tackle the deep-seated inequalities that hold our young people back. I look forward to doing exactly that through 2018 and beyond.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** We come to the open debate, with speeches of six minutes, although we have some time in hand for interventions. There is a little flexibility.

15:00

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

A while back, when I could possibly still have been classified as a young person, the singer Amy Macdonald wrote a song entitled "Youth of Today". Members will be delighted that I will not be providing a rendition, but I will read some of the lyrics:

"My children weren't the same'  
'My children's children they're the ones to blame' ...  
'In my day we were better behaved'  
But it's not your day no more".

Or, for the bulk of members, who are not of my vintage, we might say:

"just another brick in the wall".

Next year, we mark the year of young people. Good. In the minister's letter to all MSPs last Friday, she notes that

"the Year of Young People is about celebrating their achievements, valuing their contribution to communities"—

which links nicely to Labour's amendment—

"and creating new opportunities for them to shine locally, nationally and on the international stage".

Yesterday, I visited Thornton primary school in my constituency to present awards at an

assembly. It will come as no surprise that I love visiting schools and speaking to pupils. I really love visiting Thornton primary school, because the nursery kids are always brought in, and it is always from the mouths of babes that the truest words are spoken. I told the pupils about the year of young people and asked them what I should say today. A hand shot up and I was told:

"Tell them Thornton primary school is the best in the world."

Dutifully done.

Another hand went up:

"Tell them reading is fun."

I had just been presenting awards for the First Minister's reading challenge and I met Amy, who is in primary 6 and who has read 36 books since September. I accidentally tweeted that it was 26, so I would like to get it on the record that it was 36—I stand corrected. Reading is fun and cool at Thornton primary school and everyone is involved in it. At the back of the hall, there were parents and carers, and at the front there were people from the University of St Andrews and the Fife Cultural Trust as well as the nursery teachers who are in charge of the bookbug and peep programmes. They are all partners in the school's drive to get more kids reading.

Then a voice from the corner of the room tugged at the headteacher, saying:

"Tell her about the golden rule."

So he did. The golden rule is that you treat others as you would like to be treated—there is a lesson for every single one of us in this place from a four-year-old at Thornton primary school.

The fact that we have to recognise what young people do by setting aside an entire year speaks volumes about how their voices are so often marginalised in mainstream political discourse. Sure, we visit their schools and get a picture, and we ask them to design our Christmas cards and attend their prize-giving ceremonies, but do we ever truly listen to them? When we visit those schools, are we presented with the head boy and head girl or do we speak to wee Jamie, who has been removed from class for the day because a politician is visiting? We can see only as much as those who we visit are prepared to show us, or as much as we are prepared to open our eyes and look for.

Contrast the experience of the young people in Thornton primary school with that of the young people I heard about at the event I hosted in the Parliament yesterday: Kindred Scotland's children with exceptional healthcare needs event. I will tell members a wee story about Tom, who was born with a range of complex medical issues, including having no oesophagus and a severe cardiac

defect. Tom needs constant help maintaining his airways and he is deaf. His parents were told that he would never be able to sign, but today he does sign. He can also knock out quite a good drum beat on the table in committee room 6. Tom's mum describes him as her "miracle". His mum and dad are far better trained in meeting his needs than anyone else and, as a result, no friends or family can ever really help with his care. Tom's mum has had to, as she describes it, "project manage" his care, purely because services do not talk to each other.

I am sure that all members will have done their homework for today and will recall the fourth principle of the getting it right for every child approach, which is about ensuring joined-up working. However, it got worse for Tom. When he went to nursery, the teachers were trained in supporting him but, when he went up to primary school, two staff from the nursery had to fill in, despite numerous planning meetings and Tom having been immersed in GIRFEC paperwork since before he was even three. The school knew he was coming.

When the staffing changed, his mum and dad were forced to step into school for six weeks and provide medical cover because there were not enough trained staff. They were eventually unable to continue providing that cover. Do members know what happened then? The school said that it could not provide a safe place for Tom to learn so he had to stop going to school altogether. Tom has not been to school since 30 November despite his right to an education being a legal entitlement. I felt that I could not speak in the debate without telling his story. Whether it is 2018 or not, every child should have their right to learn protected.

As outlined in the programme for government, over the next year, the Government will audit and embed the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into policy and legislation. That is welcome, but the Government must ensure that it includes the rights of children like Tom in that process—children who have no voice. I had a look at the list of events that are planned for next year. We have Hogmanay, the Glasgow international comedy festival and a youth TEDx event to name a few, but I could not point to the Tom on that event list.

Amy in Thornton primary school blew me away yesterday. Imagine reading 36 books since September. It is truly inspiring. However, a few hours later, I met Tom. His story changed the way that I think about how we deliver for all young people and that is what 2018 has to be about. It must be about every young person. We must ensure that it is about Amy and Tom because, if we do not, perhaps we are destined to live out the

words of that Amy Macdonald song: it's not our day any more; it is their year.

So, to 2018. Let us ensure that we get it right for every young person.

15:06

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** I will make a point that is important to the debate: young people are not that different from anyone else. They share the same hopes and ambitions for their future and the future of our country as everyone else.

As we celebrate the year of young people, we must place it within its context. That means recognising that, for many young people across Scotland, it comes on the back of 10 years of Scottish National Party failure. It might not suit the Government to hear that but, if we are really to recognise the issues that face young people in Scotland, we must confront those failures head on. Under the SNP, education in Scotland has gone backwards, standards have fallen and we have fallen behind many countries around the world.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** Does Mr Mundell appreciate that he is making teachers who are listening to his speech feel demoralised by using such language?

**Oliver Mundell:** I thank the member for her intervention. When I am in the chamber for debates such as this, I start to wonder how many teachers I will have to meet, who raise legitimate concerns about education that the Government hides behind, before we get on with the job of improving education in Scotland.

We must not forget education's important role in levelling the playing field and raising aspiration for all. The Government has decimated our college sector, which provided yet another great opportunity to level the playing field and to raise aspiration and attainment. The Government has ignored the challenges in our university sector and sat back as talented young people from across Scotland have been turned away from Scotland's best universities.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** Is the member aware that we have not only provided free university tuition in Scotland, but seen a record number of Scots attending our universities? He should celebrate the success, for goodness sake.

**Oliver Mundell:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that intervention, although it shows a certain arrogance. The Government seems content and relaxed about the fact that the number of young people from deprived backgrounds going to

universities in Scotland is lower than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I continue to be shocked by the number of young people in my constituency who are denied their basic human right to education because of the poor provision of additional support for learning. I refer to young people who, as we have heard in other debates, are informally excluded from mainstream education.

I remain equally concerned about the number of young people in my constituency who experience a lack of employment and wider social opportunities. It is not good enough to say that unemployment is low, because in Dumfries and Galloway we are seeing hundreds of young people forced to leave the region every year. Those are young people who do not have the chance to raise their own family or continue to live in the area where they are from, and young people who are forced to head to the central belt or south of the border in order to find employment opportunities. I do not think that anyone can pat themselves on the back when we live in a country where such challenges exist for our young people.

**Maree Todd:** In the Highlands and Islands, we face similar challenges. One of the ways in which we have sought to meet those challenges, to regenerate the area and to reverse centuries of depopulation is through land reform, which is not simply about land ownership but is about providing opportunities for young people in the future. In the Carloway estate, young people are members of the board and are planning for the future of that part of the world. Does the member support land reform?

**Oliver Mundell:** There is obviously a wide range of issues around land reform, but anyone who tries to suggest that that is the biggest single issue facing young people in the south of Scotland is kidding themselves. The young people I speak to are interested in the chance to raise their own families, find housing and find long-term, meaningful skilled employment.

We hear time and again that education is a top priority for this Government, but there are few people who would say that we see that in practice. Instead, when it comes to the year of young people, we see Nicola Sturgeon popping down to Dumfries for a quick photo opportunity, piggy-backing on the success of the young people and organisations who have been working hard on some of these most difficult issues for years. It is not good enough, and she should not get away with it. The year of the young people must be more than a public relations opportunity for this SNP Government.

On a more positive note, I would like to pay tribute to Councillor Adam Wilson, who was

elected to Dumfries and Galloway Council in May 2017. Although he might not be a representative from my party I recognise the outstanding contribution that he has made locally since that time. It is important to see young faces involved in every level of our politics, and in pushing for and fulfilling the role of young people's champion on the council, he has certainly ensured that some of the issues affecting young people and young voters have moved up the political agenda.

At the same time, it is important that we recognise the efforts of all volunteers across Scotland, and particularly those in my Dumfriesshire constituency who make such an important contribution to the lives of young people. They did not wait for a special year to come along before they threw themselves into youth work, nor were they waiting for or looking for a pat on the back. Those are the people and activities that need to be pushed to the fore and, although one-off events are important, there is no denying that, when it comes to helping the young people who need it the most, it is the work of those third-sector organisations and of volunteers that makes the biggest difference.

Although I recognise the sentiment behind the year of young people and the tremendous work that many do, the real question for the Government is whether this year will be about delivering real action and change. It cannot and must not be a smokescreen for the failures of this SNP Government.

15:13

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** It will be quite hard to follow that inspirational and uplifting six minutes, but I will give it a bash.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate as we—most of us—look forward to the first ever year of young people in 2018. Today's motion offers up many different themes and things to speak about, and there are quite a few different points that I would like to contribute today.

First, I whole-heartedly agree with the motion on ensuring that the views of young people are heard and acted on. However, it is important that we act on what young people actually say that they want, not on what we might want them to say. Their agenda will not always be the same as ours or that of the organisation that is asking for their views, and that has to be okay. There is no point in saying that we are listening to young people's views if we hear only what we want to.

When I was youth champion in North Ayrshire Council, the topic that came up most often when we spoke to young folk was school toilets. That might not have been what many councillors and

council officers wanted to champion for young people, but that is what was important to them, so it was important that we acted on it.

As Jenny Gilruth said, we have to listen to all young people—not just the shiny prefects and those who are already engaged in the structures and organisations that allow them to share their views, but those who are on the outside. For any listening exercise to be truly meaningful, it has to include the views of and engage with all our young people, including those some might deem to be hard to engage with. When I hear that phrase, I have to ask myself—and I ask others to reflect on it—whether such young people really are hard to engage with or whether they are just easy to ignore. We have to make sure that nobody is ignored, because 2018 will be the year of all young people—not just some of them.

In its briefing paper, Barnardo's states that one of its main hopes for 2018 is equal protection for children. I share that hope, and I am pleased to reiterate my support for John Finnie's member's bill to ensure equal protection for children. That is because any nation that is serious about the rights and wellbeing of its children and young people simply cannot condone the use of violence against them. I question the view of any adult who would defend or condone the use of violence against children. Not only is it wrong; it is also an utterly ineffective way of either encouraging or stopping behaviour in children. I look forward to supporting that bill when it comes before the Parliament. There could not be a more perfect year for it to become law than during the first-ever year of young people.

I will touch on corporate parenting. Our own children leave home and then come back again, for longer or shorter periods, as they find their feet in the world and work out what they want to do—perhaps between finishing college and finding their first job, when relationships break down, or for any other reason. The point is that children with families have the safety net and security of their parental home to fall back on when they need it. Looked-after children need that security, too.

In October, the First Minister announced that care-experienced young people will be exempt from paying council tax. That is a big step forward and has been welcomed by care leavers and charities across Scotland, as it recognises the huge financial pressures that are faced by those young people, who do not have the safety net of family support that we can sometimes take for granted.

Of course, there is still much more that we can do to be better corporate parents and I strongly welcome the root-and-branch review of the care system in Scotland that is under way and which, crucially, is being driven by the voices of those

who have actually experienced care. The First Minister has pledged to listen to the views of 1,000 care-experienced young people over the next two years, one of which will be, appropriately, the year of young people.

**Gillian Martin:** Would the member agree that taking away housing benefit from young people would have a particular impact on care-experienced young people who are trying to make their way in the world?

**Ruth Maguire:** Absolutely—and I expect anyone who gives a speech that mentions housing issues for younger people to acknowledge that as well.

The year of young people is also a good opportunity for us to remember that our communities belong to children and young people as much as they do to adults. Children and young people should be out and about. They should be seen hanging about and being in their space, because their community is their space as much as it is ours. When I was growing up in the 1980s—or the olden days, as my daughter calls them—the opportunity to play outside was something that my friends, my brother and I took for granted. Nowadays, our tolerance for seeing children out playing has gone a bit skew-whiff, and that should concern us all. Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reason. It is also frequently described as what children and young people do when they are not being told what to do by adults. It is an essential part of every child's life, and it is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as for children's social, emotional and physical development.

Reflecting its importance, a child's right to play is also enshrined in the UNCRC, so I was pleased to read, in the recent programme for government, that the Scottish Government is to undertake a comprehensive audit of how we can further embed the principles of the UNCRC, including the right to play, into policy and legislation.

In conclusion, children and young people are not just our future; they are our present, too. Next year—the first year of young people—provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on just that, to celebrate what our children and young people are doing right now, to listen to their needs and views and to support them to be all that they can be.

15:19

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** As colleagues have done, I congratulate Maree Todd on her first speech in her ministerial role, and I commend the Scottish Government for making 2018 the year of young people, which, as we have

heard, will allow young people to showcase their many talents on a local, national and global stage.

I know that we will all agree that young Scots should be empowered to fulfil their potential and that initiatives that encourage young people to come forward with their own ideas are very welcome. The approaching year of young people has already had a positive impact, perhaps because the initiative was designed and agreed by young people themselves. The fact that, across Scotland, more than 500 young people have signed up to be ambassadors is a great sign of their determination to make a difference in their areas and to promote their ideas, and I am pleased that many of those ambassadors come from the Central Scotland region.

Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, youth councils, year of young people ambassadors and hundreds of other young people will arrange events in different parts of each local authority area. Meanwhile, each youth council—including North Lanarkshire youth council—is planning a specific campaign for the year ahead to run alongside the year of young people.

I recently met the two MSYPs for Coatbridge and Chryston, Jack Campbell and Ryan Kelly, to discuss their priorities, one of which was the Scottish Youth Parliament's right here, right now campaign, which encourages young people to learn about their rights. The campaign—which the minister mentioned in her opening speech—also hopes to inspire schools, local authorities and the Parliament to respect and promote the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In doing that, we can all play a part in listening to and acting on the voices of young people, supporting them in whatever path they choose to follow and ensuring that they know that decision-making bodies in Scotland are backing them. Giving the right here, right now campaign a higher profile fits in well with the focus of the year of young people.

I was particularly pleased to learn that some primary schools in the Central Scotland region have won awards as rights-respecting schools, and I extend my congratulations to them. However, Jack Campbell raised with me the fact that because it is expensive to undertake the training for that, some schools might miss out, particularly those in more deprived areas. I hope that the Scottish Government will look at helping with that.

Overall, the year of young people has based its ideas around six key themes that have been designed by young people: culture; education; participation; equality; health and wellbeing; and enterprise and regeneration. Another important aim, which my colleague Iain Gray mentioned, is that of tackling the generational gap between young people and older generations and, in

particular, the stereotypes of young people that exist. The survey that was carried out recently for the year of young people looked at the attitudes of 1,000 adults towards 13 to 19-year-olds. Worryingly, one of the findings reflected the stereotypical view of young people as being lazy, irresponsible and lacking in communication skills.

That has definitely not been my experience of meeting and working with young people across the Central Scotland region. Tackling such attitudes is an important part of next year's work, and developing intergenerational projects will help young people to bridge a gap in their understanding of the challenges that older generations face.

It is important to commend the work of the Scottish Youth Parliament and other partners in the year of young people. In particular, Young Scot should be applauded for facilitating the preparation of events and providing resources, time, money and staff. Youth workers across the country also deserve credit for the work that they have done to get people signed up and to ensure that information about the year of young people was made widely available to those who might be interested.

The debate is largely a consensual one, and so it should be. Nonetheless, we must recognise the challenges that those who work with young people face. At last week's meeting of the Local Government and Communities Committee, Mark Ferguson of Unison said that youth services have been among the hardest hit in the cuts to local government funding. He said:

"The aspirations of children in our communities have been taken away from them because we do not have services at the level that we had before."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 6 December 2017; c 34.]

That might have been informed by the survey of youth workers that Unison carried out last year, which showed that 79 per cent of them had experienced cuts or severe cuts to their budget as a result of cuts in council funding. Unison reported that there have been redundancies from teams that were very small to start with, and youth workers mentioned that the standard of service that they can deliver has been falling because the funding is not there, with 70 per cent of them saying that their workload has increased. We need to take those issues on board.

Yesterday, we all received an email from the Scottish children's services coalition, which called for a tripling of the budget for children and young people's mental health services. It points out that 10 per cent of young people aged between five and 16 have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem, and it reminds us of the consequences of not addressing child mental ill health, including for

employment, homelessness and the numbers caught up in the criminal justice system.

Both of those organisations remind us that the cuts are impacting on services that young people rely on. I hope that we can work together to ensure that resources can better support and develop our young people, so that the year of young people really can make a difference.

The main objective of the year of young people is to showcase what they can do, to support, empower and enable them, and to create more opportunities for young people to flourish and meet their full potential.

In closing, I think that it is appropriate to celebrate remarkable young people. I want to specifically mention Jemma Skelding, who was my guest when she came here to deliver time for reflection last May. Then, she was 12 years old and a pupil at Falkirk high school, and her first language is BSL. She is a great example of a young person showcasing her talent.

I am sure that our young Scots will all rise to the challenges of next year and enjoy their participation. I wish all young people who take part in the events every success for the year of young people.

15:26

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I add my congratulations and best wishes to my colleague Maree Todd on her inaugural debate as the Minister for Childcare and Early Years.

Some debates in this chamber are harrowing, contentious and not pleasant to take part in. This debate, “Celebrating our Future: Scotland’s Year of Young People” is certainly not one of those and I am delighted to be taking part in it. I guess that the clue is in the title—“Celebrating our Future”—because, to use a cliché, children are our future and, as Ruth Maguire said, they are our present, too. I believe that it is our responsibility, not just as elected members but as adults, to do everything that we can to help them to grow up in a society that enables them to reach their full potential.

Like everyone else in this chamber, I am regularly invited to visit schools to talk to the children, sometimes to tell them about the job of being a member of the Scottish Parliament and sometimes to answer pretty tricky questions from modern studies or politics students. Whether in primary schools or high schools, without exception I have found the children to be polite, well mannered and exceptionally knowledgeable about the world they live in, and I am always impressed at their confidence and ability to ask mature questions, in marked contrast to my school days,

when talking to adults was done as little as possible and always while staring at our shoes.

I also know that life today for young people is not a bed of roses—far from it in many cases. Young people today have more pressures than previous generations in so many ways—from social media, having to deal with horrendous world events such as the threat of terrorism and the pressure to conform in a material world that, to some extent, robs them of a large part of their childhood.

It is our responsibility to create a society that our young people can thrive in and to protect our environment by, for example, letting them live in a frack-free Scotland—which, thankfully, we have done—and reducing air pollution and our carbon footprint. We must also ensure that access to mental health counselling is available quickly for those who need it. Compromising on that is not an option, and I welcome the minister’s comments and the progress in that area that has been planned.

The Scottish Government is determined to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up. We have started by undertaking transformational change in early years provision and attempting to close the educational attainment gap. However, Presiding Officer, there are still too many children living in poverty. That must be tackled head on if we are to make a difference to children’s lives. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill sets out a series of targets that we must reach over the next decade, and we have established a poverty and inequality commission to provide advice to Scottish Government ministers and monitor progress on tackling poverty and inequality.

We are also blessed in Scotland to have amazing children’s charities, such as Children First, Children in Scotland, Barnardo’s, Aberlour and many more that do amazing, groundbreaking work with children and families. However, I find that very often young people are way ahead of the game when it comes to organising and self-support, and it just takes one inspirational leader to make a huge difference to many lives. I met one of those leaders at an event I hosted for Arthritis Research UK in Parliament last week. Her name is Charlotte Bamford and she was diagnosed with acute arthritis at the age of 24, after years of painful tests and examinations.

Charlotte was unassuming and down to earth. In a moving speech, which was totally devoid of self-pity, she told us that, as arthritis was always perceived to be an old person’s condition, she decided to start a blog to engage fellow young sufferers. More than 2,000 children in Scotland suffer from arthritis, and Charlotte has become a peer mentor to many of them, despite dealing with

the devastating effects that the condition has had on her life.

In addition, we cannot forget the army of young carers who are a lifeline for their parents and selflessly sacrifice their own enjoyment and much of their childhood to help family members. They are simply awesome and inspiring and we could never thank them enough for what they do in society.

The speeches in the debate have demonstrated the amazing potential of every young person, even those who have had the worst possible start in life. Early next year, I am hosting an event in Parliament to screen a film called “Resilience”, which highlights the ACEs initiative—ACE stands for adverse childhood experiences—and the way in which a person’s future is mapped out by them. My colleague Gail Ross is hoping to hold a members’ business debate on the subject. I urge everyone to sit up and take notice of the evidence and research on the subject, which is truly revolutionary and could shape the way in which we deal with disadvantaged young people for generations to come.

Scotland’s year of young people is a celebration of all the amazing contributions that our young people make to society. It must create a legacy whereby young people are listened to and, in effect, every year becomes the year of the young person. We have heard about the amazing line-up of events scheduled for the young people’s special year, which covers a fantastic variety of cultural, educational and sporting events. I hope that everyone who takes part has the time of their lives and I wish every young person the very best of years next year and every year, because their time is now.

15:31

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Like colleagues, I congratulate the minister on making such a positive first contribution in her new role.

For reasons that are probably obvious, I am quite excited about Scotland’s year of young people in 2018. Campaigning for enhanced rights and a greater role for young people in our society is something that I have been involved in for almost a decade now, which signals to me that perhaps my time as a young person is far closer to coming to an end than starting. Still, I am going to make the most of being the youngest member of this Parliament in our national year of young people.

My personal journey in Scottish politics and public life has been shaped significantly by some of the organisations that work every day to make this a better country for children and young people to live in, none more so than the Scottish Youth

Parliament. When I was elected to the SYP in 2011, we did not have votes at 16, equal marriage or a commitment to the living wage across the public sector regardless of a worker’s age. Now, in no small part due to the work of the Scottish Youth Parliament, those are all a reality. In the past few days, as other members have mentioned, the SYP has launched its right here, right now campaign, which focuses on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, with the aim of seeing it embedded in Scots law.

I am in no doubt that the work of the Scottish Youth Parliament across the 18 years of devolution played a role in convincing voters in the west of Scotland that they could place their trust in me, a 21-year-old, to be their voice here in Parliament. Although my age is not my only defining feature and, I am quite sure, not the one that frustrates my colleagues the most, I hope that when I speak for my generation, others will listen and appreciate the reality for young people in Scotland, across Europe and globally in 2018. We are right today to celebrate the progress that we have made, but tonight nearly one in four children in Scotland will go to bed in poverty; and this week across the United Kingdom, over 1 million people will go to work on a zero-hours contract. That figure is up from fewer than 170,000 in 2010, and zero-hours contracts disproportionately affect young people, with over one third of that 1 million aged between 16 and 24—I know many of them.

With 8,000 people sleeping out in Edinburgh this weekend in plummeting temperatures, including the Deputy First Minister and a number of other MSPs, to raise the issue of rough sleeping and homelessness, Centrepoin, a leading homelessness charity, has pointed out the link between zero-hours contracts and young people becoming homeless, because often landlords refuse to accept anyone who works on a zero-hours contract.

Exploitation happens not just through zero-hours contracts; more than one in five young people have been paid below the minimum wage, which itself is a poverty wage and, scandalously, is lower for the youngest workers. Colleagues working side by side can find that one of them is being paid significantly less for doing the same work, simply because they are young. Millennials in the UK are likely to be the first generation since the war to earn less over the course of their lives than their parents did. The Resolution Foundation estimates that a typical 20-something today will earn £8,000 less than a typical person in the previous generation.

**Elaine Smith:** Will the member commend, as I wish to, the young people’s trade union campaign better than zero?

**Ross Greer:** I am grateful for Elaine Smith's intervention. The better than zero campaign has been an inspiring example of young people coming together collectively to fight for and win their rights.

If we add the fact that the average house price is six times the average wage—which itself is much higher than the average young person's wage—and that the price of private rents is exploding, we see why we have a generation that is priced out of independent living. One in four 18 to 30 year olds have been forced to move back in with their families.

**Michelle Ballantyne:** What would you say to the university students who use flexible working—including zero-hours contracts, particularly in the hospitality trade—to help pay their way through university? Those students include three of my children, who have benefited enormously from flexible working.

**Ross Greer:** Zero-hours work is exploitation; poverty pay is exploitation. Both take advantage of young people who are forced into those circumstances. [*Interruption.*] If Miss Ballantyne wants to continue speaking—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Miss Ballantyne, I thank you for interventions, not heckling.

**Ross Greer:** Generational inequality is not unique to the UK; the single greatest act of generational inequality is playing out across the world today. Not long ago, the climate crisis was something that we talked about in terms of the world that would be left to my generation's grandchildren; then it was to our children. Today, it is we who are watching our world start to slip away. Every tax cut for oil companies, every extension to the life of creaking fossil-fuel power stations, every new capital project that drives private car use rather than public transport infrastructure is an act of generational betrayal. We will not have the time to pick up the pieces from the mistakes made by those who came before us.

The climate science is now very clear: if we do not solve this crisis now—in the next five years, during this parliamentary session—it will not be solved. The feedback loops of global warming—causing melting ice and permafrost which, in turn, cause more melting ice and permafrost, releasing more CO<sub>2</sub>—and burning rainforests, losing us valuable carbon sinks, are examples of not an abstract theory of planetary peril but a live, occurring event with consequences that we feel now and which my generation will feel throughout our adult lives.

Whether the Hollywood stars of Los Angeles whose houses burn as we speak or the young

climate refugee from Ghana whom I met at the door to Europe, in Lampedusa, the climate crisis affects us all; but it affects the poorest and the youngest the most. What my generation and those who follow need and deserve is a new Marshall plan, not to rebuild a continent after war but to save the world from a level of devastation that we will not be able to repair.

Experience has taught us that real change is rarely given from above; it has to be seized. Whether a young person is thinking of running for office, going to their first rally or taking part in direct action, please do not hesitate. Young people are powerful. Their voices and actions add weight to those of the thousands of others in this country and millions of others around the world who are fighting for justice: social, economic, environmental, racial, gender, generational and the many other struggles that we must fight before our time is out. Please join this fight and help us to win. Let 2018 be the year when we reclaim our future.

15:37

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** It is easy to forget Ross Greer's relatively junior years, given the consistent excellence of his speeches in the chamber.

I remind members of my previous role as convener of the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights. I am grateful to Maree Todd for using her inaugural debate as Minister for Childcare and Early Years to allow Parliament to consider the importance of the year of young people, which will commence in January.

I am grateful, too, for the consensual tone that has been adopted in the motion, which has been mirrored in much of today's debate. Such motions can bring out the best in Parliament: they remind us of our common values and our shared objectives, and provide a sense of purpose that picks up the challenge that was set by Nelson Mandela when he said that

"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

I do not think that there is a soul among us who does not share the Government's ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. That intention has been manifest in the many times when members have set aside the discord of party lines to move mountains in pursuit of that aim. In recognition of that, I record my thanks to colleagues from across the chamber who have worked in unison to make meaningful change in our communities for our most vulnerable young people through the increase in the age of leaving care to 21, the lifting of the age of criminal responsibility, the ending of indiscriminate use of



stop and search, the extension of the franchise to 16-year-olds, the additional provision for Scotland's young carers, and the common ground that has been established around John Finnie's proposed member's bill to end physical punishment of children in our society. That is a powerful index of progressive change, which represents the best that Parliament can achieve when we put our differences aside.

The year of young people that lies ahead should also focus our attention on the many frontiers against which we all still come up short. Although the tenor of the debate is such that I will not, on this occasion, ascribe particular blame in that regard, we would all do well to remember the young people in health board areas across the country who have waited two years or longer for first-line treatment in child and adolescent mental health services; those who have been subjected to online exploitation, abuse and bullying; the victims of child trafficking who are forced to work in cannabis cultivation, nail bars and the sex industry, sometimes in slave-like conditions; those who have been dispelled from areas in our communities through the use of high-frequency but still legal Mosquito devices; and young people with additional support needs who, having waited a long time for diagnosis, are still met with inadequate provision.

However, I will concentrate the remainder of my remarks on our young people who are in, and on the edge of, Scotland's care system, because the life outcomes of the 15,000 children and young people who, on any given day in this country, find themselves in care are demonstrably the worst of nearly any demographic in our society—so much so that I would go so far as to say that it is high time that Parliament considered them for treatment in the context of other protected characteristics.

Guaranteed aftercare support to the age of 25 and extension of continuing care to 21 have been an excellent start, but we need to do more. I certainly hope that the current review will mean that the people who teach, treat or interact with those young people in any way will be aware of the specific reality of the trauma, attachment disorder and loss that can stalk their progress and development.

One of the most significant recommendations in the recent review of the targets that we employ in the health service that was published by Sir Harry Burns was that we should routinely capture the extent and nature of adverse childhood events in order that we can form a holistic response to that reality. Armed with that knowledge, we need to ensure that we have a network of trauma-recovery services and a trauma-informed approach that

supports young people throughout their development.

I welcome the distance that Parliament has travelled and offer my co-operation and that of the Lib Dems in joining efforts to address those frontiers without precondition. I recognise the will that exists across the chamber.

The First Minister making space in her speech on the programme for government to give voice actively to the possibility of incorporating into Scots law the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child—which was dismissed out of hand in the previous session—is a measure of the progress that our nation is making in bringing us closer to realising the rights of young people and giving them a meaningful voice in the life of this country. I thank the First Minister for doing that. That is why I sought the minister's restatement of that commitment in her opening remarks.

Enshrining in law the need for decision makers to listen actively to the voices of young people will help us to go some way towards answering the challenge that the American futurist Alvin Toffler described when he said:

"The secret message communicated to most young people today by the society around them is that they are not needed, that the society will run itself quite nicely until they—at some distant point in the future—will take over the reins. Yet the fact is that the society is not running itself nicely ... because the rest of us need all the energy, brains, imagination and talent that young people can bring to bear down on our difficulties."

I leave members with those powerful words and assure the Government and the Labour Party of our support tonight.

15:44

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I am pleased to contribute to a debate to celebrate the contributions of young people to their communities throughout Scotland. I, too, congratulate the minister, Maree Todd, on her first debate as a minister.

The difference that our young people make to Dumfries and Galloway is very important, through their support for their communities by helping others and organising cultural events. As an MSP, I am lucky to spend a significant amount of my time with young folk.

Among the best parts of my job are visits to schools across the region and welcoming school kids to Parliament to talk to them about what I do. This year, I visited Hoddum primary in Ecclefechan, where I participated in the daily mile. We were promoting active travel, which is one of our Scottish Government's commitments.

I will give a wee shout out for Lockerbie academy. The kids in the advanced higher modern studies class are quite bright. I have also visited Douglas-Ewart high school, Cargenbridge primary school and Kirkcudbright primary school. I met that modern studies class so that the students could pick my brains about the political processes in Scotland. On Friday, I encountered the Boys Brigade group at Troqueer. To say that they were excited would be a complete understatement.

I am consistently impressed by the quality of the questions from, and the knowledge and the insight of, young students. They are quite clever. I look forward to their being in Parliament as future MSPs representing our country. I always come away from visits feeling optimistic about leaving Scotland's future in the capable hands of the current generation of young people.

In rural areas, it can be difficult for young people to find opportunities for employment, so it is vital that we empower them to explore the career opportunities that are on their doorsteps. The partnership between a local forestry company, Jas P Wilson, and Dalbeattie high school is a positive example of how local businesses can help to do that. Last year, I joined the Minister for Employability and Training, Jamie Hepburn, on a visit to the Dalbeattie firm to look at its machinery business, and to learn about apprenticeships and training and the provision of education in rural areas. Mr Hepburn met apprentices, and we found out more about the company's partnership with Dalbeattie high school, which has allowed local young people not only to gain practical experience of a forestry engineering business, but to remain in the area. Offering our young people meaningful training opportunities in local businesses is vital to our region's economy and will address national skills shortages in important areas of activity, especially engineering.

I am pleased to have Scotland's Rural College campus in my area. It provides vital training opportunities. The SRUC was recently awarded the Queen's anniversary prize for higher and further education, for its world-leading research into the genetics of dairy kye at the Crichton campus in Dumfries. The Scottish Government has supported that work through the environment, agriculture and food strategic research programme, with the study to date being estimated to have benefited the British dairy industry by more than £400 million.

The arts, culture, and heritage also play vital roles in the region, and young people are the driving force behind many of our big cultural events. Almost a month ago, the First Minister visited the Oasis youth centre in Dumfries to launch formally the Government's year of young people 2018. As Minister Todd mentioned, the

launch in Dumfries was a tribute to the fantastic job that the young people and youth workers did in putting together the programme of events, which I understand will contribute significantly to the year's overall programme of activities.

Part of the First Minister's visit—it was not just a photo opportunity—was to look at the hard-hitting interactive youth information experience called "The Toon", which was designed and delivered by young people for young people. The visit gave the First Minister a genuine experience.

The youth engagement element of the Youth Beatz festival brings a new twist to dealing with issues that affect young peoples' lives. Topics that have been addressed include domestic abuse, poverty, alcohol and sectarianism. More than 50 local young people volunteer to be involved and will be working all year to put together that award-winning educational experience. Youth Beatz is Scotland's largest free youth music event and will be back in 2018 to celebrate its 10th anniversary and the year of young people. It will run over two days, with six fringe events. The festival will focus on encouraging as many young people as possible to participate. It is exceptional because it is organised and shaped by young volunteers.

In Dumfries, we are privileged to be home to the new national centre for children's literature and storytelling at Moat Brae, the birthplace of Peter Pan. In September, I joined the cabinet secretary, Fiona Hyslop, to visit the site, where work had begun to transform the house where J M Barrie's inspiration for Peter Pan began. The centre will open at the end of 2018, marking the year of young people. Moat Brae will contribute directly to the economic regeneration of Dumfries by creating new jobs and providing cultural and employment opportunities for young people.

The year of young people—a global first—will give our nation's young people a stronger voice on issues that affect their lives, while recognising the important contribution that they make to our country. Vitality, it is young people themselves who have decided the aims, objectives and outcomes for the year, and who are at the heart of planning and decision making.

I wish every young person success, next year and in the future, and I look forward to the year of young people in 2018.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I note that you referred to the minister as "Minister Todd". I would not want that to become the conventional way of addressing people in Parliament—"Cabinet Secretary Hyslop" and so on. I think that it was a slip of the tongue.

15:50

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I draw members' attention to my declaration in the register of members' interests: I am a west of Scotland board member for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

I welcome Maree Todd to her ministerial role. I have always enjoyed our interactions and our sometimes robust discussions. We do not agree on everything, but I have genuine respect for the passion that she brings to the role. I say to her that when we are interacting in the chamber she should remember who looks after her on the parliamentary rugby pitch.

I am delighted to contribute to the debate, although I suggest that every year should be the year of young people. It is a great idea to focus on the challenges and opportunities for young people in today's society.

Members will not be surprised to hear that I want to focus on the importance of access to opportunity—opportunity to participate and to find an interest and a passion, whether it is pursued in school time or outside school, through access to art, culture, drama, sport and other activity.

When we are young, the world is full of opportunity—anything is possible. It is only when we grow a bit older that adults get in the way of our ambitions and start to curtail that free thinking, so that we start to think about limitations.

During the debate, something that my youngest grandson said popped into my mind. He is five years old. A policeman visited his school and asked the class to name animals that the police use in their daily lives. My grandson confidently threw his hand up in the air and said, "Giraffe." That is the kind of thinking that I like; giraffes should be part of policing, because, as my grandson explained,

"They can see in through the top window."

Ambitions are shaped by the experiences to which young people are exposed and the opportunities that are available to them to interact with their peers and to develop together, through trial and error, and to learn about aspiration, self-worth, self-motivation, confidence and resilience. I have been lucky, in that I have witnessed such development as a coach over the past 30 years or so. I have had the pleasure of watching youngsters develop from enthusiastic novice through to international competitor. Much more than that, I have seen how young people have been shaped by taking part and by sharing their journey with a group of like-minded people, by travelling and meeting new people, and by learning to lose and striving to win.

Of course, the vast majority of those who participate do not reach the heady heights of international sport, but their drive to improve their performance and their success help to embed confidence and resilience and to inspire a work ethic and ability to aspire that pervade the rest of their lives. Such outcomes are true whatever the activity a young person finds a passion for—whether it is in academia, drama, art, sport or other activity. Participation fosters a can-do attitude.

That is all the more important in the light of what we heard from the Prince's Trust, which, as Iain Gray said, says that about half of young people say that they do not believe in themselves at school, and that more than a quarter do not feel that they are in control of their lives.

That is exactly what the Prince's Trust and Duke of Edinburgh programme are about, which is why I am particularly dismayed that South Ayrshire Council plans to dump the Duke of Edinburgh programme, to cut outdoor learning, to increase playing field fees and to close more activity centres. In my view, the council is ripping the heart out of communities, exacerbating the health inequalities that we want to tackle and widening the attainment gap.

These days, if a young person is to participate, they are more likely to need to travel, which excludes far too many of them. To be successful in that, we need to address the barriers to participation or—to flip that on its head—to make access easier. For example, we need to look at the cost of participation, to which travel to venues is related.

Ruth Maguire is walking back into the chamber. By saying earlier that the 80s were "the olden days", she made a happy man very old, because I go back much further than that. It used to be that an impromptu game of football required a ball, jumpers for goalposts and a bit of open ground. "No ball games" signs prevail now, and it is often the case that an ultra-modern 4G pitch must be booked in advance and paid for in order to play. Twenty-a-side football in the playground with a tennis ball is a thing of the past, now that health and safety has gone mad.

Extra-curricular activities have never recovered from their decimation in the mid-80s, when the options that were available for participation were wide and varied. I advocate that the best assets that we currently have that offer opportunity for all lie in the school estate. I have always thought that it is counterintuitive that, at the end of the school day, children leave school, where there are many great facilities, only to have to go somewhere else in order to participate in activities. Why not have school facilities open after and before school? After all, that is where the youth are. We should

stop waiting for the mountain to come to Mohammed and we should organise opportunity where the audience is. In my experience, if the opportunity to participate exists, there will be no shortage of takers. Invest in the youth and we will get that back tenfold.

Moreover, if we can get our youth to be more active, we will have a direct impact on the health of our nation now and in the future. Part of any mental health, obesity or diet strategy has to be about allowing our youth to live active healthy lives. SAMH, Mental Health Scotland and even the Samaritans have advocated inclusivity and physical activity as having hugely positive impacts on poor mental health. Add in physical health issues such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal conditions, cardiovascular disease, stroke and drug and alcohol addiction, and there is a huge implication for the health service, not to mention for welfare and justice.

The earlier that opportunities to participate are offered, the better the potential outcomes. If children from less-affluent backgrounds are already two years behind by the time they reach primary school age, why are we waiting until they get to school age before attempting to address the situation?

I welcome the debate and the designation of 2018 as the year of young people. It gives us the opportunity to focus thoughts and ideas at developing the very best opportunities for those who will go on to shape our society. As always, it will take just a little bit of forethought and bravery from Parliament to implement such policies. It is time we properly invested in our youth to open their eyes to opportunity—rather than stifle their ambition—to allow them the courage of their convictions and to spread their wings and fly.

15:57

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** It is one of the great paradoxes of life that, when people are youngsters, they cannot wait to grow up, but when they get to my age, they wish they were youngsters.

I am a member of SNP youth. Admittedly, I am an honorary member, but I hope that I still think like a young person. Therefore, I am stepping up to the plate to thoroughly enjoy the year of young people. It is a wonderful initiative for people such as me and, for that matter, the ever-young Iain Gray, who was doing himself far too far down by referring to his bus pass—I have had four so far.

My serious point is that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and Ross Greer, Alex Cole-Hamilton and other members around the chamber said that, too. The campaign that we are embarking on for 2018 is an opportunity for young

people throughout Scotland to be heard and for their achievements to be recognised. The events will be in all parts of our country and will provide opportunities for people such as me—adults, if we revert to type—and youngsters.

We will see ingenuity of a character that we often do not suspect is there; Brian Whittle referred to the idea of using giraffes as police aids or police animals. When I visited King Edward school—like other members, I love visiting schools, particularly primary schools—the whole school was sat in one gymnasium. The headteacher of that small school said, “Mr Stevenson is here to answer all your questions”. I said, “I know all the answers”, so what immediately happened? Somebody at the back put up their hand and said, “What’s my brother’s name?”

The youngsters always beat the oldsters at every opportunity, and Stewart Stevenson is put back in his box, where he deserves to be. *[Interruption.]* I love it when the Tories applaud something that I have said. Could the parties on the other benches please do it, too? *[Interruption.]* Thank you, Mr Cole-Hamilton. Our young people are a tremendous investment that we are making in our future, and with good reason.

I want to say a few words about the annual Aberdeen international youth festival, which is one of the north-east’s superb cultural events. The festival brings together young people from around the world to perform, showcase their talents and build bridges between nations, and includes dance, theatre, musical and other performances. It has been going since 1973, so it is not something that has just appeared. The minister appears to be suggesting that it started before she was born, and I believe her. The festival has hosted more than 30,000 young people from across the globe. This year’s festival included performers from Italy, Jamaica, Ukraine, Morocco, Spain, Cuba, Russia, the Ivory Coast, Iceland, India, China, Norway, Brazil, Zimbabwe and even that distant outpost of civilisation the United States of America. It will, of course, have been attended by a few locals from the north-east and the rest of Scotland, too.

Besides pure entertainment, the festival provides educational opportunities, classes and workshops to allow people to learn. It has been a vibrant part of north-east life for a very long time. It lasts nine days, so it is a substantial event. Historically, the festival has been funded in large part by Aberdeen City Council, and it has been supported throughout its history by the former Conservative member of this Parliament Dr Nanette Milne, and properly so. In the present circumstances, I hope that she will speak to her colleagues in Aberdeen City Council who are looking at withdrawing the finance from the

festival. I am disappointed that Oliver Mundell is not here, because he could take real action by talking to his colleagues in Aberdeen. With his complaints, he gave us no action whatsoever. I am sure that we will get to the right place—perhaps what we are saying here will encourage the council to have another think. It has not formally made a decision yet, although I understand that it has made it in private.

There is a survey that shows that what us wrinklies think of young people is not that favourable—25 per cent are considered lazy, a third are considered irresponsible and 40 per cent are seen as poor communicators. I do not agree. When I was at primary school, my communication skills were almost zero compared to those of this generation, who can speak and engage with us in a tremendous way. Young people have skills with modern technologies that us older people lack. That can be quite scary and almost threatening, but it is absolutely necessary for the modern world. The young have the power to lead. In schools across Scotland, the climate change challenge is being picked up by youngsters, who go home and persuade their parents and other adults who they meet. That is an inspiration that we should acknowledge.

I love spending time with young people. I will be having lunch with my six-year-old goddaughter Darcey on Friday. On Tuesday, the Danish part of my family—my great-niece Selma and her brother Scott—will be here in Parliament to brief me on what goes on in Danish politics and show that we can probably do things better.

Jenny Gilruth is half my age and has twice my brains. She is young, not old, and she, like all young people, is the future.

16:04

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

The challenge has gone up from the ranks to follow that. I never could follow Stewart Stevenson.

I, too, congratulate Maree Todd. There can be no better first debate in a ministerial position than this one. The year of young people is important and it is an opportunity.

In preparing for this speech, I remarked to myself that the toughest political grilling that I have had since becoming an MSP was not from anyone in the chamber, nor was it at parliamentary hustings; it was when I was faced with the combined ranks of the primary 7s of South Morningside primary. When I met them six months ago, they asked me questions such as, “How does the council decide how and where to build schools?”, “What steps is the Government taking to achieve a zero-carbon economy and will it

achieve it?” and, perhaps most important, “How can school dinners be improved?”. Based on the remarks of a couple of members this afternoon, I am not the only one who is thankful that the school visit rooms in the Parliament are not televised. I do not think that we would come off well at all.

I realised two things from that. The first is that the potential and promise of young people is enormous. When I am faced with such questions and insights, it strikes me that although those young people could become anything, they need the opportunity to do so. Secondly, we would do well to make better use of their opinions and insights. The year of young people provides us with the challenge and opportunity to discuss those key issues.

Maree Todd described this as a year to change things for young people. We need to ensure that that change happens in three key ways: young people need to have a voice, they need to have the necessary opportunities and they need the necessary support to take those opportunities.

On the first point, Michelle Ballantyne remarked on last week’s reception that was hosted by the Corra Foundation and the powerful stories that we heard there. I would go further. The Corra Foundation’s everyone has a story project serves as a useful model for what we need to do in listening to those stories and embedding them in policy. In the project, the foundation interviewed practitioners and young people who had experienced addiction issues in their families and had recovered. It then sought to make policy recommendations, not based on statistics or cold policy analysis, but based on those experiences themselves.

We have come a long way. We have provided votes for 16 and 17-year-olds, and we have the Scottish Youth Parliament and the children’s commissioner. We have done a lot to provide structures and platforms for young people, but we need to take the next step of embedding their experience into our policy making and ensuring that our policy making is relevant to their experiences.

We also need to make sure that our young people have opportunities. In and of itself, potential is not enough. Opportunity is required if people are to fulfil that potential, and our education system and qualifications often do not go far enough. They do not provide that broad range of experience and opportunity that Brian Whittle outlined, and they do not recognise the broad range of achievements of young people as we have set out in our amendment. We need to challenge ourselves to make sure that that broad range of opportunities is provided to our young people and that those young people are recognised.

The work of the Prince's Trust is worthy of remark at this point. A number of members have mentioned it. It is focused on making sure that young people are equipped to take opportunities and that there is a full range of opportunities at their disposal. I have had experience of two Prince's Trust programmes. The get into programmes are there to help young people who might have slipped off the academic or vocational track through education. They seek to make sure that those young people have the opportunity to experience work and to develop the skills that they need to take on work.

**Gillian Martin:** Does the member agree that it is important that we communicate with parents, who might think that university or college is the be-all and end-all when it might be more suitable for their children to go into a modern apprenticeship?

**Daniel Johnson:** I agree with that. The other key thing to understand is that we need to provide a broad range of tracks to these different opportunities.

I will just finish off what I was saying about the Prince's Trust programmes. The achieve programme provides practical approaches to learning in small groups for children who might otherwise struggle in a classroom environment. That sort of approach provides the additional opportunities that are vital to young people.

We also need to support young people because they face some fundamental barriers in terms of their ability to learn and to take up opportunities. The health and wellbeing theme of the year of young people is hugely important. As members have pointed out, one in four children in this country is living in poverty. That fundamental barrier is one that needs to be tackled. We are absolutely right to focus relentlessly on closing the attainment gap, but if we are to truly eliminate that attainment gap, we have to eliminate poverty itself.

We also have to eliminate the other issues and barriers that children face in relation to learning. Many members have mentioned mental health, and we need to ensure that there is adequate mental health provision, including counsellors in schools. In particular, I would like to highlight neurodevelopmental disorders. The specific additional support needs that many children have create a fundamental barrier to their learning. Every classroom will have a child with autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder—or maybe a combination of those three things. The fact that we have lost additional support teachers and support staff is something that we need to tackle.

This year has to be about being unflinching in recognising the current gaps—what we need to change—and making sure that we address them.

16:11

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** I am pleased to be speaking in the debate on the year of young people, as young people have been the focus of my work. As a lecturer at North East Scotland College for 14 years, I trained many young people, and that experience informs a lot of what I campaign on as an MSP in this Parliament.

I could give 100 speeches on this theme, but I want to use my time to highlight three current issues that are impacting on young people, particularly in my area. My colleague Stewart Stevenson has given a thorough overview of the importance of the Aberdeen international youth festival to the north-east of Scotland. I, too, am deeply concerned about Aberdeen City Council's proposals to defund that important festival, which for as long as I can remember has given so much to the young people of Aberdeen city and shire, and beyond.

I am dismayed that the council has delayed the decision further, causing more anxiety to the hardworking team behind the festival and the other organisations that work closely with them. The delay causes unnecessary and unfair uncertainty for the festival and the young people who will be involved. I am pleased that the SNP group in Aberdeen has made a prudent decision that funding be made available for the next two years. I am hoping that its forward-thinking attitude to the festival influences those in opposition, who I think are being enormously short-sighted. I echo Stewart Stevenson's call for Tory members of Parliament to impress upon their Aberdeen City Council colleagues that the festival should be saved and indeed for the Labour members here to speak to their former colleagues on the council, who now act as independents.

The value of the Aberdeen international youth festival cannot be contained in a business case. Getting young people involved in culture with like-minded people from across the world is of immeasurable value. I would like to touch on the effects of the festival on those young people who live in my constituency and around the north-east. In 2017, the AIYF performers expanded their work further into Aberdeenshire and Moray in order to expand the cultural exchange. The festival's artistic director, Stewart Aitken, is committed to broader engagement in the region.

I experienced that personally when I worked at the Station House Media Unit—or SHMU, as it is known—in Woodside in Aberdeen, where we engaged with young people from across Aberdeen City's regeneration areas, who worked with the AIYF. The students I worked with were involved in filming and broadcasting festival performances. They were local young people, who could see how their work could reach broad audiences. The

international connections of their work gave them a sense of pride and possibility for the future. Opportunities to engage with the arts, and with other young people from across the globe, are not often available to kids from the areas that SHMU engages with. The AIYF has offered them that experience every single year.

Another example of the wider effect of the AIYF is ace voices, which is a network of creative projects, partnerships and communities involving more than 6,000 people of all ages in the north-east of Scotland, the United Kingdom and further afield. It is heartening to hear the positive impact of AIYF on ace voices. For example, the ace voices youth choir, which is composed of 35 to 50 young people aged 11 to 18, is planning to tour the USA in July 2019. The children involved come from across Aberdeen City and the trip to the US has come to fruition through a long-standing partnership with the festival. The leader of ace voices told me that moments such as these often engender

“a wider, often invisible ripple effect across people’s lives.”

One young person wrote a testimony about her experiences with ace voices and AIYF in which she said that they have given her pride in her achievements. Another wrote about how getting involved in ace voices helped her to overcome bullying that had made her feel lonely, sad and without friends. As a result of being involved in ace voices, that young person feels better, more active and more creative.

The year of young people is focused on providing an opportunity to showcase the talents of all young people, including those who may be more inclined to the arts or creative industries. However, to come on to my second theme, Tory-led Aberdeenshire Council has plans to cut visiting specialist teachers—the teachers who often deliver subjects such as music, art, languages and sport. That will be a blow to rural schools, some of which depend on outside visitors to enhance the educational opportunities for their students. I am concerned about the work of both the councils that have an impact in my area, because they are putting at risk the work of the Parliament and the Government in promoting the voices of young people.

A third point is on something that affects all children and young people in Scotland. I am pleased that my work to encourage online resilience for young people will happen during the year of young people. I am working in collaboration with Young Scot and North East Scotland College to make films that will encourage young people to protect themselves from online bullying, particularly of a sexual nature, involving things such as nude for nude sharing, sexting and

sharing intimate images that people might regret later in their adult lives.

I am proud to be working with college students on that project. The films that they are producing are aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of sharing such images on social media and include important messages around consent, sexuality and coercion. The films will be effective only if they are made by young people for young people. Indeed, a strong theme that has come out in many of the speeches is that measures for young people will work only if they are driven by young people rather than dictated by people such as us. I hope that members will speak in my members’ business debate on the issue in February and will come and see the films that NESCol students have created at an event that I will host in the Parliament.

I hope that all of us as parliamentarians can use the year to prioritise the important work of magnifying the voices of young people in Scotland. I urge everyone to support youth-grounded initiatives such as AIYF whenever they see them, to put politicking aside and to let them flourish and continue to play an important part in our culture.

16:17

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I welcome my Highlands and Islands colleague Maree Todd to her ministerial position.

I welcome this opportunity to debate the year of young people. In many ways, the experience of young people in Scotland is a difficult subject to encapsulate. Certain common issues, opportunities, problems and barriers affect young people in particular but, in speaking on those topics, we should not forget that we are talking about hundreds of thousands of individual young people who have different experiences and objectives and who may have many different paths through life.

Our approach to young people collectively will be best judged by how much attention we can give them individually. It is therefore welcome that young people have been included in the development of the year of young people. Their participation is key, and we ought to recognise that it is not always straightforward. Obstacles exist, and a quick glance at the Scottish Government’s polling of public attitudes to young people demonstrates that negative stereotypes are still a challenge for many young people across Scotland.

One of the primary objectives of the year is to provide a platform for young people to have their views heard and acted on. I recently met representatives of the Scottish Youth Parliament, who had many positive things to say but who also

raised a number of challenges that were widely agreed on. Although they have perhaps a greater range of opportunities than any generation before them, young people are also very conscious of the barriers and restrictions that they face.

In my region of the Highlands and Islands, young people are increasingly held back by issues around access, especially in rural and remote communities. The basics, such as transport, remain problematic. Public transport can be expensive and unreliable, which restricts opportunities to access training, jobs and services.

Barriers of experience can be just as oppressive. When I asked a group of bright young MSYPs whether they would consider setting up a business, the reaction was largely negative. Many saw the challenges, which should not be dismissed glibly, but few had positive experience of the opportunities. In Scotland, we still lag behind other parts of the UK in creating business start-ups. The views of those MSYPs suggest that we still have further to go to create a truly entrepreneurial society, so I welcome the fact that that is gaining some focus through Scotland can do, which will use the year to promote youth enterprise. From an early stage, young people should have the confidence to go out into the world and use their skills in business.

In this generation, of course, modern, technology-led skills will be central to success. My party has campaigned in particular on science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and will continue to do so in recognition of its importance. Technology will also become increasingly embedded in everyone's lives. From personal to professional use, communication will be the underpinning of economic growth and development. My region includes some of the worst parts of the UK for broadband infrastructure. Improvements are desperately needed to retain a younger population in those remote and rural communities.

The common thread is that, regardless of where they are from and what their aspirations are, Scotland's young people should not find Scotland a restrictive place in which to grow and develop. Government should help to support that development if at all possible and make young people aware of all the opportunities that are available to them. I think that Gillian Martin said—I just caught it as I came in—that university will be the preferred destination for some young people. For others, it will be college or an apprenticeship. Whatever their paths, many young people will feel pressure from parents, teachers or peers to make the right decision. That is why services such as careers guidance must, where possible, deliver a personalised service that considers the real strengths of individuals, where their ambitions lie

and how best to support them to achieve those ambitions.

We could touch on many other areas today, but I will consider where young people can make a difference—in our democracy. With the voting age for Scottish Parliament elections now at 16, engagement with young people has never been more important. I recall participating in several excellent events in schools: earlier this year, at Brae high school in Shetland; in the Scottish independence referendum campaign, at Kirkwall grammar school and Stromness academy; and at previous elections, in Inverness and in Moray. It is perhaps a cliché to say that young people often ask better questions than their elders at such events but there is a good deal of truth in it. They ask questions because they want to know the answer, not because they are trying to make a political point. However, despite that hunger for information and engagement, citizenship and democracy remain a small part of the formal curriculum.

**Maree Todd:** Will Jamie Halcro Johnston give way?

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I am just about to finish.

Another of the year's objectives is to recognise the impact of the people who work with young people. Whether they are teachers, youth workers or, significantly, the army of volunteers who support community groups from sport to the arts, the value of their time and their effort should not be underestimated. Working with young people often has far-reaching benefits. Given my own very limited work with the Citadel Youth Centre in Leith, I was delighted to meet at a young persons hustings in Orkney a young man who had attended the centre himself. Although he has moved to Orkney, his partner and daughter are now regulars at the centre.

The events that are scheduled for next year, which include a welcome number outside central Scotland, will provide opportunities to showcase talent, build on skills, engage, create interest and broaden horizons. We have a duty to future generations that cannot be taken lightly, so I look forward to the year of young people and hope that a positive legacy is left behind after it has passed.

16:23

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** Many members have shared stories of talented and selfless young people from their constituencies. We have crammed many achievements into a few hours of debate, but 2018 gives Scotland a whole year to tell those stories and celebrate thousands more.



The Scottish Government's themed years have been extremely successful in promoting Scotland as a great place to visit, with their focus on sectors and policy areas such as our environment, food and drink, and the built heritage. However, the year of young people is even more significant than those milestones. It focuses on the most important national asset of all: the young people who will shape our country in the future.

As several members have pointed out, the year offers an opportunity to challenge stereotypes. The Government research that members have quoted and which has been published to coincide with the launch of the year shows that most adults had positive perceptions of young people, finding them trustworthy and helpful. Only a minority of adults—one in four—nurse more negative and, I venture to say, out-of-date perceptions. I suggest that those adults perhaps do not have as much contact with our young people as we members are privileged to have.

Still, those unrepresentative attitudes have an adverse impact on our young people. Teenagers reportedly feel that negative views that are based simply on their age have a detrimental effect on their self-esteem. According to a report by the Prince's Trust, 28 per cent of young people do not feel in control of their lives, with 16 per cent going as far as to say that they do not believe that their lives will amount to anything, no matter how hard they might try.

We have heard today examples of initiatives from across Scotland that help young people raise their self-esteem and challenge those perceptions, not least, as Emma Harper has already described, those in Dumfries and Galloway, where I am told that the youth groups were delighted to be chosen to launch the year of young people. As the minister said, there are challenges in all rural areas, of course, but as well as the Oasis youth centre I would point to the Stove Network, which is funded by Creative Scotland and has brought young people into the process of redesigning Dumfries town centre and, indeed, the running of many cultural activities such as music, spoken word events and artistic workshops. Next month, the big Burns supper in Dumfries will be the culmination of Scotland's winter festivals programme and will involve many young people.

I wanted to make this whole speech a positive and non-political one, but the sour note that was struck by Oliver Mundell cannot go unchallenged. Poverty, low self-esteem and limited opportunities for young people are glued together. It is impossible to separate the Conservative Government's welfare cuts from the challenges that young people face. I notice that Mr Mundell's speech did not mention last month's joint statement by the children's commissioners in

Scotland, England and Wales, which asked for an urgent review of the benefits freeze. It pointed to the projection of the Institute of Fiscal Studies that suggests that, by 2021, absolute child poverty will rise by 4 per cent and relative child poverty will rise by 7 per cent because of the policies of Oliver Mundell's Government, which has sanctioned the benefits of many young people, including single parents, and has cut housing benefits for 18 to 21-year-olds.

By contrast, while the Tory Government in England abolished the education maintenance allowance, the Scottish Government has not only maintained it for the poorest children but has extended it. It has also created 30,000 apprenticeships and made university education free, including in Dumfries and Galloway, where we have not only saved the Crichton campus but expanded the number of places there through the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council.

**Maree Todd:** I am sure that the member is well aware that article 26 of the UNCRC, which Alex Cole-Hamilton asked me to enshrine in Scots law, says:

"You have the right to help from the government if you are poor or in need."

That is not caveated by your birth order in your family. The two-child cap, which is part of the welfare reforms of your Government, Mr Mundell, absolutely contravenes the UNCRC.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** I remind members to always talk through the chair.

**Joan McAlpine:** Emma Harper talked about the success of young volunteers in the region, and I want to get back to the substance of the debate—praising young people—by highlighting a couple of young volunteers in the region who have crossed my path. I would like to mention everyone, but obviously I cannot do that.

The first young person I want to mention is David Patterson, a young carer from a low-income area of Dumfries, who suffered from severe epilepsy in childhood and was bullied at school. He raised funds to go to Malawi with Lattitude Global Volunteering and spent three months—including his 21st birthday—as a youth worker there, sharing peer-to-peer experience with African counterparts as well as mentoring children. He is now back in Dumfries and the experience has given him so much confidence that he is now working in the care sector and has developed a useful career there. David has never once used the fact that he has had a tough time as an excuse to feel sorry for himself. Instead, his experiences have developed in him empathy and a desire to help others.

The second story that I would like to tell is that of 19-year-old Shelby Watson from Annandale, a wheelchair racer who was born with cerebral palsy. She has already broken international records and collected gold medals for Scotland. Last year, in Barcelona, she broke world records both in her class and outwith it. As well as conducting her own training, she finds time to volunteer. She coaches younger disabled children on the track, in all weathers—as I can attest to, as I attended an open day this summer.

Those are just two examples. All over Scotland, there are thousands more young people who have overcome challenges in order to give something back. More than anything else, I hope that 2018 will be an opportunity for us adults to say thank you to those young people for the immense contribution that they make to our national life.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to closing speeches. I call Iain Gray. You have seven minutes, Mr Gray.

16:30

**Iain Gray:** As we predicted, the debate today has been mostly consensual. We probably achieved the greatest moment of consensus when that youth emeritus, Stewart Stevenson, announced that he was going back into his box, where he deserved to be, thereby uniting members in the chamber in their pleasure. I was intrigued by Mr Stevenson's confession that he has four bus passes. I do not understand whether that means that he is 240 years old or whether there is some small print on the bus passes that I have yet to read.

One theme that has emerged is that although we all want to use the year of young people to congratulate young people—we have done much of that this afternoon—in fairness I say that members have taken some care not to congratulate themselves too much. Indeed, a number of members have pointed out that we sometimes sell young people short. Alex Cole-Hamilton summed it up rather neatly when he talked about

“the frontiers against which we all still come up short.”

That is true.

Indeed, today, we have seen education figures that show us that the attainment gap between the richest and the rest in our schools remains very significant and has hardly changed. Oliver Mundell talked a lot about the failings in our school and education system. SNP members in particular felt that he struck a sour note, but I remind them that he was preceded by Jenny Gilruth, who told us Tom's story, which was about how the public

services for which we are responsible failed a young person.

Michelle Ballantyne talked about the lack of mental health funding for CAMHS. Again, we have seen figures today that show that one in four young people who needs them waits longer than the target time to access such services. Alex Cole-Hamilton spoke of some waiting as long as two years.

Elaine Smith talked about cuts to youth work services. She is right, because, for all our fine words this afternoon, we must own up to the fact that, in local government, non-statutory services are often in the firing line or are seen as being the soft option and so suffer cuts.

**Stewart Stevenson:** Does Iain Gray agree that today is an opportunity for us all to shoulder the burden of improving children's services across Scotland? There is recognition, across Parliament, that there is more to do.

**Iain Gray:** I absolutely agree. That opportunity truly is part of the consensus that we have struck today, which is to everyone's credit.

The other theme that has come across in the examples that members have presented to Parliament today is that sometimes the greatest achievements happen in overcoming the greatest adversity. Elaine Smith talked about Jemma, whose first language is British Sign Language, and who has led us at time for reflection. Joan McAlpine has just told us the story of David, who overcame bullying to work in Malawi. A number of members have talked about care-experienced young people and the very poor outcomes that they have. How much more, then, must we admire those like Ashley Cameron, whose story was told in the “Raploch Stories” television documentary not so long ago, and who works with Kezia Dugdale in Parliament? She turned her experience of care into a cause and a campaign for what she calls a

“revolution of care and love”.

Daniel Johnson talked about embedding young people's experience in policy making, and it is not necessary to spend long with Ashley Cameron to realise that that is exactly what she is about. She does not want her achievements just to be celebrated; she wants them to change the world, and she is making that happen.

Young people in East Lothian youth council undertook a documentary investigation into poverty in my county, and took the evidence that they gained to the poverty commission that East Lothian Council has set up, which is developing policy to address poverty. Is not it the truth that, next year, we will celebrate the fact that such

young people are already making our world better?

I confess that I was distracted from the debate for a moment by Twitter, when I noticed that Children in Scotland had tweeted that its LGBT ambassadors were on their way to visit Linlithgow academy to meet the gay-straight alliance in that school and to hear about its work. When I was at high school, the idea of a gay-straight alliance working to overcome discrimination would have been completely unimaginable. Young people have already made our world today a better and more enlightened place.

It is a good thing that we gave today's youth the chance to design their year. We must understand that what they want is the chance to design their society. In truth, the more we let them do that, the better it will be for all of us.

16:36

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** While we are being all young and funky like Stewart Stevenson, I suppose that we ought to say, "Stay social and spread the word #YOYP2018".

Earlier today, I attended the cross-party group on tourism's meeting on the subject of today's debate, at which I discovered that Scotland's year of young people has never been done before—it is a world first. In a nutshell, the year of young people 2018

"is an opportunity to celebrate the amazing young personalities, talents, and achievers that make up Scotland. It's all about inspiring our nation through its young people's ideas, attitudes and ambitions.

The year long programme of events, activities and ideas will give young people in Scotland the opportunity to show the world what they're made of. Year of Young People 2018 is something everyone can support (young or young-at-heart)—

as Stewart Stevenson is—

"and be immensely proud of."

Activities will be held throughout the year, including the university sevens tournament that will be held in Melrose and the Youth Beatz festival that Emma Harper mentioned. I wish Joan McAlpine luck with the big Burns event that is coming up in Dumfries and Galloway.

Co-design is a driving principle of all the activity that we are talking about. Iain Gray spoke about the positive contribution that young people are making and gave examples of the many individuals and groups in East Lothian that are willing to get actively involved on a voluntary basis.

Today, we agree that we all have a stake in reaching out and making the year of young people

a success for UK millennials and young Scots so that they can achieve the objectives that the Scottish Government has set, which are to

"Provide a platform for young people to have their views heard and acted upon ... Showcase the amazing talents of young people through events and media ... Develop better understanding, co-operation and respect between generations".

The development of such mutual understanding, which Elaine Smith spoke about, is extremely important. Getting a better balance between the generations would benefit older people, too. We have seen that working really well in other countries.

The other objectives are to

"Recognise the impact of teachers, youth workers and other supporting adults on young people's lives"

and to

"Provide opportunities for young people to express themselves through culture, sport and other activities".

I congratulate Maree Todd on her first speech as a junior minister. She set out the key themes, which have been developed by young people and which will guide everything that we do in Parliament across the year. If Daniel Johnson is right, we might find that our young people do a better job than we, and maybe the Government, do currently.

The themes that Maree Todd talked about include participation—giving young people a chance to influence decisions that affect their lives. Perhaps young people in care will tell us how we can support them throughout their development, as was highlighted by Alex Cole-Hamilton.

Another theme is equality and discrimination, which I will talk about a little later. Other themes include allowing young people to have more say in their education and learning; sharing and celebrating young people's talents and contributions to Scottish culture and the arts; and enterprise and generation, in which we should celebrate young people's roles in innovation, entrepreneurship and the Scottish economy, as well as in making Scotland a greener and more pleasant place to live. Finally there is health and wellbeing, which I will also talk about in a bit, in relation to Brian Whittle's contribution.

Children are our future and we must invest in them. Children are the foundation upon which we build, and therefore we must never question what we can do to invest in them. We must not lose sight of that. Whatever may come and seek to obscure our focus, the primary focus must be our legacy, as politicians, of a good future for our young people. That is certainly my goal.

We all want to help to make Scotland a better place for young people to live and work in. In my constituency in the Scottish Borders, it is an issue right now that young Borderers are leaving to seek opportunities and are not returning. Although many members were critical of Oliver Mundell's speech, he highlighted a number of issues and frustrations about living in Dumfriesshire. He talked about the lack of opportunities and he spoke of his constituents who move away and are unable to bring up their families in the area where they were born and bred. He called for improvement in education and attainment, and I do not think that we should be critical of his doing that, because we all want the same: improved lives for young people.

**Joan McAlpine:** Will Rachael Hamilton not at least credit the fact that the Crichton campus, which was saved from closure by the SNP Government and has been expanded, is giving young people from Dumfries and Galloway an opportunity to study in Dumfries if they wish to do so?

**Rachael Hamilton:** I thank Joan McAlpine for that intervention. I think that there was a collaborative campaign involving different politicians to save Crichton campus. I have visited the campus and it is a fantastic facility.

Going back to rural regions, young people leaving means that we lose innovative and fresh-thinking brains and talent. It means that places such as the Borders and Dumfriesshire are always playing catch-up. As the national records indicate, a solution has not yet been found.

Jamie Halcro Johnston spoke of problems that young people have getting around because of transport costs in rural areas.

Today there is much consensus that we should address the challenges that young people face. The Labour amendment that we will support today recognises barriers in society that prevent some people from being able to participate fully in volunteering opportunities. My colleague Brian Whittle talked about his involvement as a sports coach for young people. I too, when I can, get involved in umpiring and coaching at Earlston netball club, which is an extracurricular activity that relies on volunteers and gives young people confidence by teaching a skill. Brian Whittle is passionate about creating a healthy and active nation, and I support his sentiments.

I recently met Leonard Cheshire Disability. Although it is not in the Borders yet, across Scotland it aims to help young disabled persons gain skills through opportunities in their local communities that might otherwise not be afforded them. I hope that 2018 will see Leonard Cheshire come to the Borders.

I cannot but draw attention to the work of YouthBorders. Its collaborative partnership approach to working with children and young people was recognised as an example of best practice in the recent joint inspection of services for children and young people. Its model ensures that local youth clubs are available in all the Scottish Borders' major settlements. It was identified as being unique by the joint inspection team, and I am delighted that the Scottish Government will promote the model across Scotland's community learning and development and education sectors. It is fantastic that the overarching aim of YouthBorders, which is to support alternative environments where young people can thrive, grow and evolve as individuals, will be spread nationally.

Iain Gray and Brian Whittle mentioned the Prince's Trust brief that highlighted the issues that youth have finding a voice. In many ways, it has never been easier for young people to share their views, yet it has become clear that some feel that their voice is not being heard, because it has been either drowned out or ignored, which Ruth Maguire spoke passionately about.

I want—as, I am sure, we all do—a platform other than social media for young persons to engage on. It is our job to encourage political debate from all sides and to make sure that what we do benefits young people. Michelle Ballantyne spoke about the importance of equality and the pressures on young people who are bullied. In a world of fake news and aggressive trolls, the social media space is no longer the birthplace of great ideas, and can be a platform for abuse and bullying. Indeed, one cannot really be considered safe there, at all. The wellbeing and mental health of our young people are absolutely essential, so the 2018 year of young people might require help to find a place for safe and lively debate where nobody feels threatened or intimidated. In that regard, Gillian Martin talked about work that she is doing through film education to communicate issues that affect young people.

I cannot finish without addressing Ross Greer's comment about the hospitality industry. I feel that the Greens have never supported business and people who provide jobs and opportunities. The hospitality industry offers flexibility, because its jobs are not 9-to-5 jobs and it is a growing and rewarding industry that offers training and skills that open doors. I say to Ross Greer that it is not a great thing to do to talk down the hospitality industry.

**Ross Greer:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rachael Hamilton:** I am afraid that I am in my last minute.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is some spare time, if you wish to take an intervention.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Okay.

**Ross Greer:** Does Rachael Hamilton support workers in the hospitality industry being paid a wage that would put them below the poverty line, as almost all those who are on zero-hours contracts are?

**Rachael Hamilton:** Can Ross Greer repeat the last bit of his question from “as”?

**Ross Greer:** It was “as many—most—of those on zero-hours contracts are”.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I absolutely do not agree with Ross Greer about the hospitality industry offering lower than the minimum wage. As members will know, I own a hospitality business and I absolutely cannot understand where Ross Greer is getting that information. However, if he could provide it to me in writing, I would be happy to support challenging people who pay lower than the minimum wage, because I do not believe that they should do so.

We have heard many differing and passionate speeches in the debate. If the same passion is carried into 2018, as well as the same optimism for our young people, it will be a fantastic year. There will, of course, be hurdles to overcome, but we must build on the good work that has already been done by, for example, Leonard Cheshire Disability to upskill young persons who have disabilities, and YouthBorders, which aims to help young people to thrive. I am sure that we will all want to accomplish much of what has been suggested in the debate, the responsibility for which lies with us.

I call on ministers and the cabinet secretary to share with us what they hope to achieve in the year of young people, and perhaps to give us some idea of the measurements that will show us whether the objectives have been achieved, and reassurances about educational attainment, the skills shortage and creating opportunities for young people to work and stay in the area in which they grew up. Perhaps we do not always get it right and it is time to work collaboratively with young people to ensure that their voice is heard.

**Ross Greer:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I may be incorrect, but I believe that Rachael Hamilton omitted to declare an interest when discussing the hospitality industry.

**Members:** She did declare it!

**Ross Greer:** I apologise.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will check the *Official Report* just to make sure for everyone concerned.

I call Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, to wind up. I ask her to take us up to decision time, please.

16:48

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** I thank members for their contributions to the debate. Clearly, there is a lot of support across the chamber for Scotland’s year of young people and a lot of good will for Maree Todd in her new role.

The year of young people is a global first, which has support right across the Scottish Government. I recently led a discussion with my Cabinet colleagues about the year, focusing on how we can promote engagement across policy, including that on climate change and digital, to change attitudes and culture, and engagement with young people for not just one year but permanently. I was also pleased to take part in last month’s launch of the year of young people. I had the pleasure of meeting some inspiring young people at the Prince’s Trust Wolfson Centre in Glasgow, as well as meeting the TEDx youth initiative, which will be part of the signature event for the year, funded by EventScotland.

All that build-up shows how the year is a new approach, and it is only right that we welcome the different ethos that the year will bring because it has been developed by young people for young people. As we have heard, young people have agreed the six themes for the year that will ensure that their views are developed as part of it. Those themes are culture, education, health and wellbeing, enterprise and regeneration, equality and diversity, and participation.

The planned activities are extensive, covering the entire country, and I hope that many more events will come to fruition over the next 12 months.

The very first event will herald the new year. EventScotland is funding a signature event called #ScotWord. A campaign has involved young people in discussing words that best describe what makes them proud of Scotland. On 30 December, thousands of people will take part in the annual torchlight procession through the streets of Edinburgh. At the end of the procession, torch bearers will spell out, on a huge scale, the one word that will symbolise how the young people of Scotland feel about their country to herald in this very special year.

Other cultural activities during the year will include Creative Scotland’s year of young people’s creative traineeship programme; the National Theatre of Scotland is staging a Scotland-wide festival of theatre and performance created by young people; and Jackie Kay, Scotland’s national

poet, or makar, is to take up a residency at Young Scot.

Although culture is one of the six themes for the year, another key theme is participation—many members have talked about that in the debate. It is important that all young people have the chance to participate, as part of our country's getting it right for every child ethos. Jenny Gilruth spoke passionately about participation for all and about a young man she met called Tom. I reassure her that, although many events are high profile, there are events throughout the year and I want to bring people's attention to them. Perth and Kinross will have a Diverse CiTay festival; the City of Edinburgh is working with Leonard Cheshire Disability Scotland; North Lanarkshire will have a hope for autism event; and Barnado's will have participation group involvement in Inverclyde and Stirling that focuses on young carers. I hope that there is something for everybody, but it is up to us to help to support them.

We want young people to participate and engage, including in the democratic process, to influence the decisions that will affect them. This Parliament is planning a programme of public engagement activities that will be aligned to the year to promote participation and increase the number of young people it engages with. I hope that members will whole-heartedly support the Parliament's year of young people activities wherever possible and will ensure that young voices are heard and acted upon in all relevant aspects of the Parliament's committee work.

Local activities are equally important to those at a national level. We should all endeavour to work with the young ambassadors in our areas and support local year of young people's activities, achievements and successes. It is also important that we engage with local authorities, youth work organisations, the voluntary sector, volunteers and community youth groups, which all have a crucial role to play to deliver the aims and outcomes for the year. There are 11 trained young ambassadors in my area in West Lothian, and a further three young people have applied to become ambassadors. Two of the co-design leaders in Communic18 are also from West Lothian and I look forward to supporting the events that they help to organise.

The year is also about challenges, and I congratulate and support the MSYP for Linlithgow Alice Ferguson's campaign to save instrumental music tuition in West Lothian. I hope that her mobilisation of young people will ensure that her voice is heard.

Councils make their decisions about culture, and we have heard from Stewart Stevenson and Gillian Martin about the international youth festival. Iain Gray spoke about Linlithgow academy, and I

look forward to relaying to the previous head boy, who initiated the LGBT rights issues in the academy, to make sure that he is aware of the celebrations and events that are happening today as part of that campaign. If any member needs advice on how to get involved with the year or would like to know more about the activities, please contact the year of young people project team in the Scottish Government to provide further information and guidance.

A number of members' contributions were about mental health. Health and wellbeing is one of the themes chosen by young people; Michelle Ballantyne and Elaine Smith spoke about that. Ross Greer made a powerful case about austerity and climate change and how young people are paying the price, and that theme was reflected by Joan McAlpine.

We are very happy to support the amendment. Iain Gray was quite right. We should ensure that we celebrate young people's wider achievements, if at all possible, and we can make a point of doing that during the year. I think that Iain Gray heard the response from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in that regard.

Jamie Halcro Johnston, in a very important contribution, talked about enterprise. Enterprise will present a key opportunity to encourage young people during the year. The fact that young people have identified that topic themselves shows that there really is an appetite for them to ensure that they can participate in that area.

A point that has come across powerfully is individual MSPs telling individual stories. Joan McAlpine started her speech by making the point that we should be telling the stories. That might be one of the legacies of this debate. We could try to work with the media in particular to ensure that, throughout the year, individual stories are told of individual young people who have succeeded, although they have perhaps faced adversity. We have heard from many members about how young people have managed to change things by campaigning in their own right in their own area. Some of them have done so locally and some have done so globally.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will the cabinet secretary commit to that idea and work out a strategy to deliver what she has just suggested?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I have just said that that is a good idea. That is why I suggest that we do that. We can do that on a national basis, but it can also happen locally. Imagine every local newspaper and our national newspapers championing the stories of young people.

We aim to create a legacy from each of our themed years. As previously mentioned, we are engaging young people in policy-making decisions

right across Government. However, as Brian Whittle said, every year should be a year of young people.

I think that Daniel Johnson made the point that the experiences of young people should be embedded. He reflected on how far we have come with votes for 16-year-olds and on the fact that although we have done much, that is part of a journey. The year of young people should also be about the next steps that we can take.

We need to ensure that we achieve a long-lasting legacy beyond 2018, and we want to demonstrate to young people that we are working together to support them. Collectively, we need to continue to ask what their ambitions are and how we can help to achieve them. The year of young people is their year, of course, and we must actively give them confidence that their voices might be heard.

There has been much positivity in the debate, but I am afraid that Mr Mundell made one of the most miserable contributions. His reference to the year of young people was so miserly that Ebenezer Scrooge would look generous in comparison at this Christmas time. I point out to the Conservatives that it was the other Mr Mundell who said that it would be a “miracle” if the Crichton campus was saved. As the minister responsible for that action, I helped to bring about that miracle.

**Oliver Mundell:** I thank Fiona Hyslop for highlighting the immense effort that our local Conservative MP in Dumfriesshire made in campaigning to get the Scottish Government serious about keeping the Crichton campus open. It was a very cheap political remark when she accused me of politicking in such a debate.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Oliver Mundell ducked and dived when he was challenged by Maree Todd about land reform and how it can help young people to stay in their local areas.

One of the most powerful speeches was given by Ruth Maguire. She said that it is not just about listening to what we want to hear; it is also about being challenged. A number of members have talked about young people being our future, but we have to change our mindset. Young people are our present, and the year of young people is to be celebrated. We want young people to be present in our approach to government, Parliament and society. As the minister said, we want them to be “front and centre” in our thinking. Let us celebrate our young people. As Iain Gray said, young people enlighten and enliven us. They challenge us on a local basis and on global issues, but the year is their year, it will be their time, and their time is now.

## Point of Order

16:59

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Earlier this afternoon, in response to my topical question about a recent Audit Scotland report into Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority, specifically on the so-called golden goodbye received by the former SPA chief executive, John Foley, the justice secretary informed the chamber that the SPA former chief executive

“retired under the terms of the SPA’s early retirement scheme, which covers all SPS staff, rather than through any individual settlement agreement.”

However, I understand that the SPA has since confirmed that although £43,470 of Mr Foley’s payment was made under the early retirement scheme, a further £56,666 was, indeed, a discretionary amount paid as the result of an individual agreement. It was the latter that Audit Scotland criticised as being, in substantial part, unnecessary.

In light of that discrepancy, will you advise whether the justice secretary might be invited to clarify his comments on the payments made to the former chief executive of the SPA?

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Thank you very much, Mr McArthur. As the member—and all other members—will know, that does not qualify as a point of order. However, it was a point that the member wished to make and it is now on the record. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will have heard it.

If the member wishes to pursue the issue, he can do so either in writing to the cabinet secretary, or by lodging a written question, as other members would do.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It would be helpful if the Presiding Officer could explain why such a statement is not a point of order. [*Interruption.*] A minister has come before Parliament and made a statement that has now clearly been identified as not being accurate. My colleague is simply asking whether the Presiding Officer would be able to invite the minister, at his earliest convenience, to clarify his comments to the Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** I will explain the position to all members, in case they are unaware of it. These matters are not for me to adjudicate on. If the member wishes to clarify an issue, there are many, many opportunities in the Parliament to do so. He can intervene in a debate; he can put in a written question; he can ask an oral question; he

can put the matter in writing to a minister. If, on the other hand, the member wishes to make a complaint, or an allegation—which the member did not do—he would do so under the Scottish ministerial code, not under the code of conduct for members of the Scottish Parliament. I hope that that is clear.

## Decision Time

17:02

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S5M-09498.1, in the name of Iain Gray, which seeks to amend motion S5M-09498, in the name of Maree Todd, on celebrating our future: Scotland's year of young people, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S5M-09498, in the name of Maree Todd, on celebrating our future: Scotland's year of young people, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises that 2018 has been designated as Scotland's Year of Young People; notes that it will provide an opportunity to showcase the achievements and talents of all young people in Scotland and to ensure that their views are heard and acted on; welcomes that the themes for the year have been designed and agreed by young people themselves, and agrees that the Parliament has a key role to play in celebrating the contribution that Scotland's young people make to society and their communities; welcomes the work being done by the Awards Network in recognising young people's achievements; recognises that there are barriers in society that prevent some young people being able to fully participate in volunteering opportunities, and calls on the Scottish Government to work with educational bodies, employers and the young people themselves to build on the network to ensure that these awards are recognised to be as valuable as traditional qualifications, as a legacy for Scotland's Year of Young People.



## Violence Against Women and Commercial Sexual Exploitation

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-08740, in the name of Rhoda Grant, on the international day for the elimination of violence against women, and tackling commercial sexual exploitation. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament recognises that 25 November each year marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women; acknowledges the inclusion of commercial sexual exploitation in the Scottish Government's definition of violence against women in the paper, *Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls*; considers that prostitution is both a form of such violence and a barrier to gender equality; notes the view that those who purchase sexual services should be held accountable for their part in this violence, and commends the many organisations across Scotland and internationally supporting women to exit prostitution.

17:04

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** This debate comes at the end of the global 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. The core message this year is that women's rights are human rights. It is about the right of women and girls not to suffer violence, discrimination, humiliation or harm, and the right to be treated as a human being who has the same value as everyone else.

Commercial sexual exploitation is a glaring example of how women and girls are treated differently, with their right to be protected from violence and humiliation set aside in favour of the sexual gratification of others.

In "Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls", the Scottish Government recognises that commercial sexual exploitation, including

"prostitution, pornography and human trafficking",

is a form of violence against women. We all support the Government in making that clear statement. However, when it comes to the strategy and the work that flows from it, the approach to tackling commercial sexual exploitation lacks the vision, commitment and resources that are rightly directed at other types of violence against women.

Prostitution is profoundly harmful, violent and exploitative. The Scottish Government has conducted research with professionals who work with women in prostitution, and in "Summarised

Findings—Exploring Available Knowledge and Evidence on Prostitution in Scotland Via Practitioner-Based Interviews", which was published in December last year, the researchers reported:

"most respondents who provide services and support to those involved in prostitution emphasised a range of risks and adverse impacts associated with prostitution in the short and longer term in relation to general and mental health, safety and wellbeing and sexual health."

Research into women in prostitution in Glasgow, which was published in 2010, found that 21 of the 33 women who were interviewed reported violence from men who purchased sex. Another study has shown that women who are involved in prostitution are 16 times more exposed to rape and 12 times more likely to commit suicide than the general population.

There is a telling example of the damage that prostitution causes to women's mental health in a study of female drug users in Glasgow, which found that the women who were engaged in prostitution were more likely to show symptoms of anxiety and depression than the drug users who were not in prostitution. Another study with women in prostitution found that 68 per cent of those surveyed suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The reality of those statistics comes home when we hear women talk about their experiences. In a Women's Support Project video, a woman called Stephanie says:

"A lot of people think it's easy money, but it definitely isn't cos there's a lot of psychological problems, a lot of violence. I've been attacked four times, raped twice, there's just a lot of danger in it. They're just treating you like something they've bought and you will do what they say. And if you don't agree, tough. Just get on with it."

In no other circumstances of life would such a high risk of physical and mental harm be tolerated. The equally safe strategy says that that should not be accepted and that prostitution is a form of violence against women, yet too often the response is that prostitution has always existed and will always exist, and there is nothing that can be done about it. The truth is that something can be done about it. We can hold to account those who use others for their sexual gratification. We can send a clear message that it is not acceptable in Scotland for women's bodies to be bought and sold.

In western Europe there has been a sea change in attitudes to prostitution over the past three years and, since late 2014, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, France and Canada have adopted laws that make it a criminal offence to purchase sex. The laws draw on the experience of Sweden, which pioneered that progressive

approach in 1999, followed by Norway and Iceland in 2009.

The official evaluation of the Swedish law in 2010 found that on-street prostitution had halved and there had been no increase in off-street prostitution since the passing of the law. A 2014 evaluation of the Norwegian law concluded:

“The ban on purchasing sexual services has reduced demand for sex and thus contribute to reduce the extent of prostitution in Norway.”

If we are to fulfil the vision of the equally safe strategy and create

“a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from such abuse—and the attitudes that help perpetuate it”,

we must work to eradicate prostitution. We can do that only by addressing those who perpetuate it: the men whose demand for paid sex creates a market in which vulnerable women and girls—and indeed some vulnerable men—become objects for sale.

We must also make greater strides towards helping women to find routes out of prostitution. The motion that we are debating particularly commends organisations that support women to exit prostitution but, sadly, that area is all too often underfunded.

A woman who is referred to as Katy told the Women’s Support Project:

“If there had been a chance earlier to get out of what I was doing, I would get out of it. I would have took that chance. Changed my life earlier.”

The Government’s research shows that organisations supporting women to exit prostitution are facing serious challenges due to insecure and short-term funding. Many of those organisations are known to us all. They include the Women’s Support Project, whose work I have quoted, and TARA—trafficking awareness raising alliance—which does a huge amount of work with people who have been trafficked into sexual exploitation. There are also others whose work is less well known, including organisations such as the Co-op. I am a member of the Co-operative Party, but I was unaware that it provides support and employment opportunities for people escaping modern-day slavery, which comes in the form of a 12-month paid employment and support project. That is just one example of what can be done to support people.

We need to realise that people who are exiting prostitution will have complex problems—the problems that drew them into prostitution in the first place and the harms that prostitution has since caused them. Project TurnKey CIC offers alternative support to victims of commercial sexual exploitation. It provides legal information,

workshops to boost confidence and links to partners that offer employment and training, and offers that support to women who are often in prison and who are either involved in or at risk of becoming involved in prostitution. We must ensure that such services are available to all those who need them.

The 16 days of activism have been great at raising awareness. However, gender-based violence is still happening and is not limited to 16 days. That is why we must act now to fulfil the vision of the equally safe strategy. We must work to prevent exploitation through prostitution by challenging the notion that sex can be for sale, by making it a criminal offence to pay for sex, by helping women to exit prostitution through services and by ensuring that women are not criminalised for being victims of exploitation.

17:12

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I thank Rhoda Grant for bringing this important debate to the chamber, but it is a debate that I wish it were not necessary to have. I cannot believe that we are debating such an incredibly distressing subject and that so many women are suffering violence and intimidation from men throughout the world, whether through prostitution or domestically. The fact that, in 2017, there is an international day for the elimination of violence against women and tackling commercial sexual exploitation beggars belief. However, the facts speak for themselves. Millions of women are victims of violence and sexual exploitation, which is simply not acceptable in any civilised society, as it is a fundamental abuse of women’s rights.

We have come a long way in achieving equality in Scotland over the past 10 years, with fairer workplaces for women, the provision of funding to gender equality organisations, getting the gender balance right, increasing childcare provision and so on. However, as the equalities secretary Angela Constance has said, we cannot take our foot off the gas when it comes to gender equality and safety. Women should feel safe in every space that they wish to inhabit and in whatever profession they are in. That is a matter of fundamental human rights. We all have a duty to ensure that our daughters and granddaughters are safe from violence, sexual harassment and intimidation. It is our responsibility and it should be top of everyone’s agenda.

The new Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill will, if passed, make an enormous difference to women who have been physically or psychologically abused. Crucially, and for the first time, it recognises the enormous harm that is done to children who are caught in the crossfire. The Scottish Government and the Justice Committee,

of which I am a member, are working hard with women's charities and stakeholders to get the bill right, as the many brave women who came forward to give evidence of their experiences deserve nothing less.

The sexual exploitation of women has been around forever. The late Margo MacDonald did a lot of work to improve the lives of sex workers and a resolution was passed at the Scottish National Party conference in March this year to support the Nordic model that Rhoda Grant described, which is based on 1999 Swedish law that criminalises the purchase of sex but decriminalises the person selling it. I believe that that is a progressive way to deal with violence against women, and the trafficking and monetary exploitation of women. Having heard directly from women who have worked in the sex industry about their harrowing experiences, I defer to their belief that that is the way forward. As Rhoda Grant said, prostitution, by its very nature, is violence against women.

We all know that violence against women and the sexual exploitation of women are about the abuse of power. They are perpetrated by cowardly inadequates who must be made aware that society will no longer tolerate their behaviour. It is incumbent on every decent citizen—men and women—to get the zero tolerance message over to those inadequates. There is no hiding place for them now, and women's rights will no longer be abused in Scotland or anywhere else in the world.

At a general level, we must ensure that our daughters and granddaughters never have to deal with abuse of any kind, and we must educate our sons and grandsons that it is never acceptable to perpetrate violence against women. Mutual respect between the sexes must be the goal as we go forward. We need to make 2017—the year that the First Minister described as a watershed when it comes to sexual harassment and the abuse of power—the time when society says that enough is enough. Women must never again live in fear and, crucially, that includes sex workers throughout the world. It is time for a radical rethink on this issue.

17:16

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I am very pleased to speak in this debate to recognise the international day for the elimination of violence against women on 25 November and the following 16 days of action. The theme of 2017 is "Leave no one behind", which, according to the United Nations,

"reinforces the UNiTE Campaign's commitment to a world free from violence for all women and girls around the world, while reaching the most underserved and marginalized".

On that basis, I acknowledge the inclusion of commercial sexual exploitation in the Scottish

Government's definition of violence against women in the paper, "Equally Safe". The equally safe strategy commits the Scottish Government to

"work with others to develop thinking around Commercial Sexual Exploitation and ensure that women working in this area are protected from violence and abuse, and supported to exit situations where they are being sexually exploited for commercial purposes."

On 28 November, the Scottish Parliament debated the subject of violence against women and, specifically, the Scottish Government's delivery plan for its equally safe strategy. My colleague, Adam Tomkins, put on record in that debate the commitment of the Scottish Conservatives to tackling violence against women. I am pleased to restate that commitment today.

I am genuinely grateful to Rhoda Grant for drafting a motion that opens up the debate on prostitution as commercial sexual exploitation. I grew up in Leith in the 1980s and 90s, which brought home to me the effects of prostitution on individuals and communities. The sight of women being propositioned by men looking to buy sex is not healthy or cohesive for any community, and it is that which informs part of my view on a way forward, which we will discuss later.

I have a concern about the absolutism of the motion, which is why I am glad that we are having a full and open dialogue. The motion states that prostitution is

"a form of ... violence and a barrier to ... equality".

I accept that in some—perhaps most—cases it can be, but not necessarily always, and if that premise is not established, the solution of criminalising the purchaser does not automatically follow.

Furthermore, I wonder aloud whether, in proposing a solution that holds the purchaser accountable, we risk failing to remedy the other societal, health or economic drivers behind the offer. More precisely, the motion is predicated on people being forced into sex work. If that is right—that prostitution is exploitation and violence and, fundamentally, is not a choice—which it might be, surely we must ask, as I think Rhoda Grant did, and then address what is driving people into it. We must address the cause as well as the symptom.

I agree with my colleague Michelle Ballantyne who, in a debate on 28 November, said that we must not vilify all men as perpetrators of violence against women but

"must ensure that we identify those who are, hold them in abhorrence and ensure that they are duly punished for ... the crimes that they have committed."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2017; c 62.]

In my view, that nuance is correct. Similarly, I am not persuaded that all sex workers are there only due to desperation and as a last resort.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Does the member recognise that the term “sex worker” includes pimps, pornographers, brothel owners and so on, who work in the so-called sex industry? Does the member also agree with me that prostitution is never a career choice and that the reasons for it are based in poverty, drug abuse and vulnerability?

**Liam Kerr:** Yes, I agree with the point about the term “sex worker”. I hope that the member will forgive me if I have not expanded the term; I accept her point.

Do I accept that prostitution is never a career choice? I am insufficiently informed to say that with absolutely certainty—that is my honest answer. Is it never a career choice? I do not know enough. That could be true but I do not know enough to say absolutely one way or another.

In October, I had the opportunity to meet Sabrinna Valisce and hear at first hand about the New Zealand experience. Having supported decriminalisation there, she is now campaigning in support of the Nordic approach of tackling demand for prostitution by criminalising the purchase of sex. I found her persuasive, as I did an article in *The Spectator* in August by Julie Bindel, which is well worth considering in the context of this debate.

However, I am also concerned about evidence from organisations such as Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and the World Health Organization that seem to suggest that criminalising prostitution, including by criminalising the purchase of sex, can increase violence against prostitutes and force a more hurried transaction, driving it underground and making the process more clandestine. The Canadian alliance for sex work law reform argues that targeting clients makes street prostitutes more likely to take risks with new or unknown clients and displaces sex workers into darker and less populated areas where they are more vulnerable to violence.

I genuinely welcome Rhoda Grant bringing the debate tonight. It is a highly—

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Not now, I am sorry.

**Liam Kerr:** This is a highly nuanced issue and legislative proposals on the criminalisation of the purchase of sex should be scrutinised in detail to ensure that they do not have any unintended consequences. I genuinely look forward to helping to develop Parliament’s thinking in this area.

17:22

**Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** I thank Rhoda Grant for securing chamber time this evening to debate this important issue.

The motion that we are debating this evening pushes for the eradication of violence against women and girls, recognising the sheer incompatibility between a woman’s safety and equality on the one hand and a society that accepts prostitution on the other. The Scottish Government has made it its ambition to stamp out gender-based violence from this country, as any Government that prioritises equality and human rights should do. Those efforts have made, and will continue to make, great strides.

However, across Scotland, even at this very moment, there are thousands of women whose daily reality is not a feeling of equality or safety in relation to men, but one of mental and physical destructiveness at the hands of men—some men, not all. There are thousands of women who are not empowered, valued or admired, but degraded, debased and abused by men who are fuelled by a sense of entitlement and a belief that a woman’s consent and a woman’s body are merely commodities. That is prostitution. If Scotland is truly to be a place where women are equal and free from gender-based violence, we cannot accept a system that some survivors have described as pay-as-you-go rape.

Gender-based violence is certainly not limited to commercial sexual exploitation through prostitution, but we focus on it today, not only because it is a major cause of violence against women and girls, but because it represents the continuing patriarchal obstruction of gender equality.

One survivor of prostitution, Rebecca Mott, illustrated that by stating:

“How can you remain human when you are sexually tortured so many times it is your routine? ... How do you remain human when every women-hating word, concepts and ideals are placed under your skin until you lose what or who you are?”

The fact that Scotland has no criminal offence for men who would seize a woman’s very humanity is, frankly, appalling.

The time has come for those who purchase sexual services, and thereby perpetuate gender-based violence, to be held accountable for their actions. For the sake of women who are abused, who are made to feel worthless and who are raped and murdered, the time for accepting prostitution as somehow normal must end. An industry that preys upon and exploits girls and women who are in care, homeless, in debt or addicted to drugs—all for profit—is not normal; an industry where one has to cope with routine physical and emotional

violence is not normal; an industry that grooms children for sexual servitude is not normal; so let us normalise it no longer.

As we push forward and strive to make Scotland a country where gender-based violence ceases to exist, let us call out systems and attitudes that preserve that violence, because, as former UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon said:

“There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.”

17:25

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I congratulate Rhoda Grant on bringing this debate to the chamber and on all her hard work on what is often a difficult subject to approach. I also thank Christian Action Research and Education for its work.

I spent 12 years serving on the Equal Opportunities Committee of this Parliament and, as the gender reporter, over that time I specifically tried to address the issues of prostitution and pornography, which are undoubtedly on the continuum of violence against women and children and have been accepted as such over the lifetime of this Parliament.

Any debate on this subject must recognise that prostitution, pornography and other forms of commercial sex are all part of an industry that is making millions of pounds out of human misery; that is also likely to be part of a wider web of organised crime; that promotes alcohol and drug problems as necessary tools of the trade; and that makes rich men out of a minority of predators while it ruins the lives of thousands and thousands of women and children.

The so-called sex industry—whether that is, for example, pornography, prostitution, or lap-dancing—is predicated on women’s subordination and objectification. The industry causes harm to those within it and it seriously undermines the quest for gender justice, human equality and, indeed, happy, fulfilling sexual relationships.

The idea that the sex industry in some way creates positive career choices and opportunities for women and men has to be challenged head on. Anyone who suggests that this is an industry in which good terms and conditions of employment can be negotiated with employers who are willing to sit round a table considering all aspects of the fair work agenda is silencing the voices of the many, many vulnerable and abused women.

It is clear that women enter prostitution for socioeconomic reasons, not aspirational ones. Indeed, much evidence over the years has shown that women do not consider entering into

prostitution to be a choice; the vast majority desperately want to get out. It is not a simple business transaction; it is about violence, exploitation and abuse. Let us face it: it is hardly a popular career choice for young people. People appreciate that they must sell their labour, but nobody expects to have to sell their bodies just to survive. That is not the vision for Scotland that we were discussing earlier this afternoon, when we considered what lies ahead for the year of young people in 2018.

There have of course been legislative changes and policy advances over the lifetime of this Parliament but, like Rhoda Grant, I think that the time is right for further legislative steps to tackle demand for prostitution. No other form of violence against women is tolerated, so why is buying sex acceptable? We need to look to our neighbours in Northern Ireland, the republic of Ireland and France; they have made buying sex a criminal offence. Our attention must turn to those who invest in a global sex trade, making money out of women’s bodies, and to those who have no regard for gender equality.

The Scottish Government’s equally safe strategy to tackle violence against women and girls has been mentioned. The aim is to work across all Government departments and a wide range of agencies and stakeholders. The strategy recognises that commercial sexual exploitation is a form of abuse.

I would like to draw attention to the work of trade unions in this field. Trade unions in the republic of Ireland played a key role in the turn off the red light campaign, which led to new laws to criminalise the purchase of sex and decriminalise the selling of it. In 2011, the Scottish Trades Union Congress took the unequivocal view that prostitution is a form of violence against women. Trade unions have consistently argued for further investment in services that support women who are seeking to leave prostitution. Therefore, the Scottish Government’s commitment in the equally safe strategy delivery plan to increase resources is welcome. A commitment for everyone to have access to good-quality healthcare, housing, education and an income must mean for everyone. Women who are involved in prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation have as much right to expect access to the services that they need as anyone else.

Commercial sexual exploitation is clearly a form of violence against women. As long as it is tolerated, violence will continue to be perpetrated against some of the most vulnerable women in our society. As long as it is considered acceptable for the bodies of women in prostitution to be treated as objects for sexual gratification, gender equality will remain out of reach. Progress on the issue is

long overdue in Scotland, and I look forward to working together to take the issue forward.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A number of members wish to take part in the debate, so I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

*Motion moved,*

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

*Motion agreed to.*

17:30

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** Each year, 25 November marks the international day for the elimination of violence against women. Just two weeks ago, all the parties took part in a Government debate on the progress that has been made on that, the work that is on-going and the things that are still to be done. I am grateful to Rhoda Grant for bringing the specific topic of tackling commercial sexual exploitation to the chamber.

I am clear that commercial sexual exploitation is a form of men's violence against women, that it is a cause and a consequence of gender inequality and that it makes the world less safe for women and girls. I am equally clear that, if we are to create a world that is equally safe for women and girls, we must put an end to commercial sexual exploitation—not mitigate it or tolerate it, but end it.

In welcoming the equally safe strategy, I was glad to highlight that, as part of the delivery plan, the Women's Support Project will deliver its challenging demand programme to raise awareness of commercial sexual exploitation and to build capacity in organisations to address the issue. I also highlighted the Scottish Government's commitment in the plan to consider how it could enhance support for service providers that are supporting harm reduction and exit for those who are engaged in prostitution.

Reducing immediate harm is important, and I want all women to be safe, but reducing harm alone simply is not good enough. Surely, we have to act to dismantle the structures and conditions that create the harm in the first place. I hear the vocal minority of women who say that they find selling sexual access to their bodies personally and economically empowering, but their individual comfort in their situation does not negate the wider harm that is caused by accepting a society where sexual access to women and girls can be bought and sold and where women and girls can be treated like commodities.

If we are truly to put an end to the harm that is caused by commercial sexual exploitation and prostitution, it will require bolder and braver steps than simply improving the lives of individual women who are operating or simply surviving in a place where exploitation, violence and degradation are considered the norm. Yes, we have to mitigate harm and ensure that women are as safe as possible and have access to good-quality health services, but we will all be failing in our promise to eliminate violence against women and girls if we do not address head on the single root cause of that particular form of violence against women, which is male demand for the purchase of sexual access to women and girls.

We can address that issue only by criminalising the purchase of sexual access to women's bodies while decriminalising prostituted women and providing properly resourced specialist services to help women leave prostitution. Currently, we are only really focused on the last part, which is supporting women to leave. For me, it is time to stop women from being exploited and degraded in that way in the first place. It is time to be bold and brave and to legislate to make a difference. It is time to tackle male demand.

17:34

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** It is appropriate that the Parliament marks the international day for the elimination of violence against women, and I thank Rhoda Grant for bringing the topic to the chamber. The day itself and the 16 days of action that follow it are now past for this year, but the very fact that the day continues to be needed highlights the point that violence against women is still very much an issue.

Established to mark the day that three brave women were murdered by a brutal dictatorship simply for speaking out for their rights, the day is a reminder that violence against women and girls remains one of the most widespread breaches of human rights in the world. No society is free of physical and sexual violence. Domestic abuse remains an on-going issue in virtually every community that is represented in this Parliament and is still far too often unreported. My colleague Liam Kerr reiterated my party's commitment to tackling violence against women and spoke at length on prostitution in Scotland.

In other parts of the world, the prevalence of violence against women is often highest in countries where the gender inequality gap is at its widest. Many countries lack the legal frameworks that help to protect women and/or the political will to counter patriarchal and traditional norms. Law enforcement agencies may be short of resources and too often fall short in their willingness to take

action against male perpetrators of violence against women. In some countries, such as India, it has taken mass demonstrations of women and men before the authorities act to bring to justice those accused of horrific acts against women. We must also never forget that we still live in a world where female genital mutilation is widely carried out in 30 countries, despite some progress towards its elimination.

The UN leave no one behind campaign highlights many other vulnerable groups for whom rates of sexual and physical violence are particularly high. They include women who are among the world's most marginalised, such as those from minority groups—most recently the Rohingya people—and women in places that are affected by conflict or natural disaster. Figures show that, when women are most in need of help, acts of violence against them soar. Other groups for which abuse has been highlighted in official reports include women with disabilities, elderly women—we remember the victims of abuse in care homes here in the United Kingdom—and young girls, especially those prized as trophies of war, such as the Yazidi women.

From trafficking to forced prostitution, the vulnerability of many women remains a real concern across far too much of the globe. The day that we mark tonight started more than half a century ago, and I hope that I have shown that, sadly, it is very much still needed. I find it incredible that more than half a century has passed and we are still debating the same issues. However, that is not a criticism or an indication of failure. In many areas and in many countries, there have been improvements and women have made progress.

In 2006, the Inter-Parliamentary Union reaffirmed the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and subsequent well-intentioned declarations. It emphasised that no State or Government is justified in

“invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations to eliminate violence against women”.

It stressed

“the key role of parliaments and parliamentarians in preventing and eliminating violence against women”

and the need to work with all organisations that work to eliminate sexual and physical violence. Further, it called on all Governments and Parliaments to raise awareness about issues of violence against women and to promote public awareness of the problem. The debate is playing a part in that and, again, I thank the member for bringing it to the Parliament.

17:38

**Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch)**

**(SNP):** As a woman, there are few issues I feel angrier about than the exploitation, abuse and rape of women every day in this city and across this country. Maybe it is because I am a woman too or maybe it is just because, as Kofi Annan said in 1999 to commemorate the campaign against violence against women,

“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And, it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace.”

As long as there is demand for commercial sex that traffickers, pimps and brothel owners can exploit and from which they can profit, we will never live in a country that is free of violence against women. No doubt, the vast majority of self-respecting people in Scotland agree that no woman should be subjected to violence, domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault or exploitation. However, we have still not successfully curbed the demand for commercial sex that fuels sex trafficking and allows violence to thrive. Prostitution is a form of violence against women and it is a barrier to gender equality.

Earlier this year, there was mass outrage about the shameful news of landlords asking for sex for rent. That was legitimately and rightly condemned by politicians across the board. However, sex for rent is part of a wider trend towards increasing levels of commercial sexual exploitation in Scotland involving vulnerable individuals in need of cash to purchase essentials such as accommodation or food, or to fund addictions.

At the end of the day, this issue is about power, and until we rebalance the power, we will never live in a world free of violence against women. I want to quote an article that appeared in the *New Statesman* in April this year, which I thought captured the hypocrisy of many of us who were shocked about sex for rent but are still content with allowing access to women's bodies for basic living needs. The article says:

“If anything is for sale—any body part, any experience, any relationship—then the poorest will be stripped bare. If you accept the principle that there is nothing wrong with buying sex ... how do you ensure supply can meet demand? Only by making sure there are always enough women with no other options. There is no other way. There are not enough female bodies to meet male sexual and reproductive demands without any form of coercion; that's why patriarchy, with all its complex systems of reward and punishment, exists in the first place.

If sex work is work, poverty is necessary.”

However, commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking exist not just because of the “victims”—I say that word in inverted commas,

because these are strong, courageous and brave women—but because there is demand and there are profits to be made. It is an industry that ultimately operates on the basic principles of supply and demand. That is why I fully support decriminalising the supply and criminalising the demand. There is ample evidence that greater criminal penalties and negative publicity would deter the purchaser from buying sex, thereby reducing demand.

Gender inequality, sexual exploitation and sex trafficking will never cease as long as it is acceptable to purchase access to another person's body and to purchase access to a person who is often more vulnerable and disadvantaged.

17:43

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** I begin by thanking Rhoda Grant for bringing forward this important debate on the annual international day for the elimination of violence against women. This is a topic that is important to me as a husband and as a father of three girls, and it is a subject that deserves far more attention than it gets. That is why I was happy to accept the position of women's champion for the Scotland branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. That post now has to be filled by a male, and I am honoured to be the champion.

It is important that we remember that violence against women, across the country, the Commonwealth and the world is an issue that should concern not just women, but should concern us all, and it requires everyone in society to work together to end this blight.

Violence and the threat of violence affect women across Scotland and the Commonwealth, whatever their wealth, race or culture. The impact on the women who are affected is devastating and the shock waves can be felt through the entirety of our society. It also endangers our community safety.

Rhoda Grant quite rightly raised in her motion the issue of prostitution. I want to take a moment to highlight the particular issue of the violent acts that take place against sex workers and how we deal with them, as a country.

A report that was produced in 1996 by Neil McKeganey and Marina Barnard described a range of violent behaviours towards women who were involved in prostitution in Glasgow. They ranged from name calling to physical assault, rape and even murder, and the report found that those were done not just by people whom the women termed "clients", but by others including their pimps, drug dealers and others who were involved in prostitution. What worries me is that the women are unlikely to report such crimes to the police.

Work has also been done on the subject in separate papers by Dr Emma Smith and Jane Pitcher. Their work found that there are many reasons for women's response, including fear of not being taken seriously by the police, concern about possible criminalisation should they contact the police, and the potential for increased stigmatisation. We have to do something about that: sex workers should know that the police are there to help them and not to jail them. We need to get to the stage at which the option of going to the police, reporting violence and seeking help is a possibility for every woman in our society, no matter her situation.

I would be very interested to hear from the minister, in summing up, about what work is going on in the country today on the issues that have been raised this evening.

17:46

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** I thank Rhoda Grant for bringing this important subject to the Parliament for debate. I welcome the opportunity to support the motion, and I support calls for the introduction of the Nordic model.

During the short time that I have in the debate, I want to highlight some of the inconsistencies, as I see them, that are often on display around debates on the subject, from people who seek to oppose criminalisation of the purchase of sex. The purchase of sex is either unacceptable behaviour; or it is a business transaction like any other; or, as the equally safe strategy makes clear, it is a form of violence against women. Those who argue that there is nothing exploitative about the sale of women's bodies for cash, whether that cash is required to buy food, fund addictions or pay rent, cannot then argue that there is something exploitative about the sale of sex for rent. The degree of coercion in both cases is the same. In both cases, that coercion is primarily economic in nature. Why should one medium of payment be considered abhorrent and the other acceptable?

If we choose—because we believe it to be the lesser of two evils—to avoid some perceived unintended consequences, to turn a blind eye to the purchase of sex, we are complicit in normalising such behaviour. In normalisation, protection of the rights of buyers and treatment of prostitution as work like any other lead to the explosion of demand that we see in countries where purchase of sex is legalised. The opening of multistorey brothels, trips to discount whorehouses as a normal part of high school graduation celebrations for teenage boys, and acceptance of the abuse of power relationships are not behaviour that we should normalise, and are not parts of the kind of society in which I want my sons or daughters to grow up. Such



normalisation changes behaviours and changes society's norms as it drives up demand. That is all good for the businessmen who control the supply side of the industry, but it is in no way good for those who are exploited by the business.

At a time when we worry about the explosion in mental health problems among people who are from traumatic and exploited backgrounds, we cannot condone that most intense form of exploitation and the consequent risks to mental health. At this time, when we are taking great steps to consider the future outcomes of care-experienced young people, we cannot fail to recognise the strong links between exploitation in the care sector and subsequent exploitation in the sex industry.

I find it most peculiar that those who never miss an opportunity to rail against the inequities of the free market come rushing to defend the rights of people who are in positions of economic power when it comes to the purchase of sex. In no sense can that be considered not to be an abuse of power in an unequal power relationship, but those who would rightly condemn sexual advances that took place in the workplace, based on an unequal power relationship, find nothing wrong in the abuse of power that occurs in the purchase of sex.

I also find it peculiar that people who would, in respect of any other industry, treat with great scepticism any claims coming from those who control the supply side of the business, in the sex industry's case find full alignment with industry trade bodies, concerned, as they are, with removing barriers to trade in a quest to support the extraction of maximum profit from the business by driving up demand.

At its heart, the issue is a simple one. It is about the kind of society that we want to be, and whether we believe that such abusive power relationships should be normalised or we should take steps to oppose that.

17:49

**The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing):** I congratulate Rhoda Grant on securing this members' business debate on the important issue of the international day for the elimination of violence against women and tackling commercial sexual exploitation, and I thank all members for their thoughtful contributions.

At the outset, I reaffirm that tackling and eradicating violence against women is a key priority for the Scottish Government. As members will be aware, on 24 November 2017 we published "Equally Safe—A Delivery Plan for Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls" to deliver practical steps that will

take us towards ending this horrific form of violence for good. As has been noted, the drive to make Scotland equally safe was debated in Parliament on 28 November.

Our plan is ambitious. It sets out 118 actions that we intend to take from now until 2021 to help to ensure that we can make progress towards a Scotland in which women and children live free from violence and abuse, and the attitudes and inequalities that perpetuate it. The 16 days of action are a great opportunity to champion the efforts of many people in Scotland, including the members of this Parliament who strive endlessly to bring about real positive change.

As members are aware, earlier in the year we published independent research that was commissioned to investigate the reliability of the evidence that is available on the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services and how it applies to Scotland. The research provides a useful collation of international evidence and an overview of the existing evidence in a Scottish context. Crucially, it also identifies that there are a number of gaps in knowledge, particularly in relation to the scale and nature of off-street prostitution. The existing evidence highlights poverty, constrained economic choices and structural gender inequality as drivers into prostitution, which are commonly combined with a range of underlying vulnerabilities.

In addition, the research found that a range of risks and adverse impacts were associated with prostitution in the short and longer term, which related to general and mental health, safety and wellbeing, and sexual health. However, it must be pointed out that the limitations of the evidence base are considerable, so there is uncertainty about the potential impacts of the criminalisation of the purchase of sex on that vulnerable group. Indeed, the research did not provide any conclusive evidence that harm would be reduced through such changes to the criminal law. Helpfully, however, it highlighted the potential scope that exists for improving policy and the help that is available in the context of prevention, harm reduction, support to exit and challenging demand.

**Rhoda Grant:** Does the minister not acknowledge that harm has been reduced in countries that have implemented such legislation? I am talking about a reduction not only in harm to those who are involved in prostitution, which is inherently dangerous, but in sexual violence against women.

**Annabelle Ewing:** I was trying to make the point that the international research is inconclusive. That is what the research that we have been presented with says. We have worked to obtain feedback from various stakeholders on that research, which we are currently reflecting on.

In addition, I have met a number of people who have been or are still involved in prostitution, as I promised—in response, I think, to a general question from the member—to do, and we are reflecting on the information that we gathered during those meetings.

**Ruth Maguire:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I am afraid that I must make progress.

Our approach is based on what the existing evidence can tell us. Therefore, at this time, we are focused on a prevention and reduction of harm model, which is about preventing vulnerable individuals from entering prostitution in the first place, reducing the harm that is associated with the selling of sexual services for those who continue to engage in prostitution and—crucially—supporting those who wish to exit.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I am afraid that I must make progress.

The equally safe delivery plan committed the Government to do exactly that. The equally safe strategy makes it clear that violence against women includes commercial sexual exploitation, within the definition of which fall prostitution, lap dancing, stripping, pornography and trafficking, many of which have been mentioned. Such a statement was included in the initial strategy that was published in 2014 and the refreshed version that was published in 2016, and specific actions to strengthen our efforts to tackle commercial sexual exploitation are included in the latest delivery plan. A member said that they were not that impressed with the plan, which they felt was not very ambitious—in fact, I think that it was Rhoda Grant. There is a page in the delivery plan that lists seven, eight, nine or 10 actions that I could read out, but that would take us well over the time that we have available.

**Elaine Smith:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I hate making a point of order in the middle of a speech, but the debate has been extended and I think that this is such an important matter—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that that is not a point of order. It is up to the member whether to take an intervention, as you well know.

**Annabelle Ewing:** I am trying to make some progress to respond to the points that have been raised in the debate. I was happy to take an intervention and I have tried to respond to it in a reasonable fashion.

We want to help ensure that those who are engaged in prostitution can leave. That is why the

Government supports services such as Sacro's another way, which works in Edinburgh to tackle these issues. Other partners are doing important work to tackle commercial sexual exploitation across Scotland, but of course we recognise that there is always more to do.

It may interest members—although they will have differing views on the venues in question—that the Scottish Government has launched a consultation on draft guidance on the licensing of sexual entertainment venues by local authorities. The consultation will close on 7 February 2018. I encourage members to make their views known in that context.

Those members who were elected prior to 2016 will be aware that that licensing regime was provided for in the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015 and will come into effect in due course. When it is brought in, the regime will allow for local licensing authorities to decide what is appropriate in their areas. Indeed, they will be able to set an appropriate number of venues for their area, and that number could, for example, be zero. We believe in effective licensing of the venues that remain compatible with the laws of the land, notwithstanding what people's personal views may be of the venues. Effective licensing is in place to protect the people who work in those places and to reduce criminality.

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

**Elaine Smith:** Will the minister give way?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I am afraid that I must make progress.

Within the equally safe delivery plan, alongside the specific commitments that relate to prostitution, we have committed to the establishment of a multi-agency group that will develop steps that are designed to reduce the harms that are associated with all aspects of commercial sexual exploitation. Supporting the reduction of harm will be a main focus of the group's remit. I expect the multi-agency group, once it is established, to consider the full holistic approach to tackling those issues, which, as members know, are rooted in gender inequalities.

We will continue to support the challenging demand project, which raises awareness of commercial sexual exploitation, and to work with the Women's Support Project to build capacity to deliver the project across organisations.

We have committed to commissioning a mapping of existing specialist support for those who experience commercial sexual exploitation, to better understand current coverage and good practice. We want to create pathways for people who are engaged in prostitution to safely exit

through access to mentoring programmes, which will ensure that they have—as has been properly referred to tonight—the key support that they need to access health and welfare services and that they are encouraged in pursuing economic opportunities outwith prostitution.

Of course, as new areas of concern emerge, so must our response continue to evolve. I hope that we can all work together in the spirit of tonight's debate to ensure that all issues that relate to gender-based violence, including commercial sexual exploitation, are discussed fully, with all the varying points of view expressed. Having been involved in this issue for quite some months now, I can say that there are differing points of view about how best we can reduce harm. That, I think, is what unites us all—we all want to reduce harm and to ensure that, for those who are engaged in prostitution, there is a way out.

That is what the Government has committed to do. We will continue to reflect on the evidence that we have sought to amass. In the meantime, as I said, we will continue to do everything that we can—

**Elaine Smith:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I am just finishing.

We will do everything that we can to reduce harm and to ensure that, for those who seek a way out, we are there to support their exit.

*Meeting closed at 17:58.*



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