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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 10 September 2019

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Good afternoon. Our first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, for which our leader is Mr Ameer Versace, strategic engagements director of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society.

Mr Ameer Versace (Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for having me here on this particularly poignant day, which throughout the Muslim world is commemorated during the month of Muharram. We reflect on the year 680 AD, when an extraordinary individual passed from this world. He was just 54 years of age, but he spent his entire life serving humanity. His name was Hussain ibn Ali. He called people to faith and supported people of all faiths and those of no faith in equal measure. Inherent in him were the same very fine qualities as those of his father, Ali ibn Abu Talib. They were men of true conviction and higher purpose. They were tolerant of others and had the courage to stand up against the tyranny that prevailed at the time.

Sadly, both men were martyred, but those divinely inspired personalities made their mark and their legacies will never be forgotten. Respect for humanity was fundamental to what they believed in, and it became the premise on which Islam should be demonstrated. The Imams, as we reverently call them, taught us that working in harmony makes strong bonds, which benefits and improves life for all. Our views may differ, but it is from the common ground that a powerful force for good emanates.

In a letter to the Governor of Egypt, Imam Ali said:

“infuse your heart with mercy, love and kindness for your people ... for they are your brothers in faith or your equal in humanity.”

Our honourable Qur’an guides us and tells us:

“Oh mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another.”

In the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, where I serve with the amazing team who are in the public gallery, we engage with a plethora of organisations. We work with health, education and sporting organisations, and our interfaith and

intrafaith work is something in which we take a great deal of pride. It enables us to have a deeper understanding of one another in a culturally rich Scotland. The Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society will never waver from its intended path in serving people, just as our Imams taught us to do.

Finally, as a very proud Scotsman—I wear my flag on my sleeve—it is my earnest hope that this esteemed Parliament will successfully serve and lead Scotland and will make us a model nation that is committed to equality and the greatest human values throughout the 21st century and beyond.

It has been a great pleasure. Thank you.

Topical Question Time

14:05

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is topical questions. In order to get in as many members as possible, I would prefer short and succinct questions—I live in hope—and answers to match.

Marches (Disorder)

1. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of recent sectarian violence, what action it proposes to prevent disorder at future marches. (S5T-01762)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): I first want to commend Police Scotland for the robust operation that it delivered on Saturday in extremely difficult and challenging circumstances. I am sure that I speak for everyone in the chamber in wishing the officer who was injured by a pyrotechnic device a speedy recovery. The police have my full backing in identifying and prosecuting the irresponsible individual who threw the dangerous device.

The events of the past two weekends have clearly demonstrated that sectarian violence is not a thing of the past. We have seen the right to parade peacefully and to counter-demonstrate, which are both perfectly legal and important elements of a democracy that values free speech, being abused by those who are intent on denying others a voice so that they can indulge in violent, disorderly and offensive behaviour. The right to free expression does not give people the right to intimidate communities.

I can safely say that the vast majority of the citizens of Glasgow view the sectarian violence stemming from those marches as a stain on the city's reputation. That is why I have been working with Glasgow City Council and Police Scotland to find a way forward that will prevent the recent scenes from happening again. There is no simple solution, and all the options, including legislative ones, are firmly on the table. The council is determined to reduce the number of marches, and I support it in that aim.

I also remain committed to tackling sectarianism and bigotry. We will continue to invest in education work, building on our unprecedented investment of £14 million in that respect since 2012. We must work together to eradicate sectarian violence once and for all. Of course, we are open to considering all proposals from across the chamber.

John Mason: The cabinet secretary mentioned the council's desire to reduce the number of marches. As he may know, 14 are planned for the

rest of this month. I understand that one of those is a republican march, two are on other subjects altogether and the rest are all Orange or Orange related. Does the council have the power to reduce the number of marches, or would that require some change?

Humza Yousaf: That is a helpful question. That issue was the focus of our conversation on Thursday. Where the council feels that it has the legislative powers, it will use them and act. I told the council that, where it feels that it does not have such powers, the Government would be open to a conversation on that, and I think that the Parliament should be, too.

Frankly, it frustrates me quite a lot that we are having to talk about legislation to tackle disorder that is committed in 2019 in a multicultural city such as Glasgow by grown men who are fighting the battles of centuries gone by. The fact that we have to think about legislating to prevent those individuals from committing that disorder is pretty depressing.

I assure John Mason that, where the council feels that there is a need for further legislative options to be explored, I have given it an undertaking that we will do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Three members want to ask supplementary questions. Can we have short questions, please?

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I agree with everything that the cabinet secretary said in his response to the questions from John Mason. As I understand it, Glasgow City Council is reviewing the procedures by which it permits marches in our city, which I welcome. What practical support is the Scottish Government offering Glasgow City Council in that regard?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before the cabinet secretary answers, I point out that I have realised that Mr Mason had another question. I will let you have one at the very end, Mr Mason.

Humza Yousaf: I thank Adam Tomkins for the question and for the tone in which he asked it. We have told Glasgow City Council that we will help in any way that we can with the review. Adam Tomkins makes an important point. Legislation is one way that the Government can assist, but it can help in many other ways. For example, it is currently exploring whether it could play a role in funding mediation or doing development work to bring the various parties together to agree a rationale for reducing the number of marches. Those are some ways in which the Government might give practical support.

I assure Mr Tomkins that if there is a request from Glasgow City Council for anything further that

the Government could do, its leader will be knocking at a very open door.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the events in Glasgow have left many people feeling that we are going backwards and becoming less tolerant and more divided? Does he also agree that there is no place for hatred on our streets, no matter where it comes from or who it is directed towards? We need to bring people together and ask them to reach out across divides. Will the cabinet secretary therefore encourage Glasgow City Council to reinstate the previously established stakeholders group?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Anas Sarwar for his question and the way in which he asked it. Any member in the chamber will recognise the work that he has personally done in bridging the divide between communities in which there can often be tension and in attempting to eradicate hate. I wish that to be recognised on the record.

On Mr Sarwar's substantive point about encouraging Glasgow City Council, I say that I will leave it to the council to come up with what it thinks are solutions. I know that many people will have their own views on those. The Government should also consider the proposals that Anas Sarwar has mentioned—indeed, it will be open minded to any others that might come from across the chamber. The council should be similarly open minded towards listening to ideas from across the political spectrum.

Mr Sarwar is absolutely right. My constituents in Govan, who were affected by the events a week past on Friday, have told me that they felt that it was not safe for them to go outside their houses. That is not acceptable in 2019.

We have a collective desire, need for and interest in eradicating such hatred from our streets. Frankly, the citizens of Glasgow who have spoken to me have tolerated such marches for many a year, but they have just had enough. Glasgow City Council's desire to reduce the number of marches is a pretty decent place to start on that endeavour, and it will certainly have the Government's support.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): There is a balance to be struck between promoting and protecting freedom of speech and ensuring that local communities do not have their day-to-day lives disrupted. I ask the cabinet secretary whether consideration has been given to consolidating the number of marches. For example, if one organisation has a number of applications over a calendar period, could they be merged into one march, or a number of them, in order to reduce the number that take place and so minimise disruption to local areas?

Humza Yousaf: I thank James Kelly for his suggestion. In the same vein as I answered the previous question, I say to him that I think that we should look at all proposals. I assure him that part of the discussion that the Government had with Glasgow City Council was about whether it could rationalise, and therefore reduce, the number of marches that take place. The challenge is that applications often come in from different organisations. For example, the Apprentice Boys of Derry is a very different organisation from the main Orange order whose march takes place on or around 12 July each year. Although their marches might both be grouped under the umbrella term of "loyalist" parades, each organisation will make an individual application. Adam Tomkins's suggestion about engaging with and possibly mediating between such groups is one strand that the Government should explore.

John Mason: Would be helpful if we were to have a united front in the Parliament and among the relevant spokespeople from all the parties in acting on this issue, which is a sensitive one?

Humza Yousaf: If this topical question has demonstrated anything, it is that we have the ability to have a mature discussion across the chamber about such issues. We all want to see a reduction in the number of such marches while, of course, protecting people's rights to freedom of speech and of assembly. When I replied to James Kelly, it was an oversight on my part not to have welcomed him to his justice role.

I will take up John Mason's suggestion and invite the justice spokespeople from all parties across the chamber to have a conversation about how we might assist local authorities in dealing with the problem and whether that might involve the passing of legislation or other measures.

Prestwick Airport (United States Military Payments)

2. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it can confirm how much Prestwick airport has received from the US military for its operations. (S5T-01760)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Glasgow—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Cabinet secretary, your card is not in the console, so your microphone is not on. [*Interruption.*] Do not look at me—I am not in charge of microphones.

There it is—it has come on. Off you go.

Michael Matheson: Glasgow Prestwick airport operates at arm's length from the Scottish

Government. Information on individual revenue streams is available in the annual accounts, which are available online and are laid in Parliament. To protect the commercial interests of the business, information on revenue is not broken down by individual customer in published accounts.

In relation to recent media reports, it is important to make clear that Prestwick, like all other airports that provide fixed-base operations, arranges overnight accommodation for air crew when it is asked to do so. It uses a list of 13 hotels, some of which pay Prestwick commission. Turnberry is generally booked only if other hotels are unavailable or if customers specifically request it. There is no commercial relationship between Prestwick and Turnberry. Prestwick does not benefit from commission or in any other way from booking Turnberry, and customers settle their own accounts directly with the hotel.

Mike Rumbles: It seems that we will have to wait for the American inquiry to find out the actual figures. However, can the cabinet secretary confirm reports that the income stream is the largest single income stream that Prestwick relies on? If so—if he knows that—does he really think that it makes Prestwick airport a viable economic proposition?

Michael Matheson: The member will recognise the important role that Prestwick airport plays for the Ayrshire economy and for the aviation industry that is clustered around the airport, which is part of the reason why the Scottish Government stepped in to purchase it at the time. For historical reasons, the airport has for many decades—since the 1930s, I think—been utilised by the military for stopovers and for refuelling. That was the case when it was in the private sector and it remains the case when it is in the public sector.

There has been increasing growth in the work that Glasgow Prestwick airport undertakes and growth in the revenue that it receives from refuelling and rest-overs, and that is a reflection of the proactive work that the management team has been undertaking in order to reduce the airport's losses and make it more commercially viable.

Mike Rumbles: When does the cabinet secretary believe that we will receive back any of the £40 million of loans of taxpayers' money that the Government has so far given to Prestwick airport, considering that it has still not made a profit in more than a decade?

Michael Matheson: If the Scottish Government had not provided financial assistance to the airport, the likelihood is that it would have closed, and the hundreds of jobs that are directly associated with it and the more than 1,000 associated jobs next to the airport would have been put in jeopardy. With the actions that we

have taken, we have seen Chevron operate a new base from the airport and, alongside that, we have seen Ryanair introduce its overhaul and maintenance facility at Prestwick, providing hundreds of highly skilled jobs.

The member will be aware that we advertised back in June for parties interested in purchasing Prestwick. That process is being taken forward. Any final decisions on the future of Prestwick will be dependent on the bids that are received for the airport, and any actions that we take will be in the best interests of the Scottish taxpayer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have three members wanting to ask questions. It is an important subject, but I would like short questions, please. I call Colin Smyth, to be followed by Patrick Harvie and Brian Whittle.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The sale documents for Prestwick suggested that a preferred bidder would be selected by 6 September and a sale completed by 4 October. Can the cabinet secretary say whether any bids have been received for Prestwick airport? Has a preferred bidder been selected? Is 4 October still a realistic date? Does he think that the revelations on the heavy reliance on income from the American military are likely to impact on the sale?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was multiple questions, but it was cleverly done.

Michael Matheson: Good progress has been made. At the present time, the management team is assessing the bids that it has received. I will not go into any more detail in relation to the bids—given their commercially sensitive nature, it would be inappropriate for me to do so. The management team at Prestwick has advised me that it is making good progress and it intends to continue to work to the timescales as best it can. However, there is always a need to take into account any unforeseen matters that may arise during consideration of such issues.

Colin Smyth will be aware that the use of Prestwick airport for military operations is a long-standing arrangement. Anyone who is interested in purchasing Prestwick will be aware of its history as a long-standing base that is used for rest breaks and refuelling military aircraft.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The relationship between Prestwick and the US military is indeed long standing, and so is the concern about that relationship, including complicity with extraordinary rendition and active military missions, which the Scottish Government has said that it opposes.

Is it not now clear that we also risk having Scotland's good international name dragged into a corruption allegation against a far-right US

President? We cannot afford that reputational risk. Should we not now at least suspend the relationship with the US military until the congressional investigation has concluded?

Michael Matheson: Those matters have been explored in the chamber before, and Patrick Harvie has made known his views on the use of Prestwick airport for military refuelling and for rest breaks and stopovers. I do not see the benefit of rehearsing the issues again.

In relation to his specific point about ending the relationship to allow any congressional investigation to take place, it is entirely a matter for Congress and the US authorities to conduct any investigation that they think appropriate. As I have already outlined, the arrangement that Prestwick airport has in place is to arrange accommodation as and when requested, and there are 13 different hotels in the local area that the airport uses to provide such a facility when necessary.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Prestwick airport has always had unique qualities, including its long runway and, believe it or not, its weather—it is very rarely fogged in. As a five-year-old, I watched Concorde's inaugural training flights there and, when running along the beach, I have seen F-18s refuelling on their way to the Gulf.

What is the Scottish Government doing in its negotiations to ensure that the strategic uniqueness of Prestwick airport is maintained by the potential new owners?

Michael Matheson: Brian Whittle will be aware that the airport operates at arm's length from the Scottish Government, to make sure that we comply with European state aid rules. Therefore, the Scottish Government is not directly involved in any contractual discussions that relate to the airport itself.

The very fact that we stepped in to purchase the airport—recognising its strategic importance, both as an airfield and as an aviation facility—and that we continue to support it in looking to diversify the business, is a reflection of the value that we see that it has, not only to the Ayrshire economy but to the national economy of Scotland as a whole.

Brian Whittle may also want to reflect on the details that were set out in the eligibility questionnaire for interested parties that was associated with the advertising of the airport, which set out very clearly to anyone who is bidding for the airport that we expect it to be maintained as an active airfield and that the progress that has been made in recent years by the management team at the airport is built on.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes topical question time. We will have a short pause

while members on the front bench take their places.

Creating a Sustainable Future for Crofting

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a statement by Fergus Ewing on creating a sustainable future for crofting. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

Cabinet secretary—you have 10 minutes.

14:24

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): Crofting has a special place in the cultural heritage of Scotland, and it lies at the heart of many of Scotland's rural communities. Without the crofting sector, much of rural Scotland would not be the place that we have all come to know and love.

I am pleased to say that crofting continues to contribute to the sustainability of remote and rural communities. That is partly as a result of the support and attention that the Scottish Government and its predecessors have provided in the past and are providing now.

Credit goes primarily to the crofters themselves. In October last year, I gave a speech at the Scottish Crofting Federation's event called "Celebrating the spirit of crofting", at which we celebrated the commitment, passion, determination and fortitude that is shown by a very special community of people that is unique to Scotland—the crofting community.

When last I addressed the chamber on crofting more than two years ago, I took heart from the fact that the Crofting Commission was moving on from some testing times that had been challenging for a number of crofting communities. Although the Crofting Commission has faced some challenges, I am pleased to report that work continues to be undertaken by the commission's staff and board to improve the way in which it undertakes its regulatory business.

We are already seeing the fruit of that work. Since 2018-19, the commission's residency and land use team has resolved 130 breaches of duty, 28 per cent of which resulted in the crofter taking up residency or assigning their croft. Since March this year, we have seen an increase in the number of common grazings committees that are in office.

The Crofting Commission and its board have set improvement of turnaround times as their top priority for the coming year. They are prioritising front-line regulatory staff and developing plans for how to achieve that. For example, on the

commission's website, comprehensive information has been provided to inform crofters, before they decide how to frame an application, of the kinds of issues that are likely to cause delay. The commission has simplified its handling of general enquiries, thereby reducing the typical response time from 10 weeks to less than two weeks.

The next phase of its plans includes providing more information online, reviewing the processes for contested cases, enhancing in-house information technology systems, and engaging with Scottish Government colleagues to identify further opportunities for streamlining processes. In addition, the commission has agreed to work with crofters, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Land Commission on developing its thinking about the long-term reform of crofting legislation.

There have been a number of other positive developments in crofting, so I will take this opportunity to update members on some of the successes of the past two years and to set out how the Scottish Government plans to continue to improve prospects for crofters and crofting communities.

I also take this opportunity to update members on progress towards crofting legislation reform. Members will be aware of the work that has been done to date to assist in developing proposals for legislative change. I am committed to continuing preparations for a crofting bill that garners consensus and cross-party support. Members can be assured that my officials continue to work on reform of crofting legislation. As I have said before, such changes must be of benefit to crofters and crofting communities. It is important that the bill be focused. I have therefore asked officials to work with stakeholders to identify five to 10 priority changes that they would like to see in legislation.

Members and stakeholders alike can be reassured of my commitment to crofting legislative reform. I look forward to our continuing combined efforts to achieve that aim. Given the uncertainties around Brexit and the impact that it might have on resources and parliamentary time, I am not in a position to commit to the introduction of legislation during the current parliamentary session, but the approach that I have outlined will ensure that I will be in a position to do so if the opportunity arises.

The Government is also committed to supporting people to remain on and to bringing people back to the land, thereby re-peopling our rural and remote rural populations and sustaining our fragile Highlands and Islands communities. Crofting contributes to the maintenance and enhancement of landscapes and habitats through low-impact, high-nature-value agricultural activity in areas that would otherwise be neglected.

What has the Government been doing to support crofting? In the past financial year alone, the Government approved and provided croft businesses with more than £46 million through a range of schemes, including the basic payment scheme and greening, the less favoured areas support scheme, the agri-environment climate scheme, the croft house grant, the crofting agricultural grant scheme, and the sheep and beef schemes. In addition to that £46 million, we have the bull stud farm at Knocknagael in Inverness, which offers subsidised rates for crofters to hire health status bulls.

We also provide crofters with subsidised veterinary support. In addition, crofters can access a bespoke subscription service that is offered by the farm advisory service, which provides discounted fees for consultancy services. More than 2,000 crofters benefit from that subscription, through which they access advice on animal husbandry, cropping, grassland production and much more.

There are also the forestry grant schemes, many of which are suitable for crofting businesses, and there is LEADER, which has helped to fund many croft-based projects.

Therefore, as members can see, the Scottish Government is committed to investing in and supporting crofting and crofting activities. Key to that is enabling more people to live on and work their land. Since 2007, we have approved £20 million in croft house grants for croft housing, which have helped to build and improve more than 960 homes for crofters and their families. Let us take the example of the active crofting family of George Reid and his partner Janice in the village of Taynuilt, who have a herd of 17 suckler cows at Brough croft. With the help of a croft house grant, that young family have managed to add two bedrooms and a utility room to their existing one-bedroom house. By continuing to support families who would not be able to live in the remote and rural parts of Scotland or to work their crofts without grant funding, we help to strengthen our crofting communities.

Allied to that, crofters can also access the Scotland self-build loan fund, which offers loans of up to £175,000 to help with construction fees for self-build projects. That scheme can be used in conjunction with the croft house grant scheme, which offers grants of up to £38,000.

However, I recognise that there is always more to be done to ensure that we create the conditions for our crofting and rural communities to grow and thrive. Attracting new entrants to crofting is critical to its future. With new entrants and youth come new practices, innovation and an enthusiasm that energises the sector. We all know that crofting is far more than just a form of land tenure. To class it

as such would be to miss how and why it has endured. For many people, it is a way of life, and it needs a blend of experience and youth.

In 2018, there were more than 200 new entrants to crofting, more than a quarter of whom were aged 40 or younger. This year, we have already seen more than 90 new entrants. However, more can be done. My officials are currently working with stakeholders to develop a new entrants project that will provide the necessary guidance and support to create opportunities for new entrants. One of the issues that are to be tackled will be succession planning. The new entrants project will form but one element of the national development plan for crofting, which will be published in the coming 12 months.

Crofting needs to be underpinned with the right framework to address future needs. The national development plan will set the long-term strategic direction for crofting, and will highlight the core elements that are necessary to ensure that crofting remains at the heart of our rural and remote communities. The plan, which will be discussed further at the October crofting stakeholder forum, will contain the following outcomes and methods, which are a blend of what we want crofting to achieve and what is needed for crofting to reach its full potential: population retention and rural cohesion; the creation of opportunities for new entrants; co-ordinated public sector promotion of crofting; economic opportunity and growth; environment and habitats; and regulation.

While we continue through this period of uncharted business, the Scottish Government remains firmly committed to the future of crofting. The Government is proud of our heritage in crofting and is committed to working together with crofters in the shared desire to secure that future.

The key factor when it comes to the resilience and success of crofting is its people. We need to keep people on the land, and to support them to live productive and sustainable lives. Traditional crofting has a role to play in our ambition to re-people the Highlands and Islands, but it is also important to encourage modern approaches to crofting and diversification into such things as renewable energy projects, tourism, woodland and beekeeping. By enabling innovative methods of working the land and utilising our landscape and natural environment, we will create sustainable crofting communities for future generations.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):

I declare an interest as a partner in a farming business.

I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of his statement. However, let us be clear: it was an extremely disappointing statement. Once again, a

bill that has been promised on numerous occasions has been ditched. The crofting law sump that was set up by the crofting law group highlighted the need for legislative reform way back in 2013. The Scottish National Party promised to introduce new legislation on crofting in its 2016 manifesto and again in last year's programme for Government.

In 2017, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee undertook a comprehensive examination of all laws surrounding crofting, and recommended a move away from the piecemeal process of legislative development and towards introduction of a comprehensive bill. The committee recommended that the passage of the bill should be comfortably completed before the end of the current parliamentary session. It is clear that that cannot now happen. This SNP Government is clearly not complying with the recommendations of the committee or the needs of the crofting community. Can the cabinet secretary explain that complete dereliction of duty?

Fergus Ewing: I reject Peter Chapman's approach and am disappointed by it because—as Mr Chapman knows—we undertook a consultation about what sort of crofting reform would receive support, and there was no clear majority for the comprehensive approach that he describes. Therefore, we elected to move forward with legislative reform that would improve everyday practical matters. We worked with stakeholders and across parties with that in mind.

The situation is stark and it is clear: the Brexit policy that is being pursued by the Conservative Government in the United Kingdom demands that we spend our parliamentary time on the agenda of the London Parliament against the wishes of Scotland. There are two pieces of primary legislation—the rural support bill and the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill—that would not be required if the Tories were to drop their Brexit plans, which do not command support in Scotland.

In addition, 71 European Union exit statutory instruments have been or are expected to be notified to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee by the end of this year, and 25 EU exit Scottish statutory instruments have been completed or are expected to be completed. In March this year, 500 full-time equivalent staff were involved with Brexit-related activity across the Scottish Government. If the Tory Government in London abandons its Brexit obsession, of course there will be time for us to proceed with Scotland's agenda, including crofting reform.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

Two years ago, the programme for Government stated:

“We will ... consult on and develop proposals to reform crofting law”.

A year ago, the programme for Government stated:

“We will take forward work on a Crofting Bill and publish a national development plan for crofting”.

Just six months ago, at the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, the cabinet secretary said:

“I committed to seeking to introduce a crofting bill in sufficient time for it to be passed before the end of the session. That commitment remains.”—[*Official Report, Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, 24 April 2019; c 7.*]

Does the cabinet secretary accept that the failure to deliver on that commitment in the timescale that he pledged will be viewed as a broken promise by the crofting community?

In his statement, the cabinet secretary states that he has asked officials to work with stakeholders to identify five to 10 priority changes that they would like to see, but the crofting law sump report identified 57 crofting law issues that needed to be addressed—17 of which were identified as being high priority and nine of which were classed as urgent. Can the cabinet secretary confirm, at the very least, that the nine urgent issues will be dealt with in any crofting bill that he introduces? When will the Government address the many other issues that were identified in the report?

Fergus Ewing: I point out that we implemented our pledge to consult on proposals for crofting legislative reform, and that that consultation indicated the lack of a clear majority for the comprehensive reform that some people have advocated. In the absence of a clear majority for that approach, and given that we are a profoundly democratic party and Government, we felt that we should not foist that approach on the crofting communities. Rather, we sought, and are proceeding with, an alternative approach, which is to identify practical and everyday measures that can improve crofting law. Indeed, working with key stakeholders, we have made some progress towards that on a number of fronts.

It is my desire that we proceed with a crofting bill in this session of Parliament. I am proceeding on the basis that, provided that we can secure the parliamentary time to do so, we will endeavour to introduce such a bill.

Crofters are among the hidden casualties of Brexit—especially a no-deal Brexit, which commands so much of our time. We have had no choice but to hope for the best but to prepare for

the worst. The Conservatives—and others—have been the first to demand that we spend our time considering the plight of crofters. Now that we have granted their request and are doing precisely that, they are complaining, moaning and whining again, because they cannot accept the consequences of their own desperate no-deal Brexit plans, which have led to the resignation of an increasing number of their members at Westminster. I observe that none of their members in Scotland seems to have the gumption to resign from anything.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Eleven members wish to ask questions. I want short, key-word questions and succinct answers, please.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I agree that the Crofting Commission is working better than it was, but there remain some challenging issues to be addressed, not least of which is the weak diversity in the make-up of the commissioners. We need a commission board that is more representative of crofters themselves. What is the Scottish Government doing to address that ahead of the next elections to the board?

Fergus Ewing: Gail Ross makes a valid point, and it is a point that we have raised with the Crofting Commission. The issue of whom to vote for in the election of commissioners is a matter for individuals. However, we are working hard with the commission to encourage more females and young people to become involved in its work.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer to the entry on crofting in my register of interests.

I will ask the cabinet secretary about a serious day-to-day issue that crofters face—namely, the damage done by geese. I spoke to crofters on the Uists last week, who told me that the population of wild geese on the islands continues to swell, with severe consequences for crofters' livelihoods. In the light of their desperation, what action is the Government taking to reduce the goose population?

Fergus Ewing: I fully accept that that is a serious, long-standing matter. I visited Islay with Mr Russell, who is the constituency MSP, a couple of years ago. The topic was raised with me then and has been raised subsequently. It is of serious concern to a number of farmers and crofters. I believe that Scottish Natural Heritage has had de facto responsibility for coming up with a scheme for the management of geese. Many crofters and farmers feel that the existing support is insufficient and would argue for more. I am not handling the matter, as Mr Cameron is aware, but I am happy to hear further, more detailed representations, should he wish to make them to me and to my

colleague Roseanna Cunningham, who I believe has the portfolio responsibility for the matter.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I refer members to my register of interests. I own a non-domestic property in the Western Isles.

Hailing from the Isle of Lewis, I have seen at first hand over the decades the gradual decline in livestock numbers on the hills and common grazings in the Outer Hebrides. In his statement, the cabinet secretary mentioned the impact of Brexit on legislation. How else is the prospect of Brexit likely to be felt by crofters? With a view to seeing more livestock on the hills, is there any more clarity and certainty around future funding?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that we are losing the definition of "short". We will come back to that.

Fergus Ewing: Farmers and crofters are among those who are most likely to be impacted in a number of respects should the disaster of a no-deal Brexit take place, through, for example, the loss of market for lamb and the uncertainty about future funding. In fact, all assurances from the UK about future funding would come to an end upon a general election. That is in contrast to the seven-year programmes that we are used to in the EU.

I have made arrangements for a loan scheme to be administered. Ninety-five per cent of farmers and crofters will be entitled to receive 95 per cent of their money, and we have arranged the scheme so that, if they return the form quickly in the first week of October—or thereabouts—the payment should be in their hands prior to a no-deal Brexit taking place. That is a practical step that will be appreciated—it is about what we can do with our devolved powers. However, there are some things that we cannot mitigate, such as the loss of trade, tariffs and the availability of people in rural Scotland. Those issues are of serious concern to Mr MacDonald's constituents.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The statement is a blow for crofting. Legislation is required to put right the Scottish Government's mistakes in previous legislation. Those mistakes were identified in the sump, and they make it difficult for crofters to sell houses and settle estates, which are problems that cause them distress and delay and do nothing to help with repopulation. When will the cabinet secretary correct those errors?

Fergus Ewing: Those are matters to do with reforming the law, which was developed over a long period. I agree that that work needs to be done, which is why I am committed to bringing forward legislation if I can and if there is time to do so. I cannot magic up the time that is consumed by Brexit. I would have thought that Ms Grant would appreciate and accept that. With respect, I

point out to her and all members that I am proud that—as I said in my statement—we are supporting crofters to the tune of £46 million a year, with crofting agricultural scheme grants, 960 grants for new housing, the bull hire scheme, advice of all sorts and support under the various common agricultural policy schemes. That is the real day-to-day, bread-and-butter, practical work that is being done throughout Scotland, every day, by this Government and our hard-working officials. I would have thought that most members would see that as a good thing.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement. I agree with him on re-peopling and population retention. A practical and everyday measure for that would be more support for the croft house grant scheme. I await a positive response from the cabinet secretary to a letter that I wrote on that issue.

On the question of diversity—beekeeping, for instance, is seeing very positive developments that offer opportunities—after declaring a climate emergency, the Scottish Government undertook to examine all its policies. Can the cabinet secretary say what the examination of crofting policy has shown so far?

Fergus Ewing: We have done substantial work and, as I set out in my statement, we will continue that work with the stakeholder committee and others. It is an on-going process.

I am pleased that the member believes that the croft house grant scheme is making a positive impact, and I am grateful for his positive approach. I have testimonials from individual couples throughout Scotland who have benefited from that great scheme. Nine hundred and sixty people or families have benefited since 2007, with £20 million in grants. I think that that is marvellous thing to do and, as cabinet secretary, I have been determined that we do as much as we can to help people—particularly young people—to have a croft, a stake, a place and a home in their own country.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Why has the cabinet secretary taken two and a half years, since this Parliament's cross-party Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee report to him, which said that we need a "comprehensive" bill in this session, to announce that only now has he asked officials to identify priorities for legislation?

Fergus Ewing: Mr Rumbles and I may disagree about the general approach to be taken, but, after the committee's work, we carried out a consultation, which took some time. We took views, which resulted in the conclusion that there was no majority for that comprehensive approach

at that stage. Therefore, we determined to proceed in two phases.

Phase 1 involved a series of practical, everyday measures that can improve, and in some cases, amend law that is sub-optimal. We agreed that, in phase 2, which will take place in the next session of Parliament, after the next election, consideration could be given to fundamental reform.

Officials have been working very hard with stakeholders and others on a series of issues, such as standard securities, extended powers for the keeper of the registers of Scotland, landlords with vacant crofts and deemed crofts. A lot of work has been done to advance issues, and we are fairly far down the road and not far off being able to instruct parliamentary draftsmen. The trouble is that the parliamentary draftsmen are wholly engaged in carrying out the work for Brexit and Brexit bills. We cannot expect people to do other work when the Tory Government's Brexit agenda is taking up so much time. In fact, when Amber Rudd resigned from the Tory party, she said that 80 to 90 per cent of the UK Government's time is being spent on Brexit.

I hope that Mr Rumbles agrees that we are in a situation in which it is extremely difficult for us to achieve what the people of Scotland and crofters wish and that that is certainly not of our making.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am disappointed to hear about the timetabling problems relating to a crofting bill, but the impact that Brexit will have on planning any legislation is pretty clear. It is good to hear that the cabinet secretary remains open to individual fixes to anomalies in crofting legislation, of which there remain no shortage. Will he say more about what those specific fixes might be?

Fergus Ewing: Yes. The areas that would be covered would include allowing the keeper of the registers of Scotland the means to correct the crofting register where an error is clear and straightforward without having to go through the current rectification process; providing the Crofting Commission with the power to grant owner-occupier status to landlords of vacant crofts; and common grazings shares and apportionments being deemed to be crofts to ensure that crofting legislation continues to apply to rights. There is a whole series of other issues that we and stakeholders, by and large, felt should be dealt with in phase 2. I can provide more information to any member who wishes me to provide it.

If we have the opportunity to do so in this parliamentary session, we remain determined to introduce a bill that will deal with a relatively small number of issues, as agreed with stakeholders, in order to achieve the reform that everybody wants.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Edward Mountain, to be followed by Rona Mackay. You must be brief.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my register of interests.

In the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee inquiry in 2017, the cabinet secretary undertook to look at making more areas of common grazings available for new crofts. What has he done to deliver on that?

Fergus Ewing: As I have said, the phase 1 bill issues that we are looking at include a proposal for a new common grazings company structure. However, any change to a new structure—to becoming companies limited by guarantee—would have to be addressed through UK legislation. That makes things difficult for the Scottish Parliament, because the matter is ultra vires. *[Interruption.]* I say to Mr Mountain that it does. It is a complex area in which—*[Interruption.]* As usual, Mr Mountain is carrying on a muttering fusillade. I assure him that the issues have received consideration, as is correct. The issue that I mentioned involves partly reserved areas that the Scottish Parliament cannot deal with.

I have described the main problem: we cannot proceed with crofting legislation unless we can identify sufficient time in our parliamentary timetable. The work that we require to do, which Mr Mountain wants us to do, in relation to Brexit is making that very difficult or impossible.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): It has been suggested that the budget for croft house grants might be better utilised by being integrated into local housing strategies. Is that an approach for the future that the cabinet secretary would support?

Fergus Ewing: It is an approach, but the current approach has served crofters well. We have a number of testimonials from individuals in that regard, and I have visited individuals who have received grants and have been able to set up home in the Western Isles or the Highlands. That is a good thing. It is a fairly simple, swift and effective system, but we are, of course, always ready to look at other approaches to see whether they offer potential for improvement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the statement. I apologise to Claudia Beamish and Richard Lyle, whom I failed to call, but we have to move on to the next item of business.

Immigration Policy (Universities and Scientific Research)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-18767, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the impact of the United Kingdom Government's planned immigration policy and mobility restrictions on Scotland's university and scientific research sectors. I call Richard Lochhead to speak to and move the motion.

14:55

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Richard Lochhead): Presiding Officer,

"A 'no-deal' exit from the EU is the worst option for science."

Those are not my words but those of the president of the UK Royal Society, Nobel laureate Venki Ramakrishnan. He was speaking in reaction to the UK Government's recently announced plans to fast-track visas for top researchers after Brexit. This latest proposal, like so many others that have been put forward by the UK Government in recent weeks, has been subject to scepticism from key voices across the further and higher education and science sectors, and for good reason.

Any proposal that seeks to encourage the recruitment and retention of scientists and researchers is, of course, to be welcomed. However, the positive impact that such proposals might have will be minuscule compared with the overall damage that will stem from the UK Government's fanatical pursuit of a Brexit at any cost. That damage will be compounded by what is currently engulfing the UK Government: that is, of course, chaos.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): It is a bit rich for the minister to come to the chamber and say that my party is pushing for a no-deal Brexit when not a single Scottish National Party MP voted for the deal on the three occasions that it came before the Westminster Parliament.

Richard Lochhead: Only the Scottish Conservative party could say that there is no chaos in Westminster; it is there for everyone to see within the member's divided party.

I doubt that any member in this chamber has ever experienced anything like what we are seeing in Westminster. While members of the new Prime Minister's Cabinet recline on the benches of the House of Commons and shut down Parliament, staff, students and researchers at our institutions are crying out in concern for their livelihoods and futures. Meanwhile, I am met with a revolving door of UK counterparts—I am now on my third, despite

having been in office for only one year, and I have not even got to speak to my third UK counterpart. They nod in agreement with what the sector says, but their ability to implement decisions appears to be being throttled by those above their pay grade.

In contrast, I hope that a different example from that which we see in Westminster will be set here today—one of respect, trust and consensus. What is needed, and what the sector needs, is a calm and open consideration of the facts. The fact is that Brexit, and the UK Government's view on what its future migration policy should look like, will be like a wrecking ball to our institutions in Scotland.

In fact, as I am sure many members are aware, the damage has already taken shape. Last week, at a dinner in Glasgow with the Government of Lower Saxony, I was told that its universities are seeing an unprecedented increase in the number of German academics who are based in the UK applying for positions back home. Similarly, the Russell group has reported an on-going decline in the number of European Union academics working at UK institutions. There are a lot of anecdotes about, and evidence of, that loss of talent, and although it might be a trickle now it could become a tsunami if we leave the EU and lose access to freedom of movement.

As has been said many times, scientists and researchers rely on freedom of movement to allow them to move quickly and easily between projects. Some international academics come to Scotland for only a few months at a time to help to deliver vital life-changing research, before moving on; others stay for a lot longer. Anything that puts up barriers to that flow of people and ideas—for example, a restrictive UK Government migration environment—would make the UK a far less attractive place for globally mobile researchers.

That is intrinsically linked with issues to do with research funding. Along with the movement of staff and ideas, the movement of funding in the form of international competitive research grants is the bedrock of the modern scientific research sector that we are lucky enough to have in Scotland.

Research income leveraged through international funding streams is a mark of excellence and can often attract research income from elsewhere. The third sector, for example, invests significant amounts of money in Scottish research, and one of the world's largest research funding charities has raised concerns about the impact of Brexit on its potential investments.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): What impact will not having access to that experience from across the EU have on the

ordinary undergraduate student in Scottish universities?

Richard Lochhead: That could be devastating for our universities and institutions, given that students from the EU and beyond may find Scotland and the wider UK much less attractive destinations to come to study, visit and potentially work in, because of the messages that they are receiving from the UK Government. Likewise, for investment and research funds, if we are locked out of the substantial European research funds—I will talk about this shortly—that will have a detrimental impact on the viability of courses and, indeed, the sustainability of our university and research sectors.

The Wellcome Trust, which is based in the UK, has a £25.9 billion global investment portfolio—the fourth highest in the world. Its director, Jeremy Farrar, has stated:

“We have invested in the UK for more than 80 years. It has provided an environment in which science and innovation can thrive, but if the conditions and the culture here are damaged, that will affect our support. It is not unconditional.”

He is referring to the hostile environment that the UK Government is creating and the future difficulties that institutions in the UK will face in attracting the talent that we have just mentioned, in collaborating and in winning research funding.

Horizon 2020 is the EU's flagship research fund. To date, Scotland has competitively won almost €650 million from it. Access to the fund is of critical importance to researchers, just as is the ability to easily travel from project to project. Without easy access and a lack of obstacles, researchers are likely to look elsewhere. The situation is similar with students.

Scotland is regarded as a renowned study destination across Europe. This morning, I was speaking to students at the University of Dundee, who reiterated how warmly welcomed they feel in Scotland and the benefits that they have from their unique courses. Proportionally, more EU students come to study in Scotland than to study elsewhere in the UK. Our campuses are diverse, international and an incubator for different ideas and viewpoints, shaped by people's international backgrounds and experience. All that has been underpinned by the ease with which EU students can come to our colleges and universities.

In a report conducted by the University of Stirling students' union on the campus-wide impact of Brexit at the university—the report has been mentioned before in Parliament, but its findings are worth repeating—many EU students described a feeling of worry regarding their future status in the UK. I have spoken to students the length and breadth of Scotland and heard those

concerns being echoed time and time again during my visits.

The possibility of restrictive or expensive visa conditions for future study were cited by some as a reason for looking elsewhere in the EU when considering postgraduate study. Of course, international students from outside the EU already face hostile conditions, which is to the detriment of our institutions and another factor to consider. Being made to apply for something like the current tier 4 student visa, which can cost more than £1,000 when studying in another EU country would typically cost nothing, would clearly be an enormous disincentive for EU students. However, that is the kind of situation that such students might find themselves in if we were to lose access to freedom of movement as the UK Conservative Government plans and takes pride in announcing.

The UK Government's proposed no-deal contingency measure—a European temporary leave to remain scheme—would grant EU citizens up to three years leave in the UK before they had to apply and pay for another visa. However, as we all know, Scottish undergraduate degrees last for four years, not three years. Medicine degrees and others can last a lot longer than three years, and students who go on maternity leave, for example, will often study for more than three years. The scheme is discriminatory against Scottish institutions and against any person who does not fit into the three-year degree mould that has been shaped in Whitehall.

I have laboured that point with the UK Government time and time again—hopefully, I will shortly have a fourth UK counterpart to repeat the points to—but the policy does not change. It is bizarre for the UK Government to say that it has the needs of our institutions in its mind when it repeatedly presents plans that are in direct contradiction to the sector's best interests.

We see that happen outside Brexit, too. More than 8,000 graduates took part in the fresh talent working in Scotland scheme between 2005 and 2008; I remember us all celebrating that here, all those years ago. That scheme allowed for international graduates of Scottish universities to stay in the UK to live and work for up to two years after the end of their studies, and was seen as a success by the Scottish Government, the sector and, I believe, all parties in this chamber. However, the UK Government got rid of the scheme, subsuming it into other policy and then abolishing it altogether in 2012. The Scottish Government and the sector have been adamant since then that its return is essential to help us to keep up with our international competitors. That view was shared by the Smith commission—and, what is more, by members across the chamber.

The post-study work steering group, established in 2014 and composed of representatives from all the parties in the Scottish Parliament, concluded that there was clear support across businesses and the sector for the reintroduction of a post-study work route. In 2016, the Home Office released details of what it called a low-risk tier 4 pilot, which grants masters students an additional two months' leave after their course has ended in order to seek work—two months, not two years. That does not amount to anything like the post-study route that the sector is calling for.

More recently, we have seen in the UK immigration white paper proposals to extend post-study leave for bachelors and masters graduates to six months and to up to a year for those who are awarded PhDs. That is a step in the right direction, but it still falls far short. If there are to be more announcements in the coming weeks, we need to see what we are calling for—the post-study work visa—delivered to the full, especially when we compare the proposal with what our international competitors are offering. Canada's post-graduation work permit, for example, is valid for up to three years, while Australia's post-study work visa allows for a right to remain for up to four years.

In its recent international education strategy, the UK Government expressed an ambition to “increase ... education exports to £35 billion ... by 2030”.

We all know that the field of international student recruitment is competitive, and the proposals that are outlined in the immigration white paper are not exactly game changers. Given how fast things are changing in Westminster, we do not even know what the current UK Government policy is on the issue. Given the lack of detail and certainty, it is hard to see how that figure of £35 billion will ever be met.

All that relates to what I said earlier about chaos. There is chaos at the heart of the UK Government's thinking. It does not seem to know what it wants or how to get there. It wants to make it harder for talented staff and students to come to this country, but at the same time it says that it wants to increase our share of student recruitment. It wants to end our access to freedom of movement but, at the same time, it expresses a desire to make the UK an inviting place to come for work and study.

Conversely, the Scottish Government has a clearly articulated policy, which is based on evidence and supported by stakeholders. We need a competitive post-study work offer, like the one that we had with the fresh talent scheme. We need a tailored migration policy that is flexible and tailored to Scotland's distinct needs—a policy that is frictionless, that has no cost barriers and that

does not present any burdens to our institutions, staff or students. The sector supports that, businesses support that and, as I heard today in Dundee, staff and students who want to come and contribute to Scotland support that. Therefore, we need to be able to get on and deliver it.

Against the backdrop of a no-deal Brexit, our colleges, universities and scientific research sectors face unprecedented challenges. They are one of Scotland's greatest strengths and are a key component of our resilience and our ability to meet future social and economic challenges. If they suffer, Scotland suffers, and that is why it is important that any migration policy supports our institutions and allows them to thrive.

I invite the chamber to join me in calling on the UK Government to urgently rethink its policies on migration, to extend its no-deal leave to remain to a minimum of four years and, of course, to reintroduce a two-year post-study work visa for students in Scotland.

I commend the motion to Parliament, and I move,

That the Parliament notes that the UK Government's proposed immigration policies will be deeply damaging to Scotland's further education, higher education and research sectors; joins with Scottish institutions and the Russell Group in raising serious concerns about the impact of the three-year European Temporary Leave to Remain policy, which was announced in September 2019, if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, which discriminates against Scottish institutions and students in Scotland studying for four-year degrees; welcomes the huge contribution that international staff and students make to Scotland's universities, colleges and research institutions, as well as the country's economy and communities; notes the success of the Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland scheme, which benefited more than 8,000 graduates between 2005 and 2008; further notes the consensus across parties and with sector bodies such as Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland on the benefits of a flexible post-study work route for Scotland, and calls on the UK Government to urgently amend its proposed policies to ensure that they respect Scotland's unique education system and its population needs, including by extending leave to remain to a minimum of four years and reintroducing a two-year post-study work visa for students at universities and colleges in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I make two little housekeeping points to members. First, if you want to speak in a debate, it is handy if you press your request-to-speak button—I say that for three members who, apparently, are asleep. Secondly, there is some time in hand, so if a speaker wants to take an intervention we will make the time up—until we run out of the time in hand.

15:09

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Members will note that our amendment is not that different in substance from the motion that the Government has lodged, with one notable

difference at the end. That is because we agree with much of the substance of what the minister has said—if not always with the tone. In that spirit, I want to start by welcoming this important debate and by doing something that will be novel for members on the SNP benches and by the standards of this SNP Government, which is to admit and acknowledge that my party has not got everything right on this issue.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Oh, hip, hip, hooray!

Oliver Mundell: I hear a member say, "Hip, hip, hooray!" Does that not just say it all? We are interested in working constructively, because we recognise that attracting the best global talent into our higher and further education and research institutions is vital to the success of the whole of our United Kingdom. Indeed, it is arguable that that will become even more important as we leave the European Union.

I was in favour of leaving the EU. I was one of more than 1 million Scots who voted to leave. However, that does not mean that I want us to sever our ties with Europe or see our country turn in on itself. In a dynamic, international and truly global economy, and in the proud Scottish tradition, we need the brightest and the best not just to study here but to stay and help to grow our country's population and economy, collaborating and contributing. There is no good reason why that cannot continue.

In that context, the Prime Minister makes a very important point, which is that relentless negativity helps no one. I ask members on the SNP benches this: what kind of person wants their own country to fail, to prove that they were right?

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention?

Oliver Mundell: I will not take an intervention from the member at this point.

Members on the Conservative benches are committed to working constructively to find solutions. Even though we have been on different sides of the debate, we all respect the result of the referendum and find common cause in making the best of the opportunities and mitigating the challenges that Brexit brings.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: Will the member take an intervention?

Oliver Mundell: I will take an intervention from the minister first.

Richard Lochhead: In the light of the consensus that the member is fostering, will he say whether he agrees that no deal is the worst

possible outcome for Scotland's further and higher education and research sectors and therefore should not be voted for at any point and should be resisted at every stage?

Oliver Mundell: I am delighted to hear the minister confirm that, after dragging its heels, the SNP will support a deal, because that is what the sector needs. We could have had all the problems sorted and everything tied up by 31 March. It is depressing to hear the minister talk about a trickle of people who are leaving in the face of uncertainty, when we could have had certainty, because we had a good withdrawal agreement on the table, which would have allowed us to move on and address the issues.

That is not to ignore the issues that we debate today or pretend that they do not exist; it is simply to question how we choose to approach them in a tough political climate.

As many members know, my colleague Liz Smith has consistently voiced concerns about the area and advocated for changes. She has already raised the matter with the new Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, and I am confident that the UK Government is listening.

The minister talked about a revolving door. I gently say that he might reflect on how he got his own position—but I do not want to get too political at this point, because I am all for building consensus and working together where we have shared goals and a common interest.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Let me try to steer Mr Mundell away from the politics of all this. I am interested in his line of argument: he is making a strong argument—with which I agree—about the need to attract people to this country. I know that Liz Smith has fought consistently on the issue.

How does Mr Mundell believe that the Conservative Government's stance on migration up to now has contributed in that regard? From my perspective, the Conservative Government's stance on migration—its message and the practicalities—is putting people off coming here. Does Mr Mundell think that there is a need for a change in the Conservative Government's attitude towards migration, which might allow us to realise some of the objectives that he is talking about?

Oliver Mundell: I welcome John Swinney's point. We have seen a reset in approach from the new Government under a new Prime Minister. The issue is about balancing different interests; we need to look at how our immigration system attracts people from not only the EU but right round the world and ensure that we attract those with the skills that our economy needs to grow. That is why the university sector is so important

and why the Conservatives are getting behind what appears to be a cross-party consensus today on the actions that are needed.

These issues are important for our whole society, because the university sector is one of the backbones of a modern economy. If we want to attract new people to live and work in this country, we need our economy to grow and lead the world. Research and innovation are right at the heart of that.

I will break the consensus for a second and go back to the fundamental point that this situation could have been avoided. Some members here who are ringing the alarm bells should look themselves in the mirror and ask what role they have played to try to build consensus and give those in the sector and in wider society the length and the breadth of our country the certainty that they are looking for.

Stuart McMillan: On the issue of consensus, what deal that would have consensus across all the parties that are represented in the House of Commons does Mr Mundell want to see happen?

Oliver Mundell: We have already seen something that could have been that deal—the withdrawal agreement. I voted to leave, and I might have looked for more in that deal about being removed from EU spheres, but I recognised that it was a compromise—it was in the middle and should have appealed to sensible people right across the political spectrum. Sadly, there are too many on both sides who are responsible for the mess in which we now find ourselves.

On these Conservative benches, we have clearly and consistently supported calls for a Brexit deal that protects and supports our university sector and the other sectors that are so important to our economy. That deal could have drawn a line under some of the bitterness and division that we have seen over the past few years and created the political space to focus on not just the challenges but the opportunities that we have as a global leader in education.

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention?

Oliver Mundell: I think that I am in my last minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes you are. It has been very good of Mr Mundell to take lots of interventions, but the member is now winding up.

Oliver Mundell: SNP members, despite all their protests, have had the opportunity to deliver a Brexit deal to protect our universities, businesses and farmers the length and breadth of Scotland on three occasions. Each time, they rejected the deal, while every Scottish Conservative MP advocated for it. Indeed, every Scottish Conservative MP

voted for it in March. Although we agree that we need to address the challenges that are outlined in the motion, we did not need to get to this point—people should think about that.

I move amendment S5M-18767.1, to leave out from “that the UK Government’s” to end and insert:

“the UK Government’s proposed immigration policies and joins with Scottish further education, higher education and research institutions and the Russell Group in raising serious concerns about the impact of the three-year European Temporary Leave to Remain policy, which was announced in September 2019, if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, which presents challenges for Scottish institutions and students in Scotland studying for four-year degrees; welcomes the huge contribution that international staff and students make to Scotland’s universities, colleges and research institutions, as well as the country’s economy and communities; notes the success of the Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland scheme, which benefited more than 8,000 graduates between 2005 and 2008; further notes the consensus across parties and with sector bodies such as Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland on the benefits of a flexible post-study work route for Scotland; calls on the UK Government to review its proposed policies to ensure they work well for Scotland’s unique education system and its population needs, including by extending leave to remain to a minimum of four years and reintroducing a two-year post-study work visa for students at universities and colleges in Scotland; recognises that leaving the EU with a negotiated deal will help bring much needed certainty, and calls on all parties to support the UK Government’s efforts to do so.”

15:17

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in today’s debate on a key issue for our universities, research community and economy. It is unwelcome, and indeed ridiculous, that it is an issue in the first place. On 7 November last year, we debated the safeguarding of Scotland’s research collaborations in the light of Brexit. It is regrettable that the concerns that were raised then have been largely ignored.

On that occasion, I quoted Einstein, who said:

“Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I’m not sure about the former.”

I fear that the intervening months have seen evidence stack up further of the stupidity of Brexit in general and its management by the Tory Government in particular.

We have been told that freedom of movement would end on 31 October, then that it would not. Parliament is suspended, the Prime Minister is in apparent defiance of the law and the uncertainty that we talked about in November is now exponentially greater.

A recent report from researchers at Robert Gordon University highlighted starkly that the uncertainty surrounding immigration status after Brexit is already having a detrimental impact on the mental health and wellbeing of EU citizens.

That shameful situation has been created by the incompetence of the Tory party and will contribute to the problem that Mr Swinney described a moment ago of the unattractiveness of this country as a place for EU citizens to choose for their lives and work.

There can be no doubt that our higher education sector and our scientific research community are world leading. Despite the fact that the sector has faced Scottish Government cuts of around 11 per cent and high levels of uncertainty due to Brexit, it continues to produce world-class and groundbreaking research in all areas. From humanities to artificial intelligence and from medicine to engineering, researchers in Scotland’s institutions lead the way, and we must do all that we can to allow them to continue to do so.

There can be no doubt that the sector is massively underpinned by the contribution of staff and students from the EU and beyond. The briefing that Universities Scotland provided for the debate tells us that more than 10,000 of our university staff are non-UK nationals and that 47 per cent—almost half—of university staff who work on research alone are from overseas. More than 54,000 of our students are international. Most of them are from beyond the European Union and are therefore critical to the income of our institutions, to say nothing of the international reputation of our higher education sector, of which we are so proud.

In the United Kingdom, we should strive to create a welcoming and open environment for the next generation of researchers and students. Instead, there is little doubt that the arbitrary and punitive salary thresholds, the bureaucracy and the cost that are associated with proposed immigration changes will harm the workforce and the ability of our research community to attract the skills that it needs in what is a transient and mobile global sector. Meanwhile, we have the threat of a no-deal transitional scheme that, as the minister pointed out, fails to notice that Scottish degrees are four years long and so will leave students unsure whether they will be able to complete their studies. That is perhaps the worst example of the stupidity that, frankly, seems to be the Tory Government’s specialist subject.

Already, our higher education institutions often find that the existing immigration policy is not fit for purpose. I will mention a specific problem in that regard. Scotland has a rich and diverse community of PhD students. Those people deserve the chance to work in our institutions and to take full advantage of the opportunities that are available to them. However, currently, social science PhD students who are in Scotland on a tier 4 visa cannot take up internship opportunities that are provided by the Scottish graduate school

of social science due to working hours restrictions and the Scottish Government policy on hosting them. There has been some discussion between the Governments on changing that, but I would be grateful if the minister could perhaps use a moment of his time to address the issue so that all our postgraduate researchers can get involved in contributing their expertise to organisations across the country.

If the current approach to immigration is not fit for purpose, what confidence can we have in any new immigration bill that comes forward? Universities Scotland and Universities UK would tell us that the new immigration bill ought to be an opportunity to create a system that works for the higher education and research sectors, that supports PhD recruitment, that attracts the most highly skilled researchers and that allows flexibility for research collaborators. However, the truth is that, deal or no deal, we can have no confidence that the current UK Government understands that, desires such a system or is capable of delivering it. Instead, as with so much of the Brexit shambles, the Government stokes worry and uncertainty daily, and this Parliament must stand four-square against that.

Our view is that the best deal for higher education, as with so much else, would be to remain in the European Union. The Conservative amendment suggests that that outcome is no longer possible, which is why we cannot accept that amendment, no matter how much sympathy the Conservatives may have with some of the other issues that the minister raised. That is why we will back the Government motion at decision time this evening.

15:24

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): It is timely that, as the only Parliament in the UK that is allowed to sit today, we hold the Westminster Government to account for its immigration policy and the impact that it will have on further and higher education in Scotland. As the chaos in Westminster continues, we hear increasingly alarming and anti-democratic language from the Prime Minister. For example, he has said that he would rather die in a ditch than request an extension to the article 50 deadline—making such a request being something that he is now required to do by law—and that he is exploring every possible way to circumnavigate that law to deliver a no-deal Brexit.

Despite the UK Parliament's best efforts, the prospect of crashing out of the EU without a deal remains a possibility, which would be disastrous for universities and colleges in Scotland. Immigration and free movement have underpinned the success of our further and higher education

sectors. More than one fifth of university students in Scotland are from somewhere else. That represents more than 50,000 students, about 31,000 of whom are from outside the EU, which is a higher proportion of international students than in the rest of the UK, reflecting the world-leading status of Scotland's universities. Of course, the benefit of international students coming here is not limited to the skills of those individuals. They enrich our society, contributing to our local and national economies, bringing new cultural experiences and ideas that they integrate into Scottish society, and contributing to the development of a more outward-looking Scotland that is open to the world and comfortable with its place in it.

Many international students also settle in Scotland after their studies, using their expertise and skills to benefit this country. They often fill some of the acute skills gaps from which we suffer. More than 30 per cent of academic staff at universities are from outside Scotland, and that figure rises to almost half for research staff. Such international expertise has ensured that Scotland remains a leading centre of research and innovation. It has driven huge international investments in research and development here, which means that institutions such as the University of Edinburgh's Scottish centre for regenerative medicine and the University of Strathclyde's technology and innovation centre, which is part of the international technology and renewable energy zone in Glasgow, have benefited immensely from international expertise and funding. I commend both of those institutions to all members, because they are well worth visiting. They are excellent examples of the benefits of European collaboration.

However, we are all here today because all that is threatened by the Conservative Government at Westminster. As we edge closer to leaving the EU, with or without a deal, we run the serious risk of seeing that Government's cruel and destructive immigration policies—and the dysfunctional, arbitrary administration of them—extended to EU citizens, who are currently shielded by their right to freedom of movement. That is the immigration policy that has seen people deported to their deaths and has denied child trafficking victims the right to stay in the UK. Whistleblowers have even accused the Home Office of having lied to other European states in order to deport victims of human trafficking, against European law. This summer, the Home Office was called out by 70 senior university research centre leaders for repeatedly refusing visas for researchers from Africa, including Ebola researchers from Sierra Leone. What on earth is the benefit to the UK of denying visas to those who are researching that disease?

Hundreds of thousands more people in Scotland could be subject to immigration rules that are designed to force them out and drain their incomes in the process. The hostile environment policy, which continues to this day, has already given us the Windrush scandal. People with every right to be here had their lives ruined: they were banned from working, evicted from their homes, denied public support—in some cases, medical support—and even deported to countries that they had not seen in decades and with which they had no realistic connection.

While institutional racism was central to the Windrush scandal, one of the key issues that made that generation so vulnerable to the hostile environment was people's lack of records as to their residence and who they were. They lacked such records because they did not need them when they arrived, or for many decades thereafter—they were simply not required in law at that time. Well, EU citizens have not needed those records either. They did not have to apply to any state body to come to the UK. They simply exercised their treaty right to freedom of movement, in the same way that many UK citizens have done elsewhere across the continent.

There is, of course, a new settled status scheme for EU citizens, which is designed to give them such records. However, I have no faith in the Home Office. Already, I have seen cases of EU citizens who have been in this country for decades being denied settled status, allegedly for not having proof of residence, despite it being abundantly obvious and their having decades worth of paperwork to prove their cases. There is a chance that the crimes that the Home Office inflicted on the Windrush generation will be revisited on EU citizens. That is a chance that I am not willing to take, and I know that the majority of members here feel the same way. *[Interruption.]* I thank Clare Adamson for her applause.

We must not only dismantle the hostile environment; it is time that we abolished the Home Office in order to completely tear down the institutional racism that is embedded within it. It is imperative—now more than ever—that immigration policies be devolved to Scotland, in recognition of not just the social, cultural and economic benefits that are brought here by immigrants, but the injustice and rampant criminality that have characterised the UK Government's immigration policies. When we finally have control over immigration here, we must create a free and open system that seizes the opportunities that citizens of the world have to offer us and respects the inherent dignity of all people, regardless of where they come from.

It can be easy to fall into the trap of populist and even racist rhetoric. That is something that has

infected many parties, although it is the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats who are directly responsible for the hostile environment, through the Immigration Act 2014.

Until such time as we are responsible for our own immigration and asylum systems, I support the measures that are contained in the Government's motion. It is clear that the proposal on a three-year temporary leave to remain does not take Scottish universities into consideration, and its amendment would be welcome. The UK Government could have amended it long before now. However, those proposals, along with the fresh talent scheme, only tinker around the edges. They are damage-limitation exercises for what is, at its core, a horrendously racist and discriminatory immigration system. Scotland's colleges and universities, our students and their staff deserve so much better than that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): I am very pleased to say that opening for the Liberal Democrats today, in her first contribution to a debate in our Parliament, is the member of the Scottish Parliament for Shetland, Beatrice Wishart. You have six minutes.

15:31

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am delighted to be here to make my first speech in Parliament. First, though, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Tavish Scott. Tavish dedicated 20 years to the people of Shetland and to this place, and I am sure that we all wish him well in his new role at Scottish Rugby. *[Applause.]*

In my time working in his office, I saw at first hand Tavish's dogged determination to make sure that decision makers did not forget about Shetland. I also saw that advocating for island interests can often be an uphill battle in this Parliament. However, Tavish always persevered. The air discount scheme, the island travel fund, the repatriation of NHS services and even the Shetland mapping requirement will all be legacies of Tavish's time in office. Tavish and I went to the same school—at different times—and I was recently reminded by a former headteacher of the motto of Anderson high school: "Do weel and persevere". Just as Tavish persevered, so will I.

I am glad to be making my debut speech on an issue that will have real consequences for Shetland's future prosperity. Shetland is my home and it matters to me. I grew up there. It is where I raised my children and where I hope my grandchildren will raise theirs. I am proud to represent such a beautiful part of the world, and that beauty will now be obvious to all those on the Government benches who made the trip to

Shetland for the by-election campaign. However, beautiful scenery is not enough to encourage skilled workers and students to make Shetland their home, too.

Shetland has always been welcoming and outward looking. Our geographical position at the crossroads of the North Sea and the north-east Atlantic means that, from Viking and Hanseatic trade routes to the modern fishing industry and energy sector, we have been connected to the global economy. We want to remain connected and attract the brightest and the best to make their homes here. We are in the midst of a merger that will bring together Shetland's further and higher education and training services under one organisation, and that has real potential to attract students from across Europe, with the right support. It could go some way towards addressing the skills shortage that already exists in Shetland and in the UK.

Last month, in Lerwick, I visited Ocean Kinetics, which is a marine engineering and fabrication business, and Mesomorphic, which is a software design company. It was evident that businesses need more support to train and retain highly skilled people who can contribute to our local economy. However, that is not just the local experience. In July, the Open University business barometer reported that 63 per cent of UK organisations are experiencing a skills shortage. Of more concern is that 59 per cent of senior business leaders thought that those shortages will worsen if the UK leaves the EU. I want to be clear that that is not acceptable.

I have first-hand experience of navigating the UK immigration system as an MP's case worker. Working through its complexity and bureaucracy could be frustrating and heartbreaking.

Applications were refused on small technicalities that could have been sorted out with a phone call. Instead, a second application and the payment of more eye-watering fees were required. A cynic could be forgiven for thinking that that is an easy way for the Home Office to increase fee income.

I am angry for our European friends, many of whom have lived here for decades, who are being forced to apply for permission to stay in their homes and communities. They are being exposed to the Tories' hostile environment, and already too many are not getting the status to which they are entitled.

After the shambles and brutality of the past week in Westminster, I have no faith that the Tory Government will introduce any compassionate immigration system in the future. What is more, the way in which the UK Government treated our fishing industry, on advice from the Migration Advisory Committee, by suggesting that

Antipodean gap year students could crew fishing boats, is an insult to those who do what is one of the most dangerous jobs in Britain.

The Scottish Government is rightly calling on the UK Government to respect our four-year university degree system. In turn, the Scottish Government needs to similarly step up and respect the challenges that Shetland is facing. There are things that can be done now to make the isles an even more attractive place to live, work, study and raise a family. Good connectivity is essential. For years, islanders have told the Government that we need fair and full funding for our ferry services. That promise has never been delivered on.

For years, islanders have been told to wait until 2021 for the reaching 100 per cent—R100—programme to reach them with better broadband, but now that commitment has disappeared. The effects of not having decent broadband are significant. If it takes six hours to download a Netflix film, just how are people supposed to access online study material? Access to good broadband is as much of a necessity in today's world as are other utilities such as water and electricity.

Young people will often leave Shetland for higher education and work, and to experience the world. That should be encouraged and facilitated. While our next generation does that, it will be my mission in the Parliament to make sure that, if and when they choose to return, Shetlanders are afforded every benefit that would have been available to them on the mainland. The same goes for those from the mainland and beyond who want to relocate to Shetland, because Shetland is a good place to build a life, too.

I am ambitious for Shetland. As an MSP, I now intend to make sure that the Government is, too. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate, with speeches of six minutes, please. We are a bit tight for time, so will members please take care with the length of their contributions?

15:37

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank Beatrice Wishart for, and congratulate her on making, her first speech in the Parliament. It was a very passionate speech; I can see that Shetland will not be forgotten in the chamber, going forward.

I will set out my personal passion for education, science and Scotland's place at the centre of world-leading research. It brings me great sadness to have to talk about an immigration policy that is of Westminster's making, and which has the

potential to do so much damage to the international standing and reputation of our higher and further education institutes. After all, Scotland's own Winnie Ewing—Madame Ecosse—worked so hard to establish the Erasmus and Comenius programmes, which are at risk due to Brexit, because she knew how vital the exchange of knowledge and people across Europe would be.

Although I welcome the calls for consensus across the chamber, I regret that the Tories' actions in this matter have not been good. After all, as was mentioned by Iain Gray and Ross Greer, the fresh talent initiative was created in Scotland to meet the requirements of our institutions. It was delivered by the Scottish Parliament under Jack McConnell's premiership, and it was adopted by the Tories across the whole of the UK as the post-study work visa. It was then cancelled but, to add insult to injury, special consideration was given to the London School of Economics, the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, which could continue to access its benefits. Until we see some real action from the Conservatives at Westminster in this area, I will remain sceptical about their warm words in the chamber today.

A recent survey of 1,000 staff at the Francis Crick Institute in London, which is one of the largest biomedical research centres in Europe, revealed that 78 per cent of EU scientists at the institute have stated that they are less likely to stay in the UK; 51 per cent of all staff stated that they are less likely to stay in the UK; 45 per cent of lab heads said that Brexit had already affected the recruitment of new scientists, and it has meant that they are excluded from EU programmes and that they are facing increased costs after the fall of pound; and 97 per cent of those who responded said that a no-deal Brexit would be bad for UK science.

In response to that report, Dame Ann Glover, the current chair of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a former scientific adviser to the EU, said:

"International collaboration and a sustained deep science partnership with the EU is vital in supporting scientific progress and social and economic well-being. A no-deal or a hard Brexit puts this at risk and I reiterate the call I made earlier this year to the Prime Minister to take all necessary steps to secure an agreement on science and research in the Brexit negotiations which ensures the closest possible research relationship with the EU."

Those concerns should not be taken lightly; such partnership is vital.

A recent House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry on Brexit, science and innovation and preparations for no deal was published, which I recommend that all members read about. In response, the RSE produced a

report: I will read from its summary. Any of the concerns that are expressed could be applied to any aspect of Brexit. The RSE says that such an outcome would have a "deleterious effect" on the UK's research endeavours. Although the UK Government has sought to reassure the science community, the RSE says that there is

"a significant lack of clarity and detail".

On not being able to access the many benefits of the horizon 2020 programme, the RSE says that there are

"no firm details on what the contingency arrangements will look like".

On on-going costs and the impact on universities, the RSE says that we are facing

"very uncertain and unpredictable territory".

The document goes on to highlight Erasmus and its importance, saying that it is important that

"the needs and particular circumstances of the devolved nations are taken account of."

There we have it: serious concerns from the brightest and best brains in our country in the Royal Society of Edinburgh, highlighting the devastating impact that Brexit will have.

I convene the Education and Skills Committee, which is one of the committees that has representation from all the parties in Parliament. We wrote a unanimous letter to Ms Priti Patel about our concerns. They have been highlighted already, but it is worth reiterating that the European temporary leave to remain and the proposed three-year visa will not help Scottish universities. Of all EU students on undergraduate courses in Scotland, 94.8 per cent expect the length of their study to be greater than three years. A cost of between £400 and £1,000 will not be viable and will not attract EU students in the future.

15:43

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On behalf of Conservative members, I welcome Beatrice Wishart to Parliament. She gave a thoughtful maiden speech, some of which I agreed with and some of which I did not agree with. It is good to have another islander in Parliament who can work with us to support and promote the issues that are unique to island communities.

The UK has for long been known as one of the major international destinations for the world's leading academics and researchers. In Scotland, in particular, we have punched well above our weight, not only in the quality of our university and research sector, but in attracting talent and engaging in open collaboration. In large part, that

is thanks to Scotland's long and well-developed traditions of higher education and the hard work of our institutions in building connections internationally.

Although the United Kingdom leaving the European Union forms the backdrop to today's debate, that openness and pull have never ended at the borders of the EU. We can look at the universities in our own regions and see some of the bonds that have been built across the globe. In my own part of Scotland, the University of the Highlands and Islands has partnered with institutions as far afield as Japan. However, that is not to diminish the cross-border co-operation that has taken place with our nearest neighbours in the EU.

Time and again, successive Governments of all stripes have emphasised the importance of the university and research sector in our immigration policy, and that must remain the case. There is no shortage of arguments for skilled migration in the sector. Universities Scotland has set out evidence of the benefits of mobility of talent to its member institutions, but there is the wider benefit of having a global outlook, the benefits of which might be less tangible but which, to many of us, are just as clear. The reality is that we exist in a competitive international marketplace, in which an increasing number of competitors are seeking a position on the global stage. Quite simply, if our universities are to be world ranking, we must attract world-ranking talent.

Members of the Government's party will be well aware of the work that my colleague Liz Smith has done with them in the past in this area, and they will know that our approach on post-study work, in particular, is such that common ground can be found. When reasonable suggestions have been made that have had cross-party support, we have been willing to work to persuade the Home Office and others to look into them.

In his motion, Richard Lochhead points to the temporary leave to remain policy that has been proposed by the UK Government. I welcome the positive movement here to make things easier for students from EU countries in the event of a no-deal Brexit. That is the sort of contingency planning that should be taking place, even if we hope that it is never deployed, but I am far from immune to the concerns that have been raised by bodies across the sector about the three-year limit and the issues that are caused by four-year undergraduate honours degrees being the norm at universities here in Scotland. As we will all be aware, Clare Adamson has written to the Home Secretary on that point. The issues that she raised are reasonable and well founded. It is important that, when we prepare, we get things right.

As far as existing university and research staff are concerned, it is worth again noting that the EU settlement scheme is now not only a policy but a reality on the ground. During the period of free movement of labour, thousands of people have made their homes here in the UK and have contributed to our country. It is positive that the UK Government has recognised that, regardless of the position on withdrawal or the future relationship.

We should also consider academic and research collaboration. For many years now, EU institutions have been supportive and helpful in building such links between the member states. What will replace those structures is a legitimate question to ask any Government, particularly one that seeks to take us out of the EU without a deal, but we can look to examples of situations in which successful collaboration takes place with institutions outside the EU. The UK leaving the EU can be an opportunity to examine those links and our approach globally, and to remember that more can and should be done beyond the EU's borders.

Of course, an orderly exit from the EU must respect the fact that the political background has changed, and must recognise that certain structures might no longer exist. There is undoubtedly still work to be done, and I hope that an agreed transition period, such as the one that was proposed as part of the withdrawal agreement, can aid that process.

There is a common theme. Many of the issues that I have mentioned can be addressed in the short term through an orderly exit from the EU. For those that still arise, an orderly exit with transitional arrangements will provide the space for discussion of the future relationship with the EU, as well as giving government at all levels space to develop policy to adapt to the new political climate.

That will require that a deal be reached, and in order to agree a deal, our friends and colleagues in the UK Parliament must vote for one. I support that, and I hope that, after the opportunity for some reflection over the summer, the other parties in the Parliament will recognise that need, too.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the member give way on that point?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I am afraid that I am just finishing.

Scotland is an open and welcoming country for people who want to come here from any part of the world to bring their talents and contribute to our society, but what seems to be overlooked by members in this chamber is that the UK is, too. We need only look at our history—as well as the many people in this country who can, in recent

generations, trace their past to migration—to see the evidence of that.

Although a majority of people in the UK voted to leave the EU, few want to reverse Britain's open approach to skilled migration. Most recognise the need for a fair immigration system. After Brexit, that system can be tailored to the particular needs of this country. That requires the right approach and is, ultimately, a process that begins with politicians who might have disagreed in the past about getting a deal helping us to move on from the current stalemate.

15:50

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I, too, welcome Beatrice Wishart to the chamber and thank her for her thoughtful speech.

As the member of the Scottish Parliament for Glasgow Kelvin, I have the incredible privilege of having the University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, the University of Strathclyde, the City of Glasgow College and many research centres in my constituency. It is an enormous privilege to be able to serve them.

I am seriously concerned about the impact of Westminster's proposals on those institutions, but it is not just the institutions that I am concerned about. I also have concerns about the individuals who work in them, who live here and who are now being left in limbo by mobility restrictions and planned immigration policies. I have met many of them throughout my constituency. There are families who do not know their future, and people are really hurting. With that hurt comes anger—they are angry that this is happening to them.

Whole communities are affected: that includes the many small businesses in those communities, which serve the people there. I would have thought that not just in Scotland but in the UK as a whole, we should be embracing multicultural and international communities. We should not be trying to destroy them but, unfortunately, that is what will happen in some areas in my constituency, where people just do not know whether they will be living here or not. The Conservatives should be thinking about that.

I want to quote what some of the universities in my constituency think about what is happening. Professor Cam Donaldson, who is the pro vice-chancellor for research and enterprise and vice-principal of Glasgow Caledonian University, said:

"Mobility of staff and students within the educational and research environments of universities is a fundamental tenet of our existence, largely because of the benefits it brings in terms of diversity"

and educational experience. He added that the economic and social benefits for Scotland are important. He went on to say:

"In the last few weeks alone these cases have come to my attention. Brexit has been explicitly cited in both cases ... Our leadership of a major EU Horizon 2020 grant application being switched to a colleague in the Netherlands ... A member of staff from another EU country deciding to leave us for employment in another EU Member State that is not his home one.

Additionally, as the UK's number 1 university for Erasmus+ Project funding, we are extremely worried about the impact of decisions about that programme on the financial position of the University."

The University of Glasgow has stated:

"Over 950 of the University of Glasgow's staff are non-UK EU nationals ... There are also over 3,000 EU students at the University of Glasgow".

It pointed out that

"13.2% of the University's total workforce and 21% of the University's academic research staff"

are non-UK EU nationals.

Anton Muscatelli, who is the principal of the University of Glasgow and chair of the Russell group, has warned that a no-deal Brexit could cause a talent drain from Scotland's universities, and has warned of the lack of clarity it would bring to the university sector in Scotland. He said:

"A no-deal would cause such dislocation and such uncertainty that that flow of talent would come to a halt. We want to avoid that.

There needs to be a very clear message from the UK Government around how European citizens would be welcomed into this country."

The University of Strathclyde, in its evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee, stated:

"The proportion of EEA staff in Academic Professional roles is currently 20% and much higher in some subject areas—as a result we have significant concerns about the potential impact of Brexit on our ability to recruit and retain staff in this category."

It added:

"In relation to prominence of EEA staff in particular areas, our Engineering, Science and Business faculties have the greatest proportion of EEA staff, with a smaller proportion ... in our Humanities and Social Sciences faculty",

with a

"particularly high concentration of EU staff within modern languages, physics and ... Engineering disciplines".

It also said:

"We have experienced some difficulty in the recruitment of individual senior EEA staff which is indicated to be directly related to the uncertainty about the ability of academics working at UK institutions to access EU research funding."

Research funding is an important issue. I have visited universities, including Glasgow university, that rely on EU funding. That has also been referred to by the Conservatives.

I have provided comments from three universities and I have spoken to constituents in my area who are living in limbo. It is time that we had some straight answers about what will happen—not only to people in our constituencies, but to the universities.

15:55

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I will begin by addressing the arguments from members on the Conservative benches. I acknowledge that they have attempted to adopt a consensual tone and a somewhat different position from that of their UK counterparts. However, I must object to the attempt to take the politics out of this issue, because it is simply not possible. The acceleration, under Boris Johnson, towards a no-deal Brexit is one of the very real reasons why we are having this debate—a point underlined by the fact that the UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions resigned over the UK Government's concentration and focus on no deal. The argument that a deal is there to be had if only for the acquiescence of Opposition parties is simply nonsense, because Tory MPs have rejected the deal time after time in the House of Commons. Indeed, the lack of agreement within their own party is underlined by the expulsion of 21 MPs in recent days.

Even if the Government at Westminster wanted to change direction and policy, Parliament is simply unable to sit because of prorogation and the highly unconstitutional manoeuvres undertaken by Boris Johnson and his colleagues in Government. The phrase “take back control” has never seemed more like a sick joke than it does now.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The member has been very critical of what he considers to be our inconsistency. Will he explain whether he thinks that the Labour Party has been consistent in its line about Brexit?

Daniel Johnson: I would be more than happy to. We have been consistent that whatever deal is reached must protect jobs, rights and our economy—the very issues that we are debating here. Those were the conditions in our six tests—we have been clear and consistent on that—and the deal utterly failed all of them.

As a number of speakers outlined clearly, we are already seeing the effect of Brexit on higher education. Research funding has become more problematic because of the realities of Brexit. Recruiting people from other parts of the world has

become more difficult because of the fears of Brexit. That should perhaps be no surprise, because, ultimately, knowledge does not respect borders. The pursuit of the acquisition of new knowledge is, by definition, an international endeavour. The fears created by Brexit will therefore be a concern.

Other members have pointed out the experience in their constituencies, and mine is no different. I am very fortunate to have the royal observatory and the University of Edinburgh's King's buildings in my constituency. I have seen the wave tank in King's buildings and have been on a number of visits to observe experiments relating to climate change and wave technologies. I am also pleased that my constituency contains the Higgs centre for innovation, which fosters collaboration between business, science and technology research. Every time that I make such a visit I am struck by the international spectrum of people who are taking part in the research—I meet people from all parts of the world. Indeed, if one looks at the research pages of Edinburgh University, which I did as a simple bit of research prior to this debate, one is struck not just by the sheer number of research papers—more than 6,000 a year—but by the fact that practically every other paper has an international name beside it. Research is an international endeavour. The numbers back that up: 2,500 students in Edinburgh University, and a quarter of academics and half of all researchers throughout Scotland, are from other parts of the world.

The funding issues are of equal concern. In Edinburgh university alone, there are 91 horizon 2020 projects, and 10 per cent of all its research funding comes from the EU. That research is at risk. The very basis of research, and our ability to carry it out in a world-class and world-leading way, are in jeopardy because of the Brexit proposals that we have in front of us.

The issue affects not just research, as some 63 per cent of taught postgraduate courses are filled by people from other parts of the world. That is vital income for our universities, which struggle with the funding settlement from the Scottish Government and require that income stream to ensure that they can teach all undergraduates.

We must look at the post-study work visa. It is crazy that we extend the invitation for people to come and study in this country, and then simply make it impossible for them to continue to work here. We have to look at the three-year temporary leave to remain arrangement, which is simply insufficient for our universities.

Ultimately, we live in a global world. Success in pursuing knowledge is about bringing barriers down, because the reality is that borders do not solve problems. They create them.

16:02

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I fully support the motion by the Scottish Government and I will be voting for it. I ask the Parliament to speak with one voice on an issue of huge economic and social importance to Scotland.

First, I want to touch on two points. Jamie Halcro Johnston—who, sadly, has left the chamber—spoke about Brexit being the backdrop to this debate. It is not the backdrop—it is fundamental. I was pleased that Oliver Mundell took my intervention earlier on, but, when he spoke about the withdrawal agreement in his response, he was telling this chamber and the population of Scotland that he is happy to put Scotland at an economic disadvantage compared to Northern Ireland. I am saddened that Mr Mundell thinks that Scotland should have such a disadvantage compared to anywhere else in the UK.

The Scottish Government's motion highlights Scotland's four-year degrees and the UK Government's three-year European temporary leave to remain policy. The UK Government policy would place Scottish institutions at a disadvantage, which is yet another example of a UK Government whose focus ends at the Scottish border. Even the Scottish Tories recognise that—hence their expression of concern in their amendment.

As I have highlighted in this chamber before, I studied in France twice, and in Germany and Sweden, through an Erasmus-Socrates scheme, and also received funding from the European social fund. I know how important my opportunity was to study elsewhere, meet people from other nations and learn through the journey. The UK's leaving with no deal guarantees that obstacles will be put in the way of such opportunities, which will make our society poorer as a result.

Under the proposals in the immigration white paper, EU students will require a study visa, which will deter some EU nationals from coming here, and around 9 per cent of all students at Scottish universities are EU domiciled. Around 21 per cent of research and teaching staff and 27 per cent of research-only staff are EU citizens.

This debate highlights the contrast between a Scottish Government that is concerned about the 9 per cent of the Scottish population who are students and a UK Government that shows no interest at all in the 8 per cent of the UK population who are in Scotland.

Earlier today, Ross Greer and I answered questions from pupils from St Columba's high school in Gourrock. We were both very much in agreement as to how important freedom of movement has been—and is—for Scotland. With

the Scottish population increasing, thanks mainly to EU immigration, the UK Government's proposals are very much a retrograde step.

There is already population decline in my community in Inverclyde—we are doing worse than every other local authority across the country. I do not say that with any pride. I accept that we have many challenges and that we do not have a university in my constituency, but we have an international population and scientists who live locally. Leaving the EU, whether with a deal or with no deal, is, in effect, dropping the portcullis to stop people entering. Who would have thought that a UK Government would do such a thing?

The fresh talent initiative, which was introduced by a Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive, was a positive intervention that all parties across the chamber supported. That is telling. We need a fresh talent 2 initiative and a tailored immigration system with devolved powers in a UK framework to allow us to set visa rules and criteria to meet our needs.

The Tory amendment wants us to support the efforts to secure a deal. With the UK Government in meltdown, shutting down the so-called “mother of all Parliaments” and losing Government members hand over fist, and in the light of Amber Rudd's claim at the weekend that the Prime Minister's actions are aimed at a no-deal exit, how can we trust a word that the UK Government says? The House of Commons has been shut down for five weeks and debate and discussion have been closed down, so the Prime Minister has plenty of time on his hands. I genuinely urge the Scottish Tories to highlight to the Prime Minister the concerns that have been raised in the Scottish Parliament, which is getting on with the day job—unlike the Prime Minister, who is shirking his responsibilities.

In conclusion, Prime Minister—I am sorry; I meant Presiding Officer. I am sorry for the insult. The chaos of London's Parliament is having a detrimental effect on Scotland, and that will continue. Catherine Heymans, who is a renowned professor of astrophysics at the University of Edinburgh, has indicated that she is shifting the majority of her research activities to the University of Bonn. She is doing that because of Brexit, because 90 per cent of her research funding is from the EU, and because she does not believe that that funding will be replaced if she remains in the UK.

Brexit, with a deal or with no deal, will be a disaster for our world-class university and scientific research sectors. It will also be a disaster for Scotland's economy and our social fabric. I urge the Scottish Tories to do something right for a change and stand up for Scotland and its science

and research sectors, because their constituents will thank them for doing so.

16:07

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am grateful to be speaking in this debate about the future of our university and scientific research sectors. The importance of higher education and scientific research in Scotland and throughout the UK is unquestioned. In the centuries in which our education institutions have existed, one thing that has not changed has been the vast range of fantastic talent that passes through their doors. It is not just world-famous scientists, philosophers and economists who thrive in those sectors. For many children growing up in Scotland, going to university is a goal that can fuel aspirations and have an unmistakable impact on their future.

The motion explicitly mentions the effect of immigration on education and scientific research in Scotland. Scotland's population growth is typically quite low, and it goes without saying that the uncertainty of the current situation in the UK poses a concern. However, there are other determinants of population growth besides immigration to the UK, and it would be simplistic to blame Brexit alone for changes in migration patterns.

The United Kingdom is proud of its universities and colleges—and rightly so. We have a strong portfolio of academic success. I must mention the fantastic modern Forth Valley College in my Central Scotland region. However, it would be remiss of me to speak in a debate about the future of the higher education sector without mentioning several problems that it currently faces.

Since the SNP came to power, the number of Scottish students who go to Scottish universities and colleges has fallen. Over the past year, the numbers have decreased by more than 1,000. It is unbelievable that we keep hearing about straight-A students being denied entry into Scottish universities. That is seriously just not right. It must be truly heartbreaking for a child who has studied hard to achieve top marks in their highers and has succeeded in achieving their desired results to ultimately be told that that was not good enough to achieve their goal of going to a university in Scotland. The SNP's cap on student places means that Scottish students can access only half the number of courses at Scottish universities that pupils south of the border can access.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member take an intervention?

Alison Harris: If the minister does not mind, I will make some progress.

Those problems existed before Brexit and will continue to exist if nothing is done.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member give way?

Alison Harris: No. I am going to make progress.

When I saw that the Government's motion referred to the scientific research sector, I recalled a recent visit to a research and manufacturing company that is based in my region. It is looking into fabulous innovation in new cancer treatments, and I was left—and remain—completely in awe of the work that it is undertaking. The company's vital research has the potential to transform lives and, I hope, cure some of the more serious illnesses that exist in today's world. We have a real opportunity to develop home-grown scientific research talent here in Scotland and throughout the UK.

Unfortunately, the number of candidates who are pursuing qualifications in science, technology, engineering and maths in Scotland's schools has dropped over the past five years. Alongside that drop, there has been a narrowing of subject choice for children who enter secondary 4, which means that it grows less and less likely that future generations will have prolonged experience of STEM subjects before going into further education and work. Realistically, that can translate into only one thing: fewer young people going into the sciences. We need to focus and capitalise on the opportunities that are available for Scotland's children. Our children are the future of the scientific research sector in Scotland, and they are being let down by the education system.

I will not pretend that there are not concerns for those who are working in the scientific research at present. There are funding and investment issues, and the recruitment and retention of staff has also become an issue. Those issues are real, and Brexit is a reality. As my colleague Oliver Mundell pointed out, SNP MPs voted against the UK withdrawal agreement three times, so we could now have moved on from the situation in which we find ourselves.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Alison Harris: No. I am sorry, but I am going to continue.

We need to get ourselves out of groundhog day, instead of keeping going round in circles. I am not alone in that thinking. Most people to whom I speak, whether it is on the streets, in shops or, indeed, in the local petrol station, are looking for all parties to grow up and to start resolving our problems. People are looking for all of us to come together and have a sensible debate, instead of continuing with the blame culture that is used widely across this Parliament.

As I said, this is about the future of our children, and we simply cannot continue to let them down. It

is easy to lose sight of the reality of the situation, and it is vital that we remain focused on the current issues that are faced by the university and research sectors.

16:13

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome this afternoon's debate. Scotland has a strong university and scientific research sector, which has grown in significance in recent decades. We have high international ratings, and the sector contributes significantly to our economy and to the vitality and creativity of our country.

In my region of Mid Scotland and Fife, I am proud to have the University of St Andrews, the University of Stirling and the University of the Highlands and Islands, at Perth College. Those institutions bring huge value to the region, bring students and staff from around the world to work and study, bring cultural diversity to the region and help to encourage talented individuals, with the skills that we need, to settle in the region and contribute to its future.

We face a skills shortage in key areas in science and in roles that are critical to the provision of healthcare and education. Mobility is important in allowing us to meet those demands, and maintaining opportunities for people to study and to start their career here helps us to be an attractive destination for skilled and talented professionals.

The exchange of talent is important, and the benefits last beyond graduation. Evidence shows that international graduates are more likely to do business with the UK as a result of studying here, and a high proportion of those graduates plan to build professional links with organisations in the UK.

The process of leaving the European Union is complicated, divisive and very uncertain. Recent weeks have seen the prospect of no deal become the pursuit of some in Government and there have been attempts by Opposition parties and former members of the Government to prevent that outcome. The UK Parliament is now suspended for an unreasonable length of time, at a time of great uncertainty, when accountability should be enhanced, not avoided.

However, for today's debate we need to pause. If we stand back from the immediate situation—which is difficult to do because it is so pressing and significant to everything else that happens after it is resolved—we can perhaps agree this afternoon to some principles and solutions for what the landscape needs to look like for the university and research sector if the UK is no longer a member of the EU.

The motion raises a number of issues that must be addressed if the needs of Scottish institutions are to be met. In my committee work, we have heard about the lack of understanding of devolution among UK Government departments. There is a feeling that the enthusiasm and knowledge of the early days of devolution have dissipated and that the civil service has fewer members with a working knowledge of the Scottish Parliament.

The announcement of the European temporary leave to remain period of three years to meet the needs of an undergraduate degree indicates that there is ignorance of the Scottish university sector. It is disappointing that, following clear evidence from the sector, pressure from Scottish MPs and correspondence from the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee, the UK Government has indicated no change in policy. It is not acceptable for students in Scotland to be disadvantaged by having to pay a significant fee to convert to a tier 4 international student visa in their final year.

As a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, I have also taken evidence on the future of the Erasmus scheme, the benefits of which Universities Scotland has outlined in its briefing for members today. More than 2,500 people at Scotland's universities did a study or work exchange through Erasmus in 2016-17.

The committee also heard about the number of college students and staff who benefit from the scheme and the extent to which Scotland benefits—it receives a larger share than would be expected for a country of its population size.

There are still question marks about the scheme's direction, but there is a degree of security until 2020 and an indication of willingness to continue with that or a similar model, although there are no guarantees. The prospect of no deal disrupts that, and the UK could leave by default and exchanges would be possible only through bilateral agreements, with potentially complicated visa systems.

If Erasmus survives as a model of exchange, it will likely become limited to the more resourced and internationally connected institutions, which will limit access and opportunity for the breadth of students and staff that it currently serves.

We are set to lose a lot by leaving the EU, but we must not lose sight of the value of international education exchanges and we must work to continue a scheme that offers broad opportunities.

The UK leaving the EU means a change to the immigration system. To imagine what that might look like, we have the UK Government white paper on immigration, which has been broadly criticised

for failing to recognise the needs of our economy and the role that migration plays in Scotland.

We face a demographic challenge in Scotland. At the moment, that challenge is perhaps similar to that faced by parts of England, but, in coming years, ours is predicted to become more difficult and will lead to labour shortages in key public services and the private sector. The white paper's solutions do not offer a sustainable solution for Scotland.

I believe that, in the event of leaving the EU, the UK needs to have a coherent immigration policy across the whole of the UK, to avoid the need for any border checks and restrictions on movement for UK citizens. However, in that future model, it should be possible to have flexibility and tailored policies that meet particular needs, whether those are sectoral or geographical.

The fresh talent scheme, which operated in Scotland between 2005 and 2008 before a model was adopted across the UK, is an example of a divergent policy. My understanding is that it was not easy to craft a scheme between two Governments, but a solution was found and the scheme was successful. The post-study work visa provided opportunities for students who had successfully studied in Scotland and gave opportunities for our businesses and society to take advantage of their education. I was the Labour representative on the cross-party group led by the then minister, Humza Yousaf, and across the Parliament we put together a strong case based on fact and reason to argue for the return of the scheme. Those arguments and the cross-party consensus that was achieved still stand, and a UK Government that wishes to represent the whole of the UK should adopt that approach.

The Scottish Government has set out its ambitions in "Scotland's Population Needs and Migration Policy: Summary Paper", and I will soon meet the minister to discuss the proposals. However, we all need to do more than wish a workable solution into being, and the Scottish Government has the greater resources with which to act. I accept that the current UK Government is intransigent, but it might not be in power for much longer. Migration will be a key issue in future years and we need a solution that works for our all society and our economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Gillian Martin, to be followed by—I am sorry, Mr Stewart, I was about to get your name wrong. I insist on wanting to call you something else, for some reason—that sounded very bad; I apologise.

I call Gillian Martin, to be followed by Alexander Stewart.

16:20

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I think that this is the fourth debate that I have been involved in on the potential detrimental effects of the UK Government's post-Brexit policies on Scottish universities. Hard or soft Brexit, deal or no deal, the potential damage that could be done by short-sighted and ill-thought-out immigration policies has been a common thread throughout my speeches in all of those debates. I make it clear that I do not think that the UK Government has to have a secure deal with the EU in order to make sensible immigration proposals.

Ahead of this debate, I looked into the salary scales of academic support staff and academic staff at the University of Aberdeen for reference as we consider the current proposals for salary thresholds for work visa eligibility, as mooted by this month's Home Office minister, Priti Patel. As we speak, the proposed threshold is £30,000, which is already above the UK median annual salary of £28,600. We also know that Iain Duncan Smith and the badly named Centre for Social Justice recommend a threshold of £36,000, in line with the threshold for foreign nationals from outside the EU. I hope that Priti Patel has ruled out that increase. However, I cannot find any record of her doing so, although I have looked. The white paper does not confirm a level of future salary, so this issue is still a source of great worry to many people.

Research support staff at the University of Aberdeen start on £17,000 a year, in line with living wage requirements, and, at the highest grade, their salaries come in at £29,176. The majority of support staff are in the salary bracket of £20,000 to the mid-20s of thousands of pounds. By support staff, I mean laboratory managers, research assistants and lab technicians. Those are highly trained and highly qualified specialists who are involved in many core facilities and without whom no vital research would get done. Currently, all those posts would fall below the salary threshold that is proposed by the UK Government, and we know that around a third of those support staff are from outside the UK, with the vast majority coming from other EU countries.

Moving on to the academic positions within the university, post-doctoral research fellows could expect to have a salary of around £32,000, but many academics at entry level, in the year between handing in their PhD thesis and getting their award, are on a salary of around £28,000. With the proposed salary threshold of £36,000, we would lose post-doctoral fellows from other EU countries and, even with the threshold of £30,000, the ability for people to remain here during the gap between handing in their PhD and taking up a fellowship would be lost. What would those people

do? Would they just go home and not come back to Scotland?

We must not forget colleges. The starting salary of a college lecturer is also well under the £30,000 threshold, so colleges could lose many future staff members.

We know that 30 per cent of UK academic staff is made up of non-UK, foreign-born citizens. That means that a third of current university staff who have come to work here from outside the UK would currently not qualify for a work visa under the terms that are proposed by the Home Office. That talent drain will have a lasting and direct detrimental effect on Scottish students and our international students. That was the crux of my intervention on the minister. What will the effect be on our students?

I whole-heartedly agree with points that were made in the publication on this issue by the Russell group, which represents 24 UK universities, including the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow. It has said that a salary threshold should not go higher than £21,000. It has also asked for part-time work and flexible work to be taken into account and for a pro-rata calculation to form part of the conditions. If that is not done, the Home Office will be further disadvantaging those with caring responsibilities and, in practice, excluding many female workers.

I also agree that the tier 1 exceptional talent visa scheme should be expanded to cover people of talent from all levels. Salary should not be the criteria there at all.

I highlight again the self-harm of the scrapping of the post-study work visa. Not only must the temporary leave to remain policy for European nationals take account of the duration of Scottish degrees, as so many members said, but we should do what we can to encourage graduates from EU countries to give us the economic and social benefit of their talents, by offering them post-study work visas. Let us not forget that the post-study work visa was taken away from our graduates; we can only guess at the economic deficit that has been created in the seven years since the visa was scrapped.

Scotland's universities are dealing with a huge amount of uncertainty about the loss of EU funding, and teaching and research vacancies are going unfilled as talent from other EU countries rejects the prospect of an unwelcoming UK. The UK Government is the source of all that, and its right-wing-appeasing immigration policy is making matters 10 times worse. It is high time that we had control over immigration in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mr Alexander Stewart, to be followed by Richard Lyle.

16:25

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I answer to many things, as you know, but in the chamber I use my full Sunday name.

I welcome the opportunity to take part in today's debate on the important issue of the impact of the UK Government's planned immigration policy and mobility restrictions on Scotland's university and scientific research sectors.

As colleagues said, the Scottish Conservatives have always taken a slightly different view on such matters from that of our UK counterparts. I pay tribute to Liz Smith, who has fought tirelessly in that regard. We have consistently supported the introduction of a new post-study work visa. The previous system should have been retained, but there were too many flaws and loopholes in it. A more flexible system is possible, which I like to think would benefit the university sector and the wider Scottish economy.

Although we take a somewhat different view on the issue from that of our Westminster colleagues, we do not want a differentiated immigration system for Scotland. The Confederation of British Industry Scotland, the Food and Drink Federation Scotland, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and NFU Scotland have all spoken out against differentiation. It is clear that a distinct immigration system simply would not work.

Clare Adamson: Will the member take an intervention?

Alexander Stewart: I will not do so at the moment. I want to make progress.

It is important that we all remember this Scottish Government's record when it comes to universities. The SNP Administration has cut funding to every university. In my region, Mid Scotland and Fife, I have the University of St Andrews, the University of Stirling, Perth College, which is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands, and Forth Valley College, all of which have indicated that they are struggling financially. That is a fact that none of us can deny. There has been a reduction of nearly £400 million in the past five years—that is about £130 million in real terms—and Universities Scotland estimates that Scottish university budgets will contract by a further 1.8 per cent this year. We cannot accept that everything in the garden is rosy. We acknowledge that there are difficulties. The facts speak for themselves, and the institutions are telling us what is taking place.

The UK Government, however, has shown its commitment to the university sector by guaranteeing horizon 2020 research funding even if the UK leaves the EU without a deal. I do not

want us to leave without a deal; none of us wants that to happen. It is vital that we secure a deal that will support our universities and research facilities.

The UK Government has also committed to covering the costs of Erasmus+ and the European solidarity corps until the end of 2020—only 2020, but at least the funding is secure for that time, and it is important that we work together to ensure that it continues.

Richard Lochhead: Will the member explain how Brexit will help universities to address the financial challenges that he suggests are faced by the higher education sector?

Alexander Stewart: As I said, we need to work together to try to manage the process, because Brexit is happening—the United Kingdom made that decision and we need to honour the decision. I want to work collaboratively to ensure that Brexit works for us, because it is happening. We need to ensure that universities and research centres receive the funding that I mentioned.

I accept that EU research funding is important, but we must not forget that more than six times more funding comes from the UK than from the EU, which is vital. We also have the Scottish funding council. Those are opportunities for us to continue to work with our European neighbours and partners, case by case, when it is of benefit to both sides. Collaboration is vitally important; that been proved many times before.

Schemes such as Erasmus+ can be transformational for those who take part. We already know that; individuals and organisations tell us that. It is vital that we work with those outwith the EU as well as with its 27 other members. Yesterday, I was at the University of Stirling to talk about city deals. It has in excess of 100 nationalities there, all supporting it for the future. The current political declaration that has been agreed between the UK and the EU states that the UK could continue to participate in such schemes if there were to be a fair and appropriate financial contribution, which is only right and proper.

However, we must look at the record of the SNP; my colleague Alison Harris spoke about the decrease in the number of students in Scotland's universities by more than 1,000 in the past year alone—about 4 per cent—which is totally unacceptable in the circumstances. The cap on student places further disadvantages Scottish students in the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service clearing, and we have spoken about the difficulties and comparisons with south of the border.

It is important that we respect the referendum result and leave the European Union. We all want to have a managed exit and a deal—that is what is

important. We have had opportunities to progress the situation with regard to no deal. Working together with our colleagues in the UK Government, we can ensure that students in Scotland can have a thriving research sector that will prosper for us all. That is exactly what we want. If we work together, we can achieve so much more.

16:32

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I did not have the opportunity to go to university. Instead, I entered the world of work early, but I pledged to myself that my two children would not be the same and that they would have the chance to go to university—they did so, which made my wife and I very proud.

I did that because I believe that the opportunity to learn is of the utmost importance and that we should work to make it a reality for all. In Scotland, we are home to some of the most highly rated research institutions in the world. Indeed, some of the best students in Europe actively choose to study and work in Scotland and EU researchers are driving forward our science and innovation. We rightly have an international outlook, which makes us proud to be a destination of choice for students and academics the world over. That is all threatened by Brexit and the related hostile immigration policies of the UK Government, which should not be allowed to stymie Scotland's scientific and economic progress.

For me, immigration issues are not just political—they are personal. My mother-in-law was Dutch and my father-in-law was Lithuanian. The ability to live, learn and love without barriers is of the utmost importance. If they had not come to Scotland, I would not have met my wife or had my children or my glorious grandchildren. It makes us think, does it not?

Under the current UK Government proposals in the immigration white paper, EU students will require a study visa, which will place an additional burden on students and universities and potentially deter EU nationals from coming here. The perfect illustration of just how little the UK Government knows or cares about Scotland is its proposed temporary leave to remain scheme, which would fall short of covering students who are studying for a four-year degree in Scotland—it truly beggars belief. The suggestion that EU students will have to apply for a visa for a further year at a cost of up to £840 is an outrage and must be dropped.

Scotland absolutely must have a tailored migration system, with devolved powers within a UK framework, to allow us to set visa rules and criteria to meet Scotland's most acute needs.

Frankly, moving EEA nationals on to a visa system could act as a barrier to skilled researchers who wish to work in Scotland.

I never tire of saying that Scotland did not vote for Brexit and that the Scottish Government believes that it will be damaging for our economy, our communities and our reputation. It is not just me who is saying that, because the higher education sector in Scotland also has concerns regarding our leaving the EU. The loss of freedom of movement will make it more difficult to attract and retain EU staff and students. We will lose access to significant research funding and collaboration opportunities such as those that are provided by horizon 2020 and we will not be able to participate in a wide range of EU programmes, including Erasmus.

Scotland has long been an attractive destination for international students from within and beyond the EU, but UK student visa policies and the threat of Brexit are sending a negative message to students who are considering Scotland for their studies. It is therefore important that we continue to reiterate our view not only that we did not vote for Brexit but that anyone who is thinking of coming to Scotland to study or to work in our institutions is most welcome here.

The UK Government does not have a credible plan to ensure that our valuable science and research can be maintained and enhanced following Brexit. Where is the plan? I ask Tory members to show me it. The UK Government does not have a credible plan at all, other than to shut down Westminster—I watched that yesterday, and it was an absolute disgrace—to avoid scrutiny and pursue a no-deal Brexit. That appears to be the UK Government's reality, but it is not ours. It sits in stark contrast to the approach of the Scottish Government, which is the only Administration in the UK that, since 2016, has had a consistent plan to resolve the issues. Short of our remaining a full EU member, the only solution that would break the current impasse that has brought us to the brink of a no-deal Brexit is to stay in the European single market and the customs union.

As set out in "Scotland's Place in Europe: Science and Research", which was published in November 2018, Scotland has much to offer the world when it comes to science and research. The Scottish Government will do everything that it can to continue to bolster our academic strengths through its existing valuable partnerships and new collaborations across Europe and beyond. Scotland is a proud European nation and we will continue to be so.

It is time for an urgent wake-up call for the current Prime Minister and for him to heed the warnings that have been raised by some of the UK

and Europe's leading names in science and research. The letter that was sent to Theresa May and Jean-Claude Juncker by 29 Nobel laureates said that freedom of movement and funding were two of the sector's biggest concerns. Sir Paul Nurse, who was one of the signatories of the letter, has stated that a hard Brexit outcome would "cripple UK science" and that

"the government needs to sit up and listen."

Not only is it time for a wake-up call for the Prime Minister; it is time for him, his Government and his party members in this Parliament and the other Parliament, which I call the English Parliament—sadly, it is not sitting—to stop playing dictatorial politics and to realise that they are playing with people's lives. Here in this Parliament and across Scotland, we are done with their games. Scotland needs a different path—a path that does not end with Brexit Britain.

16:38

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

We have certainly had an interesting discussion today. On behalf of Labour, I congratulate Beatrice Wishart on her first speech in Parliament and on her by-election win. I did not get up to Shetland for the campaign, but my brother lived on Bressay for many years, so I have been a regular visitor to Shetland. I wish the member every success in standing up and fighting for the people of Shetland.

This has been an interesting debate in many ways. It strikes me that the Scottish Conservative and Brexit party is either completely confused over where we are with Brexit or is in complete denial about it.

As to many others who have watched Boris Johnson since he became Prime Minister, it is evident to me that he is not seeking a deal in getting us out of the EU. Indeed, when Mr Johnson was in Ireland yesterday, the Taoiseach made the point that the backstop is not up for negotiation unless a credible alternative can be proposed. There has been a complete failure on Boris Johnson's part to suggest any such alternative. That was backed up when the Home Secretary announced her resignation and made the point that no effort has been going into the Government's approach to Brexit. There certainly has been no effort to find a deal, while a lot has been going into achieving a no-deal exit.

Therefore, there is a sense that there is denial on the part of the Scottish Conservative and Brexit party, and we need to wake up to that.

I also take the point that Gillian Martin made about this being the fourth debate on the issue. Earlier, John Swinney said that Liz Smith has

worked hard on it. Alexander Stewart told us that he has a different opinion to the opinion of his UK counterparts on these matters. However, Liz Smith's efforts have not achieved anything as regards the European temporary leave to remain—ETLR—policy, which has been so bad for Scotland. The National Union of Students Scotland's briefing for members says:

"With urgency, we implore the UK Government to deviate from their current ETLR policy which actively discriminates against EU students wishing to study in Scotland whilst placing Scottish institutions at a competitive disadvantage in attracting students from across the continent."

It is fine for us to have had four debates here, and for members of the Scottish Conservative and Brexit party to say that it differs from the Conservative Party on the issue. However, the reality is that no one down there in the Conservative Party in the UK Parliament is actually listening to them.

The NUS goes on to say:

"There should be an immediate revision of ETLR, extending student visas for the duration of their studies, no matter what this may be, with specific allowances for student disadvantage and welfare. Further, the UK Government should reintroduce a Post-Study Work Visa, allowing students studying in Scotland to work, live and further contribute to Scotland after their studies".

That point that was made by Clare Adamson and Claire Baker when they talked about the fresh talent initiative, which was successful for Scotland—until the Tory UK Government came in. It has virtually refused to recognise that our degree system in Scotland is different, so the Scottish Conservative and Brexit party needs to wake up to the realities of where we are.

I was also struck by Sandra White's point that, in her constituency, the issue is about people. Universities Scotland says:

"Amongst our staff, we have 6,500 EU nationals (13.4%) and 4,275 non-EU international citizens ... working across the teaching, research and other professional roles (finance, marketing, welfare etc).

Non-UK nationals tend to be found more commonly in the teaching and/or research roles in universities. Combined, EU and non-EU international staff make up 47% of university staff who focus on research-only and 29% of staff who do both teaching and research".

Given those numbers and Sandra White's point that they represent real people, we can see the concern and worry that have been caused for those individuals and their families—not to mention, as the minister did, the potential for us to lose many academic staff who will go elsewhere in Europe.

It is also important that we remember the net economic impact to Scotland of international students entering higher education here. In 2015-

16, that was worth £1.9 billion, which is no small number in relation to our economy. If we look specifically at living costs, international students' spend in Scotland—again, I am using 2015-16 figures—is estimated to have been £517.5 million. Again, that is crucial to the Scottish economy.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Mr Rowley—will you begin to wind up, please?

Alex Rowley: Yes.

Universities Scotland estimates the tourism spend by students and their families and friends to be £25.7 million.

If this is the fourth debate that we have had on the subject, it is time that the Tories in Westminster were listening. Sadly, I am not sure that they are.

16:45

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Before I address the comments that have been made from across the chamber, I add my congratulations to Beatrice Wishart on what I thought was an excellent maiden speech. I will express some personal views on the policy area that we are discussing.

This Parliament knows that I have for several years been a critic of aspects of the UK Government's immigration policy, most especially that which relates to post-study work visas for postgraduates. I did not agree with removal of the post-study work visa in 2012, not least because of what I believed would be the detrimental impact on universities in Scotland. That is exactly why I chose to participate in the Scottish Government's post-study work steering group in 2016, which Claire Baker mentioned. I again commend to Parliament the cross-party findings of that group, and its recommendations.

Parliament knows, too, that I voted to remain in the EU. One of the key reasons behind my decision was that I had listened to the views of many people in the higher education sector, and I continue to do so.

However, I would like to put all that in the proper context. First, let us remember exactly why there was concern about the visa system back in 2012. It was because, in the preceding four years, there had been considerable abuse of the system. It was first identified with the bogus college issue. That became very relevant to Scotland thanks to *The Herald's* investigation in 2008, which exposed malpractice in three Scottish "colleges" that were known as Glasgow College, Middlesex College and LSMT Business School. The investigation resulted in each being struck off the register, and rightly so.

Those operations in Scotland were bad enough, but the problem was worse in England. It turned out that many unlicensed institutions were operating outwith the law and, in some cases, were acting as fronts for illegal immigrants. That was clearly unacceptable and led, quite rightly, to moves by the UK Government and the Scottish Government to protect the term “college” and to tighten up on student movement.

The second part of the context is the increasing pressure on university places across the UK, which has increased competition in student application processes. That is a welcome development in many respects, but it has brought with it new challenges, which is why the universities have sought tighter Home Office guidance and clarity about the visa process.

The third part of the context is, of course, Brexit. Although those of us who voted to remain continue to regret the outcome of the 2016 referendum, it is incumbent on all of us to accept the result and move on.

Let me turn to why we need to get the issue sorted, why I have continued to lobby the Westminster Government hard to make changes, and why I remain very hopeful that there will, in the coming days, be some progress—albeit that it has taken far too long to get to this point.

The current system is not satisfactory because it undermines the ability of higher education institutions to attract and retain staff and students in the way that meets the needs of their academic programmes—in particular, in a fast-changing international climate in which there is such intense competition between our universities. When I was told by one of our medical schools that a cutting-edge knowledge exchange research programme had been temporarily halted because researchers from the far east had had to return home when their visas ran out, I recognised just how damaging a restrictive visa system could be. Likewise, we have heard of situations in which the Scottish lead in a knowledge exchange project has been put in doubt because of concerns about visa continuity.

That cannot be right. Our universities should not be put in a situation in which they are forced to worry about the future of a key research project that not only has high educational value, but has extensive economic benefit. That is why change is desperately needed.

The latest Universities Scotland briefing shows that the percentage share of EU students at our universities is 8.7 per cent and 13 per cent for international students, which pulls in somewhere in the region of £1.9 billion to the Scottish economy. For university staff, the statistics are 13.4 per cent and 8.8 per cent respectively, which

is just one of the reasons why Scottish universities have, over recent years, been able to punch well above their weight when it comes to attracting research funding.

International mathematical models show that the greatest creative success in higher education comes when there is a high level of qualitative collaboration between different countries. That depends on relatively free movement of students and staff, and a visa system that is not unnecessarily restrictive.

I will also comment on the Erasmus programme, which I have, in my role as convener of the cross-party group on colleges and universities, been anxious to promote. Established in 1987, its exchange purpose for EU students has been extraordinarily successful, not only because of the 9 million people who have participated since its inception, but because of the quality of its work and the undoubted benefits of opening up exchange opportunities to people who might not otherwise have had them.

I believe that this policy area is absolutely fundamental not only to our higher education institutions but to the future of the economy in Scotland. In this country, we are incredibly lucky to have 19 outstanding institutions in the higher education sector. So far, our Westminster Government has not lived up to its reputation of being able to protect that sector as we want it to.

I repeat my comments that I am very hopeful that, in the coming days, we will see a change. That change is long overdue and much needed, so I hope very much that there will, in the days ahead, be some considerable changes to the way in which our universities can operate.

The Presiding Officer: I call Ben Macpherson to conclude the debate.

16:51

The Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development (Ben Macpherson): I thank all members for their contributions to what I believe is a very important debate. In particular, I congratulate Beatrice Wishart on her very thoughtful speech, which I will refer to again shortly.

We live in serious times, and in serious times it is important that we are able to debate important issues. It is shocking that the Westminster Parliament has been prorogued and, while Westminster has been silent, we, in this place, must collaborate on what we share concerns about and on the issues that confront us.

From today’s debate, it is clear that, first, across the chamber, we share a respect and admiration for the huge contribution that the higher and

further education sectors make to Scotland's economy, to Scottish society and to our international reputation. Secondly, there seems to be a general consensus that Brexit, combined with proposed UK Government immigration policy, is having a negative impact on the higher and further education sectors and that it is an issue of widespread and real concern. Thirdly, there seems to be a consensus that the proposed UK Government policy position in a no-deal scenario of a three-year European temporary leave to remain solution is not a solution, given its three-year limit.

The UK Government needs to look at the issue urgently. I had an undertaking from the previous Minister of State for Immigration that she would look at the matter urgently, yet, in recent weeks, there has been no correspondence on the situation to any minister in the Scottish Government. That needs to change, because, as the motion says, it is discriminatory against Scottish higher education institutions and students who are studying for longer degrees. It should never have happened in the first place, and we need action to sort it.

First, it has emotional and practical implications for those who have been working in our sectors for some time. That is why the Scottish Government is committed to our stay in Scotland campaign. I appeal to all members to continue to engage with that campaign so that, in the further and higher education sectors and all across Scotland, we do all that we can to emphasise that welcoming message and support people to stay.

Secondly, an important point has to be made about attractiveness. The cabinet secretary and Deputy First Minister made that point really well, as did Iain Gray. Brexit combined with UK Government immigration policy proposals, including a salary threshold of £30,000, an immigration skills charge and added bureaucracy, all contribute to a less attractive environment for people who want to come here to study and work. We need action on the examples in the motion as well as action on UK Government immigration policy. If the UK Government takes forward what it has proposed, whether it be the cost of a tier 4 student visa or being able to remain after study being applied to EEA and Swiss students, this will just be a more unattractive place for people who want to come and stay. We need change there.

The Scottish Government values all skills, including those held by graduates. That is why the Scottish Government has argued for a long time for the return of the post-study work visa for students studying all degrees at bachelor level and above. They need to be able to remain in the UK and Scotland for two years after graduating. As outlined in the motion, such a route would be a

vital lever for attracting the best international student talent, securing essential income streams and allowing gifted graduates—people of skill, intellect and commitment—to continue to contribute to Scotland after their studies.

Although no substitute will give the same benefits as freedom of movement, we need the UK Government to commit to collaboration on solutions in that sphere that can keep graduates in Scotland and on innovative solutions for Scottish and UK immigration policy.

We could deliver a post-study work visa in two ways. First, the UK Government could re-commit to the introduction of a post-study work visa. We call for that in today's motion; we have been calling for it for two years and we will continue to call for it. We want to see it happen. Secondly, we could deliver such a solution through tailored immigration policies within a UK framework. Alexander Stewart was dismissive of the potential for tailored immigration solutions for Scotland, but I will quote to him the Scottish Council for Development and Industry:

"Other countries successfully operate regional migration schemes which target the specific needs of their economies and SCDI believes that there are workable options for more differentiation in the UK's system."

Business is listening and open minded, and it is time for the Scottish Conservatives to be open minded about solutions for Scotland.

We could also be flexible and innovative with such tailored solutions in how we tackle challenges and incentivise in rural and island communities. I therefore encourage Beatrice Wishart, as the newest member for the Scottish Liberal Democrats, to encourage them to engage with the Scottish Government on the potential for tailored migration policies for Scotland. My door is open so that we can have those conversations.

We could deliver solutions to keep people here after they have completed their studies. We want to see a reintroduction of the post-study work visa, and we want to see open-minded engagement on tailored migration solutions for Scotland.

Before I conclude, I will deal with the Tory amendment and explain why we will not support it.

The Presiding Officer: Very briefly, minister.

Ben Macpherson: The Tory amendment seeks to take out from the motion the statement that

"the UK Government's proposed immigration policies will be deeply damaging to Scotland's further education, higher education and research sectors",

when all the evidence that we have heard in today's debate suggests that that will be the case. Therefore, we cannot accept the amendment. In addition, it

“calls on all parties to support the UK Government's efforts”

to bring about a deal as an outcome to the Brexit scenario. I would like to be enlightened on what those efforts are, given that Amber Rudd has said that little effort is going into achieving solutions.

Conservative members have criticised the stance on Brexit of the SNP at Westminster. I remind Oliver Mundell, in particular, that very many Conservative MPs voted against Theresa May's deal. He should note that.

We are committed to protecting Scotland's international academic and research standing, and we will continue to press for the reintroduction of a post-study work route so that people who study in Scotland can continue to build their lives and careers here. We are disappointed by the Tory amendment because, unfortunately, people are leaving and we want them to stay. People are not coming here because they are not as attracted to Scotland as they were. We need to think of new mechanisms to make Scotland attractive to them.

I commend Richard Lochhead's motion to Parliament and ask members to vote for it unamended.

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is the election of a member for appointment to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. I have received one valid nomination. The question is, that Ruth Davidson be elected for appointment to the SPCB. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 112, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

Ruth Davidson is therefore elected for appointment to the SPCB. I congratulate Ms Davidson on her appointment.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the bureau, to move motion S5M-18799, on committee membership, and motion S5M-18800, on substitution on committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Donald Cameron be appointed to replace Jamie Greene as a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee;

Mike Rumbles be appointed as a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee;

Jeremy Balfour be appointed to replace Alison Harris as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Rachael Hamilton be appointed to replace John Scott as a member of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee;

Alison Harris be appointed to replace Oliver Mundell as a member of the Education and Skills Committee;

Daniel Johnson be appointed to replace Johann Lamont as a member of the Education and Skills Committee;

Beatrice Wishart be appointed as a member of the Education and Skills Committee;

Alex Rowley be appointed to replace James Kelly as a member of the Finance and Constitution Committee;

James Kelly be appointed to replace Daniel Johnson as a member of the Justice Committee;

Sarah Boyack be appointed to replace Alex Rowley as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee;

Maurice Corry be appointed to replace Rachael Hamilton as a member of the Public Petitions Committee; and

Neil Findlay be appointed to replace Elaine Smith as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Oliver Mundell be appointed to replace Alison Harris as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Education and Skills Committee;

Jamie Greene be appointed to replace Alison Harris as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee;

Peter Chapman be appointed to replace Maurice Corry as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Public Petitions Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Pauline McNeill as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee;

Elaine Smith be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Elaine Smith as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Finance and Constitution Committee;

Monica Lennon be appointed to replace Anas Sarwar as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Health and Sport Committee;

Anas Sarwar be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.—
[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We come to decision time. The first question this evening is, that amendment S5M-18767.1, in the name of Oliver Mundell, which seeks to amend motion S5M-18767, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the impact of the United Kingdom Government's planned immigration policy and mobility restrictions on Scotland's university and scientific research sectors, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 85, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-18767, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the impact of the UK Government's planned immigration policy and mobility restrictions on Scotland's university and scientific research sectors, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 84, Against 1, Abstentions 29.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that the UK Government's proposed immigration policies will be deeply damaging to Scotland's further education, higher education and research sectors; joins with Scottish institutions and the Russell Group in raising serious concerns about the impact of the three-year European Temporary Leave to Remain policy, which was announced in September 2019, if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, which discriminates against Scottish institutions and students in Scotland studying for four-year degrees; welcomes the huge contribution that international staff and students make to Scotland's universities, colleges and research institutions, as well as the country's economy and communities; notes the success of the Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland scheme, which benefited more than 8,000 graduates between 2005 and 2008; further notes the consensus across parties and with sector bodies such as Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland on the benefits of a flexible post-study work route for Scotland, and calls on the UK Government to urgently amend its proposed policies to ensure that they respect Scotland's unique education system and its population needs, including by extending leave to remain to a minimum of four years and reintroducing a two-year post-study work visa for students at universities and colleges in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on the two Parliamentary Bureau motions, unless any member objects.

The question is, that motions S5M-18799 and S5M-18800, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Donald Cameron be appointed to replace Jamie Greene as a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee;

Mike Rumbles be appointed as a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee;

Jeremy Balfour be appointed to replace Alison Harris as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Rachael Hamilton be appointed to replace John Scott as a member of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee;

Alison Harris be appointed to replace Oliver Mundell as a member of the Education and Skills Committee;

Daniel Johnson be appointed to replace Johann Lamont as a member of the Education and Skills Committee;

Beatrice Wishart be appointed as a member of the Education and Skills Committee;

Alex Rowley be appointed to replace James Kelly as a member of the Finance and Constitution Committee;

James Kelly be appointed to replace Daniel Johnson as a member of the Justice Committee;

Sarah Boyack be appointed to replace Alex Rowley as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee;

Maurice Corry be appointed to replace Rachael Hamilton as a member of the Public Petitions Committee; and

Neil Findlay be appointed to replace Elaine Smith as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Oliver Mundell be appointed to replace Alison Harris as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Education and Skills Committee;

Jamie Greene be appointed to replace Alison Harris as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee;

Peter Chapman be appointed to replace Maurice Corry as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Public Petitions Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Pauline McNeill as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee;

Elaine Smith be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Elaine Smith as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Finance and Constitution Committee;

Monica Lennon be appointed to replace Anas Sarwar as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Health and Sport Committee;

Anas Sarwar be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

Bullying and Harassment in the National Health Service

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-17240, in the name of Edward Mountain, on bullying and harassment in the national health service. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament, in light of John Sturrock QC's report into allegations of bullying and harassment at NHS Highland, commends the courage of all those who have spoken out in this regard and also those who do so throughout NHS Scotland, and notes calls on the Scottish Government to protect and support all those who speak out against bullying and harassment and to ensure that the whistleblowing process is robust and easily accessible.

17:08

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank those members who supported the motion in my name, including David Stewart, Rhoda Grant and Neil Findlay from Labour, Mike Rumbles from the Liberal Democrats and John Finnie from the Greens. I am, however, sad that no member of the Scottish National Party signed the motion.

I welcome all those who have travelled from the Highlands to listen to the debate. Some of those who are sitting in the public gallery are members of the whistleblowing group, and I would like to thank them for everything that they have done.

Only last week, an MSP asked me whether I really believed that bullying is an issue. The simple answer is yes—not physical bullying but psychological bullying, which is often worse. Some suffered in silence and some resigned, but until the whistleblowers spoke out, they had nowhere to turn.

I have received requests for help from not only victims but parents who were worried about their children, and wives and husbands who were worried about their partners. I have heard many heartbreaking stories about why people could not face the next day at work because of bullying. One person was not sure that they could face life at all. After 12 years in the Army, I am not faint hearted, but to be rung on a Friday night by a parent distraught about their child, a national health service employee who was contemplating suicide, was not easy.

That was just the tip of the iceberg. Once the whistle was blown, 140 bullying victim testimonies were collated by the GMB trade union, shedding light on the deeply harrowing experiences of a wide variety of NHS Highland staff. Despite my

calls and those of many others, the Scottish Government dithered about whether to launch an investigation. When it did so, and John Sturrock QC published his report, the report confirmed what many knew already: there was indeed “fear and intimidation” of staff, many of whom had

“suffered significant and serious harm”.

In my years of professional experience, I have never read such a damning report. In the weeks and months since the report was published, many NHS Highland employees have contacted me. Most were relieved that the culture of bullying had finally been recognised. However, some felt that the report did not deal with their situation. Those are the ones I call the managed out—they were managed out of their jobs by bullying, and they feel that the Sturrock report has not addressed their mistreatment. They should not feel marginalised as part of the process, and I call on the Scottish Government to fully investigate their situation.

It is clear that the Sturrock report, rather than being the last step, is the first step towards changing the culture of NHS Highland. I welcome the reconciliatory approach that has been taken by the new chair and chief executive of NHS Highland. They are driving forward a new culture of respect, and the health board is slowly rebuilding.

However, NHS Highland is not alone in needing to change. In the wake of the Sturrock report, the Scottish Government must also change how it operates. In October last year, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport announced that she would appoint a whistleblowing champion for each health board. I welcome that action, but it has taken until the summer of this year for applications to open. That is too long.

We know what happens when there is not a robust system. As one non-executive director stated in the Sturrock report:

“The issue of a bullying culture was first raised with the auditors, Audit Chair and Board Chair in late 2016.”

They went on to say that the Scottish Government “knew about it”

but

“Nothing was done.”

In fact, the Government seemed to be blind to the warning signals. Perhaps the biggest red flag was in 2017, when four non-executive members of the NHS Highland board resigned.

When some of the board’s non-executive directors expressed a lack of confidence in the chair and the chief executive, it became clear that something was being done to prop up a failing management team. In response to the non-

executives’ claims, the executive members of the board wrote to their colleagues stating their unreserved support for the chair and the chief executive. Not only does that show the dysfunction of the board back in 2017, but it raises serious questions about why the Scottish Government was not watching. Why did it have to take four senior clinicians to exhaust every avenue before their only option was to blow the whistle? Many people are asking why, if the Scottish Government knew about the bullying, it did nothing. Many staff members, both former and current, would like an answer to that question. I believe that they deserve it, which is why I support the whistleblowers’ calls for a further investigation to be launched into why no action was taken in 2016 and to find out what was going on in the board.

Too many loyal and hardworking NHS staff have been mistreated and had their careers ruined as a result of being bullied in NHS Highland. I welcome the Sturrock report, but we need to be clear that the report is just the beginning of a process and not the end. I support the actions of the new chair and chief executive in following through on Sturrock’s recommendations, but Sturrock’s report did not answer every concern. As I mentioned, NHS Highland cannot move on until former employees who were managed out have had their mistreatment addressed.

We still need to have the full and frank debate on the Sturrock report that the cabinet secretary promised in this session of Parliament. We need to make sure that this appalling and sorry state of affairs never, ever happens again. I finish with a plea: let us have that debate, which would be part of the healing process, and let us ensure that whistleblowers are appointed to every board as soon as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate, with speeches of four minutes.

17:15

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I read John Sturrock’s report, which is great and contains a lot of information. I recommend that employees who work for any health board look at it, because it includes good guidance.

I thank Edward Mountain for bringing the motion to the chamber. It is an extremely important subject, which has raised many questions and statements—and rightly so.

I, too, commend the courage—as noted in the motion—of the NHS Highland employees who spoke out to inform John Sturrock QC in his inquiry into cultural issues related to allegations of bullying and harassment in NHS Highland. It is difficult to come forward to raise complaints and concerns about one’s place of work and to

challenge the behaviours of peers and managers. People do so, I hope, with the intention of obtaining better outcomes for all.

As we have heard already, bullying damages lives. It is important to state the quotation from Maya Angelou that John Sturrock's review includes:

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

The emotional stress that bullying inflicts can lead to poor work performance and absenteeism, and it can even force people to leave their jobs, as we have heard. Conversely, dignity at work has profoundly energising effects on employees, their feelings of integrity, self-respect and pride and their motivation.

Much has been done across NHS Scotland to tackle bullying and harassment in the workplace and to promote the standards of behaviour that are acceptable and expected in each organisation. It is important to note that dignity at work in NHS Scotland extends beyond a workplace that is free of bullying and relates also to a working environment where one feels dignified, doing valuable work in a supportive environment for fair reward. Being valued, listened to and treated with respect are just some of the things that are experienced in a dignified workplace. Bullying and harassment are not new, and are not just focused in NHS Scotland.

Members are aware that I have been a nurse for 30 years and was previously employed in the USA, NHS England and NHS Dumfries and Galloway. I have experienced harassment, which is called "horizontal hostility" or "lateral violence" in the USA. It is not necessarily physical, as Edward Mountain said; it is also psychological.

In my case, while working in the operating room in Los Angeles, on more than one occasion, specialist laparoscopic surgical instruments unusually "disappeared" from their specific labelled, organised storage place—we knew that we should be tracking those items. Then they miraculously reappeared after a particular individual came to the rescue in order to curry favour with the surgeon. My video imaging equipment would be rewired over the weekend, which affected the patients' safety. That direct sabotage put patients at risk.

We know that promoting dignity at work and a good, civilised work environment matters, because it reduces errors and stress and fosters excellence.

What are the solutions? What can be done to support and promote in the workplace a culture in which morale is good and staff are empowered and motivated and achieve great work?

In preparing for the debate, I noted five main items that can be addressed. I cannot deal with them all now, but during my research, I found that Professor Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe has looked at what we need to do to support leadership. I ask the cabinet secretary what measurement statistics we are using to look at the effectiveness of an individual leader in developing a positive culture across their teams, and how we measure sensitivity to the change that is required.

The transformational change that we are seeing with health and social care integration across all our health boards—whether in Scotland or England, or even in the USA—really needs to be looked at. What are NHS Education for Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and organisational development leaders doing to collaborate across the health system, so that we can have a civilised work environment in which we reduce errors and stress and foster excellence?

I look forward to supporting the cabinet secretary and to hearing her response.

17:20

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I congratulate my friend and colleague Edward Mountain on securing this important debate and pay tribute to the excellent work that he has done in continuing to speak out for NHS Highland staff who have experienced bullying and harassment. I know, from having met and spoken with some members of NHS Highland in the past weeks and months, that they greatly appreciate the work that he has done.

I thank NHS Highland's new management team, which hosted me on a visit to Raigmore hospital in April. We had the opportunity to have an open and frank discussion about the real challenges that that team faces in trying to move the organisation forward. That is vital for any organisation. NHS Highland needs to move forward from issues in the past. Real learning can be taken forward in any organisation only if it moves forward to ensure that such things never happen again.

I echo and support the sentiments in the motion, which commends all staff across NHS Scotland who have come forward and spoken out about bullying and harassment in their workplace. Their bravery can help not only their fellow NHS colleagues but patients in our health service.

As Emma Harper rightly stated, we will get the best out of our NHS staff in any workplace only when they feel truly valued and respected. Much progress still needs to be made nationally to help to achieve that, and I know that people in NHS Highland are acutely aware of that.

I look forward to the Government holding a full parliamentary debate on the Sturrock report. The cabinet secretary pledged that to me in her statement on 9 May, and I have recently followed that up with her in writing.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the Sturrock report and its important recommendations, many of which we believe can be applied widely across all NHS boards. The report found significant and alarming evidence of bullying and harassment in NHS Highland. Many staff suffered serious harm and trauma to the extent—this has been outlined—that they were forced to quit their jobs or retire early, and that has added to well-known staffing challenges in many specialties.

We remain deeply concerned that it took ministers so long to take any action to intervene, although they knew about the dysfunctional management and the nature of the complaints in NHS Highland from at least the autumn of 2017.

The Scottish Conservatives back a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment in the NHS. We have called for better processes for NHS whistleblowers for more than a decade and have repeatedly said that the Scottish Government needs to help to build a genuine culture of openness in our NHS in which our NHS staff feel able to raise concerns and suggest improvements without fear.

We should acknowledge that the whistleblower helpline has been a welcome improvement, but there is much more that we can do. I am pleased that the Parliament's Health and Sport Committee recently looked carefully at proposals for the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's new role as the independent national whistleblowing officer. We recently published our report on that.

It is vital that we get the system right, that the new national standards for NHS services ensure that all organisations receive and investigate any whistleblowing concerns, and that those standards are robust and transparent.

In its written submission to the committee's inquiry on a new national whistleblowing officer, the British Medical Association stated:

"We consistently hear from our members that they fear raising concerns or 'whistleblowing' for the possible impact they believe it could have on their career or their relationship with colleagues. Many also believe that they won't be listened to or it won't make a difference.

This is simply not acceptable."

That has to change. The BMA is right, and its comments indicate just how far we still need to go to have a system that truly enjoys the confidence of NHS staff across Scotland, protects their confidentiality, and offers them real assurance that

their concerns will be properly investigated and addressed.

To conclude, I very much welcome the debate and the spirit in which it has been brought to the chamber. We need to focus on bringing support to our NHS staff and ensuring that they receive the full support of the Parliament and the minister. Our NHS staff work incredibly hard day in, day out. They look after all of us. In turn, we need to ensure that the best possible systems are in place to respond to any concerns that they have.

I look forward to a longer debate on the Sturrock report in the future. The Scottish Conservatives will continue to back our NHS workforce to ensure that we have an accessible, transparent and effective whistleblowing process.

17:25

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I congratulate Edward Mountain on securing the debate and on his excellent and well-researched speech. It is welcome that the debate follows on from the issue having been raised at last week's meeting of the Health and Sport Committee. I, too, congratulate the NHS Highland whistleblowers who are in the public gallery on their tenacity in pushing forward their important campaign.

The debate is timely. Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and respect at work. Bullying and harassment are unacceptable and a violation of human and legal rights. Let us be clear: bullying is not acceptable anywhere, at any time, in society; it is an abuse of power.

Earlier this year, it was revealed that the number of NHS staff who contacted a whistleblowing hotline in Scotland had more than doubled in six months. It is imperative that the Scottish Government discovers why the NHS in Scotland has become such a fertile ground for inappropriate behaviour, and why some senior staff refuse to listen to the concerns of those who work on the front line.

It had always seemed to me that there was an underlying toxic culture of bullying in NHS Highland and that that was clearly having an effect on staff morale and emotional health. The wider issue is the possible effect that that has had on the credibility of NHS Highland and on the ability to recruit and retain staff. It is difficult to measure the effect on patients, but there will surely have been an impact.

Like Edward Mountain, I strongly supported the cabinet secretary's appointment of John Sturrock QC to carry out the independent review. I have worked with Mr Sturrock in the past and hold him in high regard. Although Mr Sturrock said that there were multiple possible causes of bullying

and harassment in the NHS, he touched on the role of increased pressure to perform and to meet targets as a factor in the overall equation.

Like others, I recognise that NHS Highland has experienced a change in leadership since the bullying saga first began. I, too, welcome the appointment of Iain Stewart as the chief executive, and of interim chair Professor Boyd Robertson, whom I know well from his days at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. However, it is vital that NHS Highland moves quickly to explain what it plans to do by way of reparation for all the previous victims of bullying and harassment, both in terms of psychological support and compensation.

My case bag has been full, as those of other MSPs in the chamber will have been, of details of victims. Some victims who have contacted me have had their careers ruined, some have lost out financially and many have suffered mental health issues. One victim told me:

“I never ever wanted to leave but I felt forced into it and I had no-one to speak for me ... I have lost the job I loved, lost my earnings and also years of pensions. Finances have been dreadfully difficult for me since I left.”

Another victim, who was highlighted by the GMB, doctors and whistleblowers last year, said that raising a bullying and harassment case meant that “every step of the way you were on trial”.

We have to learn from others elsewhere. The freedom to speak up review, which was led by Sir Robert Francis QC, examined bullying in the NHS in England. Its recommendations stressed that what was needed was early support for whistleblowers, a cultural change, the prevention of isolation and containment, and legal protection for whistleblowers.

As we all know, next year, the Scottish Government plans to create the independent national whistleblowing officer, whose new role and functions will be undertaken by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The aim is to ensure that everyone who delivers NHS services in Scotland is able to speak out and to raise concerns when they see harm or wrongdoing that puts patient safety at risk or when they are aware of other forms of wrongdoing.

The Scottish Government has the opportunity to build a national culture in the health service in which there is openness and trust, and creating a truly independent whistleblowing officer will be an important first step. The message from all sides of the chamber in the debate has been that there is no place for bullying in the Scottish health service. We need to reclaim the workforce. Knowing what is right does not mean much unless we do what is right.

17:29

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I thank Edward Mountain for giving us this opportunity to have a short debate. He asked when the Government will use its time for a debate on the topic. We will do that—I will return to that point.

Edward Mountain’s motion calls on the Parliament to commend

“the courage of ... those who have spoken out”

in NHS Highland and

“those who do so throughout NHS Scotland”

today. I am sure that we all support that call.

As I have done previously, I personally thank those in NHS Highland who spoke out, including those who are in the public gallery. Their courage is much to be commended. Speaking out is never an easy thing to do. I also apologise to them and to others for the fact that they were bullied and suffered hurt and harm in NHS Highland and elsewhere.

As members know, we commissioned the Sturrock review. I thank all those who contributed to the review and who took the time to explain their experience and their story to John Sturrock. Again, that was not an easy thing to do, but their input has fully informed his report. It has also had an impact on the thinking in Government and, more widely, across the chamber.

What have we, as a Government, done since John Sturrock’s report was published? We have asked all boards to consider the report’s recommendations, to look at how the report impacts on their policy and practice and to report to us on where they consider that improvements are needed. All of that is being looked at. Before the end of this year, Joe FitzPatrick and I will conduct a mid-year review with all the boards. We will look at their responses against what we are being told by the partnership forum and others about how a particular board operates.

Edward Mountain referred to non-executive whistleblowing champions. We have had 139 applications for those roles, and the champions will be in post by the end of the year.

As members know, the national whistleblowing officer, which is now part of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman’s office, will fully begin their role next year.

I think that I have mentioned our “once for Scotland” approach when talking about our policies on whistleblowing. If that is used a lot, that means that the policies and the culture are not working. Yes, we need the whistleblowing bit to be right, but we need the policies and the culture to be right.

I have discovered that what are essentially good policies on staff support, culture, openness and the raising of concerns are not being applied consistently between our boards or, indeed, even in our boards, so we are undertaking work to tackle that.

I am sure that members will recall that, in my statement in May, I talked not just about what John Sturrock had said about NHS Highland but about what lessons there are for the whole of our national health service.

David Stewart: I understand that there will be investigation, post-Sturrock, into Argyle and Bute. Will the cabinet secretary say a little bit more about that?

Jeane Freeman: NHS Highland, with the staff in Argyle and Bute, has identified, on the basis of the Sturrock report, exactly what needs to be looked at, and it is in the process of identifying who will lead that review. The review should be short—given the scale and size of the issue, it does not need to be as long as John Sturrock’s review was. I hope to have all the detail of that review very soon, and I will make sure that David Stewart and other members have that information.

We knew that the Sturrock report would include lessons for bodies across the health service. Consequently, as members know, I convene a ministerial group that brings together the leadership across our NHS, including the leadership of boards, royal colleges, regulatory bodies and trade unions. The group has been widened to include the whole health and social care system, so local authorities are involved, too.

We met on 31 July, and we will next meet on 28 October. In between times, some of the work that is under way includes looking at Emma Harper’s question about how something as intangible as positive culture is measured. We can produce measurements that would give us a bit of an indication about how an organisation is working, but how should we measure how people feel? That work is looking more widely to see whether there are lessons that we can learn elsewhere.

On NHS Highland, I am pleased to hear colleagues rightly offer their support for the new leadership team and the work that they have undertaken. They have spent the past weeks since the Sturrock report was published in discussions with individual members of staff, groups of staff and the board. I visited NHS Highland in June and had the opportunity to speak with the people who are in the public gallery today and others about their experience and what they expected and hoped for.

The board and senior leadership have come together to identify six key areas of improvement: hurting and healing; information; people

processes; values and behaviours; resilience; and communications. In that context, they will consider the important point that Mr Mountain made about the people he referred to as the managed out—people who have left or have felt under a compunction to leave because of the culture that existed in NHS Highland—and the issue of what action might be appropriate in respect of them, on a case-by-case basis, because that is entirely an individual matter. I discussed the issue with colleagues when I was there in June. The approach has to be about what is right for each person as opposed to being a policy. The policy is that there should be work done in order to make restitution. What the restitution is should be decided by means of a discussion between the board and each individual to determine what works.

Having come up with the plan, the leadership team will now engage with all staff in NHS Highland, as I wanted them to. Colleagues will remember that John Sturrock pointed out that, although there was a body of staff who had experienced bullying and had been hurt and harmed by it, there was another body of staff who had not had that experience and felt that the organisation that they worked for had somehow been tarnished, and that there was a need to bring those two groups together and move forward. Therefore, going back to all the staff with the plan is important. Once that process has been completed, I will again speak to NHS Highland about what it will do next and will make sure that that meets my expectations.

I do not accept that ministers took too long to intervene. I do not have time to discuss the matter in detail today, but members will recall from previous parliamentary answers and my statement that I have set out a number of steps that Government officials, on the instruction of ministers before my appointment, undertook to support the board in a number of ways. However, in November, after a number of courageous individuals stepped forward and said that there was a culture of bullying in NHS Highland, I commissioned John Sturrock’s report.

With regard to a Government debate on the issue, it seems to me that the most sensible thing to do is to bring a debate to the chamber when we have had the next meeting of the ministerial group on workplace culture in the NHS and when NHS Highland has had that final set of discussions with its staff on the plan that it intends to undertake. At that point, we can have a debate about what we are proposing across the whole of our NHS, about what is being undertaken in NHS Highland and about whether there is more that colleagues in the chamber think that we should do.

I do not think that this is an issue in which our particular party affiliations divide us at all, and I do not think that it should be that kind of issue. I think that it is an issue on which we can constructively and positively work together for the benefit and the sake of the staff in our NHS, who work hard every day to do the best job that they can.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

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