



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 3 March 2020

Session 5



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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 3 March 2020

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is the Rev James Faddes, who is the church leader at Bishopbriggs community church.

Rev James Faddes (Bishopbriggs Community Church): Thank you—it is a privilege to be here today.

I reflect back 29 years to when I was 17, serving a short-term prison sentence in 1991. I made foolish mistakes that significantly impacted the course of my future. When a prison chaplain and his volunteers introduced me to Jesus Christ, I found faith.

Upon release, I relapsed into reoffending and substance misuse—a revolving door that we are all too aware of. Some 18 months later, homeless, isolated and struggling with mental ill health, I wandered into a church, where I was befriended, mentored and loved back to life.

My confidence restored, I discovered new skills and purpose, gained meaningful employment, went back to school and, later, university and reconciled with my family and community. Here I am, today: a husband, a father of four children and an ordained minister of a local church, supporting chaplaincy work in my local prison and addressing you all today. The message? People change.

My friend Darren, a former prisoner and heroin addict, is now an ordained Anglican vicar and a Methodist pioneer minister in Derby, helping the most marginalised, offering support and throughcare, running a social enterprise and mentoring ex-offenders and recovering addicts, because he, too, knows from experience that people change.

Another friend of mine, Adam, is at the early stage of his journey. He is three years clean and sober, and he is an active volunteer who is determined to make restitution for his wrongs. He is learning the art of coffee roasting with me and is on track to study social care. One of his ambitions is to get a job and simply to pay tax as well as help others on the rehabilitation road. He, too, knows very well that people change.

Paul, from Tarsus, in Turkey, was complicit in the harsh persecution of Christians in first-century

Damascus. His life was transformed because of a powerful encounter with the risen Jesus Christ. He wrote these words to his young protégé, Timothy, and we find them in the Bible:

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”

In communities all across our country, we are losing far too many of our loved and dear ones to criminality, substance misuse, and, sadly, the grave. Paul of Tarsus shares some good news with us: Jesus Christ came to save—the worst.

I encourage all of us here and everyone in our country to keep working for a better country, and may we never lose the hope that people can change.

Business Motion

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-21096, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to this week's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 3 March 2020—

after

followed by Topical Questions

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Novel
 Coronavirus COVID-19 Update—
 [Graeme Dey]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is topical question time. There is one question today.

Early Learning and Childcare

1. **Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether all aspects of the expansion of funded early learning and childcare will be available to all families in August 2020. (S5T-02059)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Maree Todd): We are confident that, by continuing to work closely with our partners in local government, we will deliver the expansion in early learning and childcare entitlement from this August.

We have always recognised that delivering such an ambitious investment for our children will be challenging and not without risk. It is therefore encouraging that, in its report, “Early learning and childcare: Follow-up”, which was published today, Audit Scotland recognises that we are “making steady progress” towards delivery, that

“progress is broadly in line with plans”,

and that “effective national oversight” arrangements are in place.

Beatrice Wishart: In its report, Audit Scotland highlighted how much is to be done, including addressing “significant workforce challenges” and that there is “a big risk” in relation to infrastructure construction. At stake are the flexibility and choice that families need, and that Audit Scotland thinks might not be available in August. Audit Scotland said that “it is likely” that delivering flexibility and choice

“will not be fully implemented”

in time.

What will that mean for parents who are looking to arrange their work around their important childcare entitlement? Does the minister agree that parents should not receive take-it-or-leave-it offers?

Maree Todd: In August 2020, parents will experience a step change in flexibility and choice over where they access their child's funded early learning and childcare entitlement, as a result of our introducing the funding follows the child approach, which puts into parents' hands the power to choose the type of childcare and early learning setting that suits their child and family.

For the first time ever, a parent will be able to go to any provider, as long as the provider meets the national standard, is willing to enter into a contract with the local authority and has a place available. Parents will have the power to do that, which means that private nurseries, local authority nurseries and childminders will be able to offer early learning and childcare.

I expect flexibility and choice to continue to expand as the programme is fully implemented, and I expect further change as parents understand the opportunities that will be available to them from August 2020.

Beatrice Wishart: Parents deserve to know whether the expansion is on track where they live, because that will determine whether they can get the full benefit of the policy in six months. However, the Government has refused to provide local breakdowns. The National Day Nurseries Association said that such information would

“help demonstrate what is and isn’t working”.

The expansion of early learning and childcare is a national priority. Will the minister accept that people deserve clarity on whether it will be delivered in full where they live and allow us to see local progress reports?

Maree Todd: We will deliver in August 2020. We have a strong governance structure in place in the joint delivery board, which Audit Scotland highlighted as “effective governance arrangements”. I expect the programme to be delivered nationally and locally, and for it to be successful.

As a result of our joint delivery board discussions, we publish regular reports. I will be more than happy to highlight to Parliament those reports and updates if the Lib Dem member is not aware of them.

The Presiding Officer: Four other members want to ask a question.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I listened carefully to the minister’s responses. I accept that the funding may follow the child, but surely that is predicated on there being an adequate number of places and teachers in nurseries to deliver on the commitment.

In its report, Audit Scotland said:

“There are significant risks that councils will not be able to expand funded ELC to 1,140 hours by 2020. In particular, it will be difficult to increase the infrastructure and workforce to the levels required, in the limited time available.”

In the light of that, will the minister guarantee that the system will be fully staffed by August 2020 and able to deliver on that commitment?

Maree Todd: The Audit Scotland report confirms that we are broadly on track; we are where we expected to be at this point. Undoubtedly, we have a great deal of work to do between now and August 2020, and for that reason, we have put in place robust contingency plans, for example, for the infrastructure investment.

The data for the Audit Scotland report was collected back in October, and, by January, we were 3 per cent ahead of target on the infrastructure completion rate. Yes, I am confident. Not only are we ahead of the plan, we have robust local contingency plans in place to be sure that we can deliver in August 2020.

On the workforce, we have been expanding the pipeline for a number of years, through college and university places and in this, apprentice week, I have to highlight the success of our apprenticeship recruitment: we aimed for a 10 per cent year-on-year increase and we achieved increases of 21 per cent in the first year and 24 per cent in the second year. Given that more than half the staff are already in place and a number of local authorities have already completed their recruitment drives, I am confident that we will meet the necessary target.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): We are now in March. The policy is promised in August, and the key finding of the Audit Scotland report is that, in the period between, we will be required to find half the workforce increase and deliver half the new infrastructure for the whole programme. Does the minister not think that such a finding demands contingency action rather than assurances that everything is fine?

Maree Todd: I assure the member that robust contingency plans are in place with a project of this scale and complexity, despite the fact that, by every measure, we are on track and on target to deliver. Of course, it would be foolish not to have developed robust local contingency plans, and we have done so. That gives me a great deal of confidence that we will deliver in August 2020.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Recalling that, under the Lib Dems, funded childcare was less than one third of what it is now, can the minister say more about how workforce planning in different parts of the country is progressing to ensure that the expansion of funded early learning and childcare is in place from August 2020?

Maree Todd: The 2020-21 Scottish budget will deliver a year-on-year increase of £201 million in the revenue funding that local authorities receive for the delivery of early learning and childcare. By the end of the current parliamentary session, the

local authority annual revenue funding for that will have increased by £567 million on 2016-17 levels.

On local workforce issues, Alasdair Allan is an MSP for a rural area and will recall that an early concern was that rural areas might not have sufficient people to deliver the extra workforce required and that Brexit might have a particular impact on that through reducing our population of European Union nationals. That is clearly a concern to us, but we are finding that a number of people who are employed part time in early learning and childcare in rural areas are keen to go up to full time. I therefore assure the member that we are on track to deliver in rural areas, as well as in more urban ones.

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): The Audit Scotland report says that flexibility and choice will not be in place by August; paid childcare for children under three is now at risk due to the expansion; there is no robust way of monitoring the staff drain from the private, voluntary and independent sectors to councils; and there was rushed planning and delayed guidance from the outset. How does the minister respond to those very serious concerns?

Maree Todd: I will pick up on the point about delays in finalising key guidance, which I hope will provide Alison Harris with a response on many of the issues that her question raised. Back in March 2017—a full three years before implementation—we confirmed that the ELC expansion would be provider neutral, driven by parental choice and delivered across the public, private, third and childminding sectors.

With our local government and third sector partners, we took a joint decision to consult on the national standard, to ensure that everyone who had an interest had time to consider the issues fully and to contribute their views. That means that we are working very closely with partner providers, local authorities and everyone involved in team ELC, whose level of commitment across Scotland is huge. All of that gives me the confidence to say that we will undoubtedly deliver.

Covid-19 Update

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Our next item of business is a statement by Jeane Freeman, providing an update on novel coronavirus Covid-19. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement. I encourage members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible.

14:16

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): On Sunday, we had confirmation of the first case in Scotland of novel coronavirus Covid-19. The patient is from Tayside and has a travel history. Although the patient is clinically well, they are being cared for in hospital in Scotland, as a precautionary measure. I am sure that members will join me in wishing them a full early recovery. I know that colleagues will appreciate that it is important that we respect the patient's right to confidentiality, and that it is not appropriate for me to comment further on the details of the case. Following confirmation of the diagnosis, contact tracing has been completed by the local health protection team.

Covid-19 is a new strain of coronavirus. The virus came to light in December last year. It is thought to have originated in Wuhan city in China and has spread steadily across the world. As of yesterday, there were almost 89,070 cases throughout the world, with the most substantial outbreaks in Europe currently being in northern Italy. The scientific advisory group for emergencies—SAGE—which provides expert advice to the Scottish Government, has updated its reasonable worst-case-scenario planning assumptions for coronavirus. It is important to stress that that does not represent a prediction or a forecast; it is sensible modelling that is based on available data that allows us to plan for the worst case. The current modelling tells us that 80 per cent of the United Kingdom population might become infected, with 4 per cent of that amount requiring hospitalisation, and an estimated 1 per cent fatality rate among those who are infected.

Those are big numbers, so it is important that I put some caveats around them. First, I stress that the modelling will be continually updated as we learn more about the virus and its behaviour from data that will come from other countries, including in Europe, and from our UK cases.

Secondly, the vast majority of people who are infected with the virus will have mild symptoms, will not require hospital treatment and will be able to return to their normal lives after a week to 10 days. However, some people will experience more

severe symptoms, and some of them will become very unwell. From our understanding at this point, those of us who are older or have underlying health conditions will be at greater risk of becoming more unwell than others. We also know that, as the number of cases rises, there will be an impact on people in our working population who will be unable to work either because they are unwell or because they are caring for family members who are unwell.

Covid-19 is a new virus to which we currently have no immunity and for which there is currently no vaccine, which means that it has the potential to spread extensively. The approach that we must take has four elements. The first is the phase in which we contain, which will consist of detecting early cases, following up close contacts and preventing the disease from taking hold for as long as possible.

The second element is delay, the aim of which will be to slow the spread of the disease so that we can lower its peak and thereby enable our national health service to cope with it better. That is critical, but we need to understand that by slowing spread down and flattening out the peak, we will also prolong the length of time for which we will be managing the disease.

Thirdly, the research element will enable us to better understand the virus and the actions that will be needed to lessen its effect, which in turn will lead to responses including diagnostics, effective antiviral treatments and, ultimately, vaccines.

Fourthly, the mitigation element will involve providing the best possible care for those who are ill by maintaining essential healthcare and other services and taking steps to minimise, where we can, the overall impacts on society, public services and the community.

I will touch briefly on two of those elements. Containment, which is where we are right now, requires the steps that I outlined earlier, but it is also the phase in which the public can help us greatly by actively and consciously using good respiratory care and hand hygiene. The “Catch it, bin it, kill it” message is important—people should use tissues to catch sneezes and coughs and then bin them. Good hand hygiene is also important, not only after using the toilet but before preparing food. Hands should be washed regularly throughout the day, especially if people are in physical contact with others or with surfaces that others use. That matters and will help a great deal.

If we see that the disease is taking hold, we will look to slow the spread of the virus as far as we can, and to flatten the peak of its impact. That is when we will look at a full range of measures to help us to delay its spread, including potentially

extraordinary social-distancing measures, self-isolation and restrictions on public events. Evidence from elsewhere in the world has shown that such measures can, when they are undertaken in combination, be very effective. It is important to stress that we are not at that stage yet, and that the decisions on when to introduce such measures will be taken on the basis of evidence that tells us about the balance between their effectiveness in slowing the spread and the impact on, for example, the economy.

Members will be aware that today we published the four-nations action plan—“Coronavirus: action plan. A guide to what you can expect across the UK”—which is a product of the joint work that is going on across the UK. In addition to the approach that is set out in the plan, we have been working closely with the UK Government and the other devolved Governments to develop emergency legislation that it is intended will be laid at Westminster this month.

The emergency legislation will contain a number of additional powers that would not be considered if not for the extreme seriousness of the challenge that we now face. The emergency legislation will, for example, allow the temporary lifting of some requirements of registration in order to allow former NHS staff to return to work, should they be needed and should they wish to do so. It will enable enhancement and deployment of staff to health and care settings, and it will enable easing of some legislative and regulatory requirements to allow, for example, ministers to direct school closures, should that be needed.

The bill will also enable us to require mandatory flu vaccinations for health and social care workers if we consider that spread of the virus might continue into next year’s flu season. Given the projections for staff absences and pressure on the NHS, we wish to do all that we can to protect the workforce and patients.

None of those proposals is being made lightly. In taking the new powers, we will carefully consider first whether they need to be used, and then when and how they are to be used. It is important to note that the bill will contain a sunset clause to end the existence of the emergency powers, either after a set period or when the UK’s chief medical officers declare that there is no longer an emergency.

Finally, I will briefly outline some of the important work in the health service that has been under way for some time now. All NHS boards have been asked to review their preparedness planning, using their pandemic flu plans as their bases. From those, they should develop specific Covid-19 plans for primary, secondary and social care settings. There is frequent daily engagement between senior health directorate and clinical

officials and boards, and their counterparts elsewhere in the UK.

The Scottish Government resilience room has been activated and its members are meeting regularly to ensure that plans are in place across Government for the areas in which we anticipate that there will be an impact. The First Minister, the chief medical officer and I continue to participate in Cobra meetings to ensure that, as far as is practicable, our responses are aligned across all parts of the UK.

Along with other parts of the UK, Scotland has extensive experience in handling pandemic outbreaks, including the swine flu and severe acute respiratory syndrome—SARS—outbreaks. We have in place established frameworks, and our preparations to date include the establishment of testing laboratories in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and speeding up of identification of confirmed cases, which leads to faster contact tracing and, in turn, limits potential spread of the disease.

As a precautionary measure, general practices have been supplied with face masks to ensure that they have readily available supplies. I have asked NHS National Services Scotland to continue to ensure that the NHS and, where appropriate, social care services continue to receive the supplies that they need.

We have updated the Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008 to make the virus a notifiable disease, thereby placing on registered medical practitioners a duty to notify health boards of suspected cases of the disease, and on directors of diagnostic laboratories a duty to notify health boards when cases of the virus are detected.

To support our prevention activity, we have enhanced surveillance through a network of clinicians and laboratories to strengthen early detection of community transmission, which will provide important data on early warning of coronavirus in community and hospital settings, and allow health protection teams to quickly undertake contact tracing in order to limit further the spread of the virus.

Our advice to the public has not changed. However, I re-emphasise the importance of good personal hygiene practices that everyone should use at all times to limit and slow the spread of coronavirus.

It is understandable that people will become more concerned, so we will continue to provide reassuring, consistent and clear advice. Up-to-date and accurate information to inform our work and decisions, and to inform the public, is vital. Our approach is to have the maximum possible accurate information and transparency.

Health Protection Scotland has issued a suite of guidance to health professionals and others on detection and early management of coronavirus cases, which has been communicated to all boards by the chief medical officer. The guidance includes sector-specific guidance to a wide range of bodies, including schools, colleges, universities and the oil and gas sector.

There is understandable concern among people in Scotland about the presence and impact of the virus, but although we rightly operate to worse-case scenarios, there are important points to make to put that in context. We expect more cases, but for the majority of those who are affected, the symptoms and impact will be mild. Our contain, delay, research and mitigate approach is the right one to take. The public have a critical role to play in helping us by following the straightforward personal hygiene messages. If anyone has travelled to affected areas and developed symptoms of coronavirus, they should go home and phone to seek medical advice from their general practitioner or NHS 24's out-of-hours service. The public should use the website nhsinform.scot for advice and continuously updated guidance, and NHS 24 has set up a free helpline.

This is a serious situation that we are taking very seriously. We are monitoring it very closely here and across the world, alongside the other UK Administrations, the World Health Organization and our international partners. We are using all the expertise that is available to us, and the experience of our NHS in Scotland. We are planning and preparing, letting the science and the clinical advice guide us, and doing all that we can to ensure that our response is proportionate and effective.

We will continue to keep the public and members of the Scottish Parliament fully informed as the situation develops.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement.

Understandably, many Scots—especially those with respiratory issues and compromised immune systems—are deeply concerned about the potential extreme demands that the coronavirus could place on the NHS and social care services.

Over the past six years, there has been a significant reduction in the number of hospital beds, with the loss of 2,762 acute beds. Given the reasonable worst-case scenario planning that the cabinet secretary and the chief medical officer have outlined, which suggests that a high number of vulnerable patients would require hospitalisation, what planning is taking place for

recommissioning NHS beds across the hospital estate in Scotland?

In relation to calling back former NHS staff, what steps are being taken to gather information on where those potential staff members currently reside? Have ministers considered carrying out a publicity campaign to help identify them at an early stage?

Jeane Freeman: Before I answer the member's questions, I want to highlight the point of the approach to containing and delaying. The point of containing is self-evident; the point of delaying is to spread the peak of the coronavirus.

If we do not delay and things run their normal course, the peak will follow a curve—I cannot find the exact word, but the member can see it from my gesture—which would place significant demand on our health service. If we can delay the process, we will flatten that peak so as to enable the NHS to manage it. That will prolong the time during which we are managing the disease, but it will allow the emergence of additional anti-viral treatments and a potential vaccine further down the line should the scientific research bring one. That is the point of delaying.

As the national clinical director said this morning on the radio, not every case will appear at the one time, nor will they appear in the one place at the one time.

As this scales up, what current business-as-usual NHS work would it be possible to pause in order to create more space? I am meeting COSLA tomorrow, and the chief officers of our integration joint boards are already engaged in this. What more can we do in order to create greater impact on the delays in care for those who are clinically ready to leave hospitals but are not yet leaving? What does that tell us about the additional capacity that we might need. All that work is under way. At this point, it is too early to give any definitive answer, but Miles Briggs has my absolute assurance that, as I have done up until now, I will make sure that he and other party spokespeople on health, and others, are kept fully informed as we undertake our work.

We do not need to call back staff yet. Plans are being worked up for how we might reach out to those members of staff who are retired or have taken a break in their career for personal or family reasons and so on, in order to understand what they would need, if they were willing to come back—such as part-time work, more flexible hours and so on. We also need to build into any return scheme time for people to upskill again, so that they are confident in the clinical environment. All that work is under way to put those plans in place.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for advance

sight of her statement and I thank her and the chief medical officer for their briefings with Opposition parties to date. Scottish Labour supports the international and UK-wide efforts to contain, delay and mitigate Covid-19, and we will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to ensure that the public is well-informed and that we are as prepared as we can be for all scenarios.

I understand that the NHS 24 service has seen a spike in the number of calls. On the basis of modelling and scenario planning, what level of calls does the Scottish Government expect and what resources and contingency measures are in place for that? With regard to the NHS and social care staff, can the cabinet secretary say more about the advice that has been given to staff and about discussions with trade unions? In the event of school closures in parts of the country, or of an impact on social care, what might be in place to advise and support staff who are worried about childcare or other caring responsibilities?

Jeane Freeman: Ms Lennon will know that I have offered a briefing to party spokespeople and party leaders after the statement, should they wish it. Mr Dey's office has emailed the four nations action plan to all members, so they will all have sight of that. On NHS 24, the most up-to-date figures that I have are for 1 March—I will have yesterday's figures later. There was an increase of 44 calls to the helpline. There was a significant increase in the number of views of the NHS inform web page. The increase in calls is important, but it is not yet overly significant; however, NHS 24 has a free advice helpline, as well as the 111 number for those who experience symptoms—they would receive a clinical triage through that line.

We have asked NHS 24 to do some scoping work on how it might need to scale up and what would be needed to allow it to do that. That is part of what all our boards are looking at as we speak.

On staff and unions, an initial call was made this morning to all senior figures in Scotland in all unions involved in the NHS. We will undertake conversations with them about what the detail of all the necessary work might mean. NHS Scotland staff policies cover situations where, for example, a member of staff is asked to self-isolate in order to ensure that that does not count for their absence record. There are also NHS policies around carers and caring responsibilities, and so on. We have asked that those policies are double-checked, and we will have a discussion with unions to ensure that they are as good as we need them to be for this particular situation.

I have asked—I hope that it has already happened—that detailed information to all NHS staff be circulated, with a repetition of the guidance and with a commitment that we will

continue to keep them informed about what is happening even if they do not work in an area that is actively engaged in the current situation.

On employers in other sectors, I know that, as part of her portfolio responsibilities, my colleague Ms Hyslop is engaging with the business sector and others to ensure that they are planning and thinking about how they will help their employees to help us in the particularly important phases that we need in order to manage the spread of the virus.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement and for her on-going communication on the issues involved.

The symptoms of Covid-19 are similar to those for other respiratory illnesses, which might result in increased contact between patients and GPs in their practices. Can the cabinet secretary confirm how the Scottish Government plans to reassure people who are concerned and ensure that support is available to GPs so that they do not become overloaded? The cabinet secretary has touched on the issue of unpaid carers, but they are very concerned about the impact of their absence, if they have to self-isolate, on the person who they look after. In addition, what consideration has been given to those on zero-hours contracts and in insecure work, who will receive no pay whatsoever if they are absent?

Jeane Freeman: The case definition of the virus is: a cough, fatigue and difficulty in breathing. If people who have those symptoms have a travel history from the areas currently affected, be that in Europe or elsewhere—again, that information is available on the NHS inform website—using the NHS 111 number will take them through some clinically appropriate questions, then produce bespoke advice about what that individual should do.

As members will know, we have a range of different testing methods across our boards that are designed to prevent the spread of infection, which can be accessed in a designated area in a health board; in the drive-through testing that members might have seen in Lothian, which is also appearing in other parts of the country; or in community testing, whereby the testers will come to an individual.

Those are the symptoms and that is what people with them should do. They are not, strictly speaking, flu symptoms, although they are comparable. The best thing for people to do if they are concerned about their symptoms is to use the NHS inform website or the 111 number to check and get reassurance, or to get advice about additional actions, if they are required.

On the role of GPs, work is under way across the primary care sector with GPs, primary care teams, dentists, community pharmacy and optometry in the community for them to understand and engage in the work that we need them to do in providing advice to individuals, ensuring that they have the supplies that they need for their own staff and others and helping us with the elements, which I described, of containing, delaying and mitigating.

Unpaid carers and those in our community who are more vulnerable, in either health terms or other terms, are a particular concern to us. Where that issue relates to employment, my colleague Ms Hyslop has work under way, as I said. Equally, my colleague Ms Campbell is looking with us at what more we can do for those in our community who are vulnerable, in terms of not only their health but possibly their location.

On the unpaid carers who might be concerned about what happens to the person who they care for if they become unwell, that will be part of the response that I will be discussing in more detail with COSLA tomorrow.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Does the health secretary agree that, if event organisers want to avoid the restriction phase, they must help now with the containment phase? Well over 100,000 people go to the football each week, and stadium toilets often have cold water—or even no water at all—and empty soap dispensers. People go on to shake hands and celebrate with those sitting around them. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if such events are to continue, as I hope that they can, it is critical that decent washing facilities are in place? Will she contact the Scottish Football Association and Scottish Professional Football League coronavirus response group to ask it to urgently ensure that facilities are up to scratch?

Jeane Freeman: What I agree with Mr Cole-Hamilton on is that everyone—every person in the chamber, every member of our families, every employer organisation and every entertainment venue—has a serious responsibility to help us in the containment phase with the very simple steps that I outlined.

If an entertainment venue, a sports facility or an employer needs to ensure that the facilities are there to allow people to effectively wash their hands, bin tissues and so on, I strongly urge them to do that. I know that our officials from active Scotland are in contact with the various sports bodies. We will take that work forward with them; my colleague Mr FitzPatrick will ensure that that happens, so that we can ensure that people are doing what they need to do right now.

If the disease takes hold in the community and we move into the delay phase, we will be looking at the decisions that Mr Cole-Hamilton hints at, but we will look at them in a proportionate and reasonable way, in order to ensure that we get the balance right between effectively protecting the health of our citizens and minimising, where we can, the impact on society and the wider economy.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I remind the chamber that I am still a registered nurse. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I am. Can the cabinet secretary again emphasise the impact that members of the public can have on reducing the spread of Covid-19 by doing things such as washing their hands frequently, not touching their face and covering their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing? She has already highlighted that, but it is so important.

Jeane Freeman: I think that our marketing campaign has just produced its first result, Mr Briggs. I certainly know where to find Ms Harper.

I simply concur with Ms Harper. We all know that we should do those things, yet every single one of us becomes lazy about it. We might wash our hands—I hope that we do—after we have used the toilet, but we do not always think about doing that before we prepare food and so on. We certainly teach our children to do those things.

We now need to become exemplars of personal respiratory hygiene. The onus is on all of us to do that and to encourage everyone with whom we are in contact, be it family members, friends, colleagues or whomever, to ensure that they all do it. Doing that will not only have a significant impact on the containment of the virus but be an additional boon to public health in general.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I have been contacted by concerned constituents who regularly commute to London by plane or train. What advice is being offered to companies with employees in that situation and to transport operators and transport hubs? How are the Scottish and UK Governments ensuring that that advice is heard?

Jeane Freeman: As I said, we have one case in Scotland and 40 cases in the UK. I should make the point that, of the 40 cases that we have in the UK, 15 patients have now been discharged from treatment. That is an indicator of what I said about how the majority of us will experience mild symptoms. We are in the containment phase at this stage and so it is—by and large—business as usual, while we are taking those important personal precautions in relation to our own respiratory hygiene and health.

Employers will be looking at what plans they need to make should we have to move into the delay phase, which we expect to have to do. As I

said in my statement, in the delay phase we will give serious consideration as to whether we need to advise the curtailment of public transport, gatherings and so on. We will balance what the evidence tells us about the positive impact that curtailment will have on the spread of the disease against any impact that it might have on individuals, normal life, the economy and so on. However, we are not yet at that point.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary set out the process of contact tracing for the coronavirus case that was identified in Tayside, which is of great interest across Scotland? Will she also reiterate the very low risk that is posed by the possibility of passing someone who has the virus on the street or in a shop?

Jeane Freeman: I mentioned social distancing in my statement. Generally speaking, the scientific advice is that we are at greater risk of contracting the disease following face-to-face contact within a distance of 2m for up to 15 minutes. The risk comes through the droplets that are expelled if someone sneezes or coughs. As such, it is not particularly circulated in the air around us and we would not contract it if we passed someone in the street or in a shop. We can, however, contract it from surfaces, which is why regular hand washing is important. That is, by and large, what I said earlier about case definition and about how coronavirus is spread. Therefore, as I have said many times already, those simple personal steps are important.

On contact tracing, an individual who has tested positive is asked to take the local health protection team through everything that they have done. For example, they take the team through their travel history and everything that they have done from the point at which they were in a designated coronavirus area—that is, one of the areas in northern Italy or other places in Europe, or in a country such as Iran, South Korea and, indeed, China. They go through the means by which they travelled and with whom they were in close contact, such as family members or work colleagues—it depends on each individual case.

All those individuals are then traced, clinically assessed as to their own state of health and—if necessary—tested; close contacts in particular are tested. That is what contact tracing involves and, obviously, the more cases we see, the greater the burden of contact tracing on local health protection teams. As such, that is another area where we are asking people to assess whether additional resource is needed for that work to be undertaken, should the number of cases significantly increase.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be well aware from World Health Organization statistics that

coronavirus is highly infectious and that older people with pre-existing conditions are most at risk. For example, in China, the highest death rates are among those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease, in that order. How will our most vulnerable citizens be protected?

Jeane Freeman: Vulnerable people will be protected in part by the ways in which we can all protect ourselves, which I have described. Where they have particular concerns because of underlying conditions, their GP or NHS 24 can give them specific additional clinical advice. As we move from the containment phase to the delay phase, depending on the clinical and scientific advice that we receive, we may provide those groups with additional advice and steps that may differ from what is provided to others.

However, we are not at that stage yet, and the evidence that David Stewart has quite rightly referred to—I am not questioning the evidence that is currently guiding us—will be refined as we have more data about how the virus is spreading in other countries and about our UK cases. The modellers will refine that data as they go, and that may point us either to additional conditions that we should pay particular attention to or to a shift in how the virus is impacting as it spreads to other countries.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Further to David Stewart's question about older people, many of us are essential to the economy, public services, volunteering and caring for others, young and old. Indeed, older people may even be called up as additional resource in the NHS or schools. How will the Scottish Government balance the reasonable message of safety first without scaring older people, who are important both in their own right and because of their significant contribution to society?

Jeane Freeman: I could not agree more that we older people are absolutely vital to our society—in all the ways that Ms Grahame mentioned. In all seriousness, I agree with what she said. It is not our intention to scare anybody. We have been clear about that since we announced the first case and in all the work that has been undertaken by the First Minister, the chief medical officer, the national clinical director and myself. Our job is to be completely honest with people about what we understand to be the position, what the science and the clinical advice lead us to expect as worst-case scenarios, what the caveats are around those and the approach that we are taking and, therefore, what we need the public to do and where they can go for the expert clinical advice that they might seek. That includes older people as well as others. Our intention is absolutely not to

scare but to inform and reassure, and to provide people with the information that they need while we get on with planning what we need to do, in the health service and elsewhere, if the disease begins to take hold in Scotland. We are looking to delay it and to manage it against all the factors that I outlined.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary have discussions with health boards about the impending proposal to reduce the number of laundries in hospitals from eight to four? That is obviously of considerable concern, given the coronavirus situation.

Jeane Freeman: Liz Smith has raised a very important point, which is part of what we have asked our health boards to consider. It is not just about the number of beds or staff that they have or board and primary care supply chains, for which we are responsible; it is also about the other facilities, such as estates and laundry. We will pick up that point with the boards, and I will be happy to update her as we make progress on that.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): In the light of the announced plans for UK-wide emergency legislation, how is the Scottish Government working with other Administrations to ensure that any such legislation will provide the appropriate and tailored means to tackle coronavirus in every part of the UK, given that there may be different powers in different nations?

Jeane Freeman: Ms Maguire has raised an important question. We are working with the UK Government on the emergency legislation. Its relevant officials are co-operating with ours, and the same is the case for Wales and Northern Ireland. Because it is emergency legislation and because we need to have the option of the additional powers relatively soon, we have taken the view that, even if we might have some of those powers already, we will simply bring the legislative consent motion to this Parliament, in order to take the additional powers.

The key then will be each of the four Governments taking decisions about when and how to use any one of the additional powers. We do not currently have some of the emergency powers although, arguably, we do have some of them. However, emergency powers will ease things for us. The same applies in Northern Ireland, Wales and England.

That is the approach that we are taking. The key issue with the emergency powers is, as much as having them, how and when we take decisions to use them. It will, of course, be for the Parliament to debate and decide on the LCM.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary mentioned the importance of research and innovation, including

diagnostics, antiviral treatments and, ultimately, a vaccine, to reduce the impact of the virus. It is clear that those efforts will all be global ones. Where does Scotland, in particular, have the expertise and the ability to input into finding those outcomes in due course?

Jeane Freeman: Mr Macdonald is absolutely right: they are global efforts, and those efforts are being pursued with urgency, as members might imagine. Scotland is an active player in those global efforts. From memory—I would be happy to provide Mr Macdonald with more detail on this—I know that the University of Edinburgh, for example, is one of the leaders in some of the trials that are under way. Work is going on here to look for what might be the right vaccine, although we are some months away from that and, as people will appreciate, that will not assist us in the current situation. Work is also under way in which existing antiviral medicines and treatments are being looked at to see whether, with any adaptation, they could be effective against coronavirus, although they might have been developed for another particular virus.

As members would expect, given how successful Scotland is in its research work, including clinical work, in all four of our major universities in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow and in other universities, we are actively engaged in all of that work. Across the UK, an additional £20 million has been contributed to that particular research effort.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): How will the Scottish Government ensure that organisers and attendees of large-scale events will be kept informed of any changes to the current coronavirus advice, which might affect such events or lead to their cancellation?

Jeane Freeman: We have stood up SGoRR—the Scottish Government resilience room—and the Scottish Government’s resilience operation, which the First Minister chairs. Obviously, that involves cabinet secretaries across the Government’s portfolios undertaking work in their own areas. My colleague Ms Hyslop is looking at cultural events and organisers, sporting events and other types of events, and she is getting in contact with organisers so that they understand where we currently are on coronavirus. They are picking up some of the points that Mr Cole-Hamilton made about ensuring that there is resourcing for people to wash their hands properly, for example. Contact is being maintained with them so that they are alongside us as we go actively through the containment phase and contribute to that containment, and so that they are among the factors that we would play in when we came to look at whether we wanted to place any restrictions on large-scale events. I stress again

that we are not at that stage yet, and we have not made those decisions. A number of factors would need to come into play before we did that.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): It is clear that nurseries, schools, colleges and universities are environments of concern in which close contact poses risks of localised outbreaks. What clear advice is the Government giving to parents, teachers and those who are in charge of those environments so that there is absolutely no doubt about what they are able to do freely of their own accord and what they might be required to do if instructed to do so by the Government or authorities?

Jeane Freeman: Health Protection Scotland has issued detailed advice on health measures and steps and the nature of the virus through the relevant networks. Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland and local authorities are among our key partners in the resilience effort. There is advice for people about much of what we have discussed in the chamber today.

Mr Greene may not yet have had the opportunity to read the four nation action plan, which indicates that the groups that are most at risk, as Ms Grahame said, are elderly people and people with underlying health conditions. However, at this point, it appears that children are not particularly vulnerable, and neither are pregnant women.

As I said, all of that is being led by the science, and that advice has gone out. As matters develop, further detailed advice will continue to go out in much the same way, and I will continue to keep members updated on developments.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I would like further detail about what containment means. For example, would the Government not consider being more proactive by recommending against large gatherings before the virus spreads further, instead of waiting until it does and then simply delaying its spread as the cabinet secretary described in her statement?

Should the Scottish rugby fans who were at last week’s six nations rugby match in Rome and who were mixing with Italian fans from northern Italy before the lockdown in that area be afforded a test as a precaution?

Will the Government disaggregate the data on coronavirus by sex, so that we can see whether there is a difference in infection and mortality rates between men and women and, if there is, what biological and social factors might cause that difference?

The Presiding Officer: I was hoping for a quick question and answer.

Jeane Freeman: The disaggregation of the data would initially be done by us as part of the UK effort. At the moment, the primary focus for the scientists and those who are modelling on the basis of the science is to help us to understand the virus, its nature and its spread as much as we can. We will certainly feed in that ask.

Rugby fans who were at the game in Italy are receiving the same advice as has been given to others. If they feel as though they are experiencing the symptoms that I have described, they should get in touch either with their GP practice or with NHS 24 by telephone.

Elaine Smith asked why we are not advising against large gatherings now as opposed to keeping that proposal under consideration for later. All the evidence tells us that to do that when only one case of the virus has been confirmed in Scotland, and before we reach a point at which we understand that containment is not working and that the disease has taken hold in the community, would make the restriction on large gatherings less effective than if we advised against them in the delay stage.

A lot of what I have set out is not exclusively what I, as the health secretary, think is the right thing to do; it is led by the science and clinical advice. That is why it is a four nation UK plan. The work that I have set out and that the Scottish Government is undertaking, as well as the approach in terms of those four elements, is shared right across the UK and is based on scientific and clinical advice.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The cabinet secretary will know that my region welcomes tourists on cruise ships from across the world. If cases of the virus are reported on board, as they have been in other places, what additional support can be provided to those often small NHS boards? Are there any plans to move any vessels with cases on board to areas where increased medical support can be provided?

Jeane Freeman: On the second question, that will be part of the consideration. My colleague Michael Matheson and others will be looking at that as part of their resilience planning should that happen; obviously, it has not happened yet. The provision of additional support from one health board to another is standard across our NHS, and that practice would simply be part of the existing resilience plans. We would expect health boards to be doing that, and they do.

There is guidance for ports in respect of our devolved powers, and there is also guidance from the UK Government for all ports, given the reserved powers that it holds.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I apologise, but there is no time for any more questions, as we have already eaten into the time allocated for this afternoon's debate.

International Women's Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-21073, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on celebrating international women's day 2020.

15:05

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): This coming Sunday is international women's day—a day on which to celebrate women's achievements and to celebrate progress towards gender equality. This year's theme is each for equal, which recognises that we each have our part to play in making gender equality a reality, because while significant gains for women's rights have been fought for and won, gender equality remains an unwon cause.

This is a significant year for the women's movement because it is 25 years since the fourth United Nations world conference on women. In September 1995, when I was just a tiny wee woman—I am still a wee woman, probably—with the world looking towards the beginning of a new century, thousands of Government representatives and activists gathered in Beijing to talk about women's rights. The conference is often remembered for a speech by Hillary Clinton, who was then first lady of the United States of America, in which she famously declared that

“women's rights are human rights.”

The outcome of the conference was the “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”, which was a progressive blueprint for advancing women's rights that was negotiated and was, at times, the subject of heated debate, but ultimately agreed by 189 Governments. The declaration is a remarkable feat when we think that women's rights would have varied considerably among all the countries.

I would like to read a short section from the declaration. It begins:

“We, the Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women ... Gathered here in Beijing in September 1995, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations ... Determined to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity ... Acknowledging the voices of all women everywhere and taking note of the diversity of women and their roles and circumstances, honoring the women who paved the way and inspired by the hope present in the world's youth ... Recognize that the status of women has advanced in some important respects in the past decade but that progress has been uneven, inequalities between women and men have persisted and major obstacles remain, with serious consequences for the well-being of all people ... Also recognize that this situation is exacerbated by the increasing poverty that is affecting the lives of the majority of the world's people, in particular

women and children, with origins in both the national and international domains ... Dedicate ourselves unreservedly to addressing these constraints and obstacles and thus enhancing further the advancement and empowerment of women all over the world, and agree that this requires urgent action in the spirit of determination, hope, cooperation and solidarity, now and to carry us forward into the next century.”

Those words united countries towards a common cause, and much has changed for the better.

Sadly, however, women and girls around the world still experience hardship, poverty, violence and inequality. We must continue to change that. The platform for action that underpins the Beijing declaration helps us. It sets out 12 critical areas of concern that align closely with the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Those areas include poverty, health, education, armed conflict, the economy, human rights, media, the environment, power and decision making, violence against women, and the girl child. Each area is broken down into strategic objectives and actions. If the declaration provided the vision, the platform for action is a guide through which to realise it.

I would like to provide members with an update on the work that the Scottish Government is progressing in some of those areas. The Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Bill was introduced in Parliament last November. It clarifies the legal basis on which health boards can deliver forensic medical services, and will ensure that people have consistent access to services whether or not they choose to report to the police. That is known as self-referral. We want to give people control over what happens to them at a time when their ultimate control has been taken away.

I was pleased to confirm last week that funding for services that deal with violence against women, including Rape Crisis Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid centres, will be increased to £13 million per year from 2020-21. I thank all Rape Crisis's services for their kindness and compassion, but especially the Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre for the warm welcome that it gave me last week at the launch of that very welcome piece of information about funding. The money will also help to support projects that target prevention and early intervention, which is a core part of “Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls”.

We are strengthening the law. The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 came into force in April 2019 and addresses the full spectrum of domestic abuse. It covers not only physical abuse, but forms of psychological abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. Recent figures show the success of the legislation. We have also introduced the Female Genital Mutilation

(Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Bill, which will create a new type of protection order for women and girls who are at risk.

We are taking action on women's health through our commitment to develop a women's health plan. It will tackle women's health inequalities, raise awareness of women's health conditions and improve access to appropriate services and care. The plan will target access to postnatal contraception, abortion and contraception services, menopause services—something that I have a particular interest in—and endometriosis and heart disease outcomes.

Scotland is leading the world on period dignity, for which we are very proud of the Parliament. Since 2017, we have invested about £15 million to make period products available free in education settings and community locations across the country. I welcome Monica Lennon's having introduced her Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill, and I congratulate her for getting the support that was required for the bill to pass stage 1.

However, we do not need to wait for legislation, welcome though it is, to build on the good work that we are already doing, which is why we are taking further action, including developing regulations that will place a duty on local authorities to provide period products in schools from the next academic year, and exploring how we can support women who have medical issues such as endometriosis to access period products.

In relation to women and work there is another important anniversary this year. It is 50 years since the Equal Pay Act 1970 was passed. It was a milestone for women's rights in the 20th century; it made it unlawful to pay a woman less than a man for doing the same work or work of equal value. In March 2019, the Scottish Government published "A Fairer Scotland for Women: Gender Pay Gap Action Plan", and we will publish a report on our progress later this spring.

As we know, the drivers of the gender pay gap are complex, and equal pay is one part of the jigsaw. The gender pay gap exists in part because men and women are not doing the same jobs at all—segregation still exists. Women are still concentrated in lower-paid sectors and still assume the majority of caring responsibilities in households, which is why our transformation of childcare provision is so vital, because it is promoting family-friendly workplaces.

We must also continue to challenge gender stereotypes, including in early years and education settings, in relation to the kinds of jobs that men and women do, and in terms of who cares for children and family members. That was at the heart of one of the recommendations of the First

Minister's national advisory council on women and girls, which recommended the introduction of two daddy months—additional paternity leave for dads.

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, Jamie Hepburn, wrote to the United Kingdom Government in January to urge it to improve the package of support that is offered to all parents, and suggested an additional 12 weeks of paid leave for fathers on a non-transferable "use it or lose it" basis. He also recommended an increase in maternity pay for all women workers over a 52-week period, and a review of eligibility for maternity allowance. Increasing the level and length of statutory provision to parents will promote uptake of shared parental leave by fathers, support a more gender-balanced approach to parenting and offer financial support to mothers and fathers at the time of the birth of their child, which is crucial to our collective ambition to eradicate child poverty.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): That shared parental leave is very welcome. Does the minister agree that uptake has been quite low and that there needs to be an awareness campaign to promote parental leave for mothers and fathers?

Christina McKelvie: I agree with Rachel Hamilton. I hope that through including it in my speech today and raising awareness in Parliament, lots of people will talk about it. We will do a bit of that ourselves today. We should use all our networks to make sure that people take up the opportunities that come from that work. I hope that members from across the Parliament will support Jamie Hepburn in his quest to get the UK Government to change the rules on parental leave.

The First Minister's national advisory council on women and girls was established in 2017 to be a critical friend, and to champion the importance of gender equality and be a challenging voice where needed. My goodness! It has challenged us in a brilliant way. The council has just published its second report, which is on policy coherence.

In its first end-of-year report, which was published in January last year, the council made 11 recommendations on the topic of attitudes and culture change in areas from justice to education and in relation to childcare, political representation, women in the media and paternity leave. Seven of the council's 11 recommendations are in the Scottish Government's programme for government—that shows how influential the council has been. The recommendations have resulted in the introduction of the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Bill, which I mentioned earlier, and the creation of a new commission on gender equality in

education. I am pleased to be a member of that commission, which is co-chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, and by the amazing #iwill campaign's ambassador Razannah Hussain. It met for the first time just last week.

The advisory council also recommended that the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women be incorporated into Scots law. The Scottish Government accepted that recommendation, and the national task force for human rights leadership is considering how best to bring into domestic law the protections and rights that exist under the convention and other treaties.

The advisory council also recommended the introduction of quotas to improve women's representation in politics, while acknowledging that the power to do so rests with the UK Government. Women's representation in the Scottish Parliament has gone backwards since 1999, and women still make up only 30 per cent of Scottish councillors. The even greater underrepresentation of disabled women and ethnic minority women is not tenable. However, in the next few months, when the parties are all selecting our candidates for next year's elections, we have a chance to remedy that, to an extent. It is imperative that diverse women's voices are heard and represented in Parliament and in our other democratic institutions. All political parties must accept responsibility for that, and I will be taking that up in my party.

I am proud of the work that is happening across all areas of Government to help to realise gender equality in Scotland, and I know that much of that work is supported on a cross-party basis in the Scottish Parliament.

However, I am also clear that we are still on a journey. We have not won the war; we have won a few challenging battles, but we still have a way to go. Of course, it is right to celebrate all the steps forward that have been made. Women fought for every one of those steps, whether it was the right to vote or the right to equal pay, and we must keep reminding ourselves of the reasons why equality is important and bring it back to that core message from the Beijing declaration: women's equality is good for all of humanity.

I move,

That the Parliament unites to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2020; welcomes the theme for this year, #EachforEqual, which recognises that collectively everyone can play their part in taking action to create a more equal world; acknowledges that 2020 also marks the 25th anniversary of the 1995 UN World Conference on Women, which produced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a blueprint for advancing women's rights; further acknowledges that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the 10th anniversary of the Equality Act 2010; recognises that, while

much progress to achieve equality has been made, it has not yet been achieved in Scotland or around the world, and is necessary for the economy and society to thrive; agrees that a focus on intersectional equality is essential to tackle the different forms of discrimination that women face, and reaffirms its commitment to upholding, protecting and advancing the rights of all women and girls, which are fundamental human rights, and to achieving an equal society.

15:17

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am delighted to open on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives and to support the Scottish Government's motion.

In 2020, we need to have 20:20 vision when it comes to promoting equality and opportunities for women. International women's day is a fantastic opportunity to celebrate how much things have changed for the better, from the Equality Act 2010 to votes for women to tackling the gender pay gap. Nevertheless, even in 2020, there is still a long way to go.

The each for equal message of this year's international women's day is fitting, given that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the 10th anniversary of the Equality Act 2010.

I recently finished reading a wonderful book by Jenni Murray, which members might be familiar with, entitled "A History of the World in 21 Women". Murray highlights the work of Benazir Bhutto, and explains how, in adversity, she triumphed as a successful politician and Prime Minister, and explores how women such as Malala Yousafzai were inspired by her courage and determination. We, in this chamber, need to inspire the next generation of women to stand for office and understand that they can achieve great things. However, we are all too aware that discrimination, hatred and prejudice still exist in today's society.

When we speak about the discrimination against and stereotyping of women, we often do so from an urban or metropolitan point of view. In my constituency and across rural Scotland, women continue to be marginalised. A lack of employment opportunities, difficulty in accessing childcare, long-entrenched stereotypes and remoteness all contribute to rural women often being in a worse position than urban women. Growing up in the rural Welsh borders, I was all too aware of the challenges that women faced. We were expected to carry out manual jobs on the farm, just like men, but we were not necessarily rewarded or respected in the same way.

Women played an extraordinarily important role in farming during and after world war two, as they worked the land and assumed the roles of men

who were serving. Despite that, attitudes towards women in agriculture did not change and it tends to be assumed that the natural successor to a farm business will be male. As I said in my maiden speech, I was fortunate in that my father asked whether I would like to take over the farm, instead of my brother Will. I had worked alongside my siblings from a young age, but when my father asked me that, it came as a bit of a shock. My response was, "I just assumed my brother would take over." I was lucky to have a father who did not discriminate against me, as a young woman. For rural women throughout Scotland, we must make the case for driving culture change in what has traditionally been a male-dominated sector.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Does Rachael Hamilton recognise the important work of the women in agriculture task force in raising awareness of women in the sector?

Rachael Hamilton: Emma Harper makes an important point. The women in agriculture task force sends a positive message to women in rural areas and I very much welcomed its report, which showed the significant barriers that women face and which I just highlighted.

As I have said before in the chamber, the Scottish Government should make further, targeted interventions to improve rural childcare. We learned today that a major recruitment drive is needed to ensure that the expansion in funded nursery places will meet its summer deadline. The issue is serious and has a serious impact on people who live in rural communities.

In rural areas, our local colleges are important to education, given that universities are often located further away and are not necessarily the right place for some people who want to study part time. I would like more change in the gender balance in important subject areas in Scottish colleges. In 2016, the Scottish Funding Council committed to increase increasing the minority gender share in the most imbalanced subjects, with the aim of ensuring that the imbalance is no greater than 75:25 by 2030. However, Audit Scotland said in its report, "Scotland's colleges 2019":

"Progress towards addressing the long-standing gender imbalances has been limited and will require a concerted effort from schools, colleges and wider society in making sustainable change".

I ask the minister to say, in her closing speech, how the Scottish Government intends to address such issues and encourage more girls to take up science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, particularly in the context of agriculture.

I am sure that I speak on behalf of my female colleagues across the parties in the Parliament when I say that we must root out discrimination

and harassment in our society, especially that which is directed at women, whether it happens in the rural or the urban sphere. Online abuse is a major part of the issue and, I think, is putting a large section of young women off thinking of running for office. In my four years as an elected member, I have experienced multiple instances of misogynistic abuse—indeed, veiled threats, too. I am sure that many of us have experienced such abuse. Even though it is 100 years since women were given the right to vote and we have had two female Prime Ministers, there are people who treat democratically elected women with disdain. That sends a very negative message to young women and girls who wish to run for public office or who have aspirations of operating at a high level in a company.

Women's political representation and workplace equality were discussed in the Scottish Human Rights Commission's progress report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, in which the SHRC considered Scotland's position in the context of women's rights. The report highlighted that there is room for improvement, as we all know. Scotland led the way on political representation for women but dropped from fourth place on the global stage in 2003 to 27th place in 2017.

We need to do more to convince women that their place can be here in the Parliament. I thank the people in my party for their work in Women2win—a fantastic movement that encourages, mentors, trains and provides networking opportunities for young women. Through Nosheena Mobarik and our diversity commission, the Scottish Conservatives are leading the way in increasing the number of female black and minority ethnic candidates. We have a long way to go. Only 19 per cent of Conservative MSPs are women, and overall only 35 per cent of MSPs are women.

I will finish with a quote from Jenni Murray's novel:

"A woman who has education, passion and, as is the case for so many, a father who supports his sons and daughters in absolutely equal measure, can achieve what she believes is right, just as a man can."

I want women and girls, no matter who or where they are, to draw inspiration from that and realise that the sky is the limit.

15:25

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I wish all women a happy international women's day when it comes on Sunday. We are delighted to support the Government's motion and what was an excellent speech from Christina McKelvie.

This year's theme is each for equal, bringing together the next generation of women and girl leaders—and rightly so. However, before I address the specific theme of the debate, I cannot ignore the worrying fact that male violence against women is on the increase, despite a fall in violent crime in Scotland. The actual figures will be considerably higher than statistics suggest because of the low reporting of such crimes.

Women will never be equal if we are not safe from violence. In the UK, one in four women will experience domestic abuse and one in five will experience sexual assault—staggeringly, the global figure rises to one in three.

In Scotland, if a woman is murdered, it is most likely to be at the hands of their partner or former partner—that accounts for 60 per cent of total homicides of women last year. According to the UN, the “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”, which was signed in 1995, is recognised as the most progressive road map for the empowerment of women and girls everywhere.

This is a pivotal year for advancing gender equality worldwide, as the global community takes stock of the progress made on women's rights since the platform for action was adopted. As members might expect, the emerging global consensus is that, despite some progress, real change has been agonisingly slow for the majority of women and girls in the world.

Today, not a single country can claim to have achieved gender equality. Multiple obstacles remain unchanged in law and in culture, as Rachael Hamilton nicely demonstrated today. Women and girls continue to be undervalued. They work far more, earn less and have fewer choices.

We will get nowhere near our goals until we tackle male violence and male control over women's lives. I acknowledge the work that the Government has done on forced marriage and, internationally, on child marriage, on female genital mutilation, on domestic violence, on controlling and coercive behaviour and on the sex for rents scandal in the housing sector, which I hope to raise later this week.

Those issues prevent many women from living the best lives that they can live and from reaching their full potential. That is why, in addressing the theme, we should never forget that until we are safe, we will not be equal. As women parliamentarians, we must be clear that we have work to do—on many occasions, I hope, in solidarity with our sisters around the world—while recognising that this Parliament has made great strides.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): On the reasons for violence against women, does Pauline

McNeill agree with me that financial independence—obviously linked to equal pay—is something that women desperately need because it would lead to their having control.

Pauline McNeill: Sandra White is correct. Women need independent financial control over their own lives, which is central when it comes to making decisions.

As the motion identifies, there are many layers of discrimination—that is key to addressing the different aspects of sex discrimination. I want to mention the disadvantages and discrimination that BME women face in their everyday lives. More has to be done to protect Muslim women in particular by looking at guidance and keeping them safe, in particular those who feel vulnerable when wearing head scarves. I commend Anas Sarwar and others on their work on Islamophobia last week.

Last month in Turkey, a law was introduced that will allow men accused of having sex with girls under 18 to avoid punishment if they marry their victims. That is hard to believe in this day and age. The controversial so-called marry your rapist bill has sparked fury among women's rights campaigners in Turkey. According to the United Nations, more than a third of Turkish women have suffered physical or sexual violence from a partner.

Such legislation and legal revisions have been on the statute books in other countries in the middle east and north Africa, but, thanks to the wonderful work of women activists across those countries—in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine—those loopholes have been removed in recent years. Male violence against women is global, so we must work globally.

This month marks five decades since the movement then called women's liberation had its first conference at Ruskin College, Oxford. Its four key demands were: equal pay; equal educational and job opportunities; free contraception and abortion on demand; and 24-hour nurseries. The conference's focus was not only on the demand for equal pay; it discussed the fact that work that was predominantly done by women, such as care work, was less valued. It is clear that those themes remain today.

It continues to be the case that most single-parent families are headed by women. They make up nearly a third of families in Scotland, and more than half live in poverty—a figure that, it is estimated, will rise to almost two thirds by 2021 as a result of welfare reform. The fact that women and children are living in poverty was the reason for my arguing for an amendment to the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 to take account of the specific hardship that single parents face.

The law on equal pay is clear: women should be paid the same as men not only for doing the same job but for doing work of equal value. Asda is still in dispute with more than 35,000 female members of its workforce over equal pay. So far, it has lost four appeals. When will it, and other companies like it, realise that women expect to be paid the same as men for work of equal value? The Court of Appeal has agreed with that view. In the latest equal pay claim to be brought against a major supermarket, more than a hundred Co-op shop-floor workers are seeking up to six years' worth of back pay.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to a close, please.

Pauline McNeill: There has been progress since the first days of the women's liberation movement, but we know that we have a long way to go. As we celebrate 50 years since the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the 10th anniversary of the Equality Act 2010, we all know that our fight against male dominance will last for a long time to come. Let us ensure that such legislation, which has served the interests of women well, continues to do so in the years to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are a bit pushed for time. I ask Patrick Harvie, and Alex Cole-Hamilton who will follow him, to stick to six minutes each, please.

15:31

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome the chance to take part in the debate. Several members have already mentioned that the tag line for this year's international women's day is each for equal.

Under that theme, I have seen campaigners highlighting in particular the important contribution of women to the economy, and the levels of inequality that exist in the labour market. For example, research by Close the Gap found that closing the gender gap in employment could be worth up to £17 billion to the Scottish economy. Measuring value in that way can be reductive: we should want a more equal world on principle, not just for economic reasons. I am wildly impressed by the voice of Greta Thunberg, who is one of the world's most inspiring voices on climate change, a young woman who speaks with both anger and clarity in an incredible way and who uses her platform to lift up the voices of others, not just to speak for herself. It is important to recognise that it is not just about the economy.

However, looking at the economic metrics does help to demonstrate the scale of change that we still need to see. Women's pay is still 15 per cent lower than men's, across the whole workforce.

Since 2011, the gender pay gap has fallen by only 0.9 per cent for full-time employees. Information on the lack of progress on that subject is available from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, and it should shock us all.

Such issues were highlighted to me this morning, when I visited the University and College Union's picket line at the University of Strathclyde, where people were campaigning on the linked issues of pay, workload and casualisation, as well as the gender pay gap. The combined impacts of low pay, precarious work, and the way in which workload impacts on family life, given the unequal distribution of caring work, exacerbate the existing gender pay gap and the lack of women in highly promoted posts in the sector.

It is true that we have seen good progress on certain issues. I echo the comments that have already been made about the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill, promoted by Monica Lennon. It has been estimated that, over a woman's lifetime, it will cost her more than £5,000 to purchase such products. The Parliament has now agreed that that is not acceptable and that eradicating that cost barrier is imperative. Monica Lennon is due great credit for her work on the issue, as are those from across the spectrum—in particular, those in the Scottish National Party—who ensured that the Government came to see the case for supporting the bill. They are all due congratulations for working across party lines on the issue.

The bill is not a destination in itself, but it should engage members' minds on the size of the task that remains ahead of us. We still have a long way to go on women's reproductive rights, on pay, which I have mentioned, and on the experience of marginalised women, such as those in ethnic minority, trans and non-binary communities. For example, we have not taken some of the steps that are open to us on reproductive rights. Under the Abortion Act 1967, there is still no legal right to an abortion in Scotland without the permission of two doctors. Under the Scotland Act 2016, that power now sits with this devolved Parliament, as it should have done from the start. It was an anomaly to devolve all health and justice matters at the start of devolution in 1999 but to consider abortion to be an exception. Whether we regard it as a criminal matter or a health matter, it should have been part of the devolution settlement. We can, and should, now take the obvious step of decriminalisation, which many reproductive healthcare professionals have called for. Provision for late-term abortions is still not what it needs to be in this country.

I was pleased to see that the motion recognises the importance of taking an intersectional approach. I think that I am right in saying that, if

we agree to the motion—I hope that we will do so unanimously—it will be the first time that the Parliament has expressed a view on that. I know that, for some people, intersectionality sounds awful jargony, and it can be a bit of a tongue twister. That is partly because the idea originates in a lot of US thinking. In American English, intersection is used in everyday language, so intersectionality is much more accessible as an everyday concept—it is the way in which things meet at a crossroads.

At its root, intersectionality is a simple and powerful idea: that we need to recognise the different ways in which inequality, prejudice and discrimination can play out. Neither people as a whole nor groups of people are homogenous. Gender inequality impacts in different ways on women who are white and on women in black and minority ethnic communities; on women who are disabled and on women who are not, on women who are well off and on women who live in poverty; on women who are trans; on those who choose to identify as cisgendered; and on those who do not hold any gender identity at all.

In Scotland, we have a large number of women's organisations, including Engender, the Scottish Women's Convention, Zero Tolerance and many others, that have been doing fantastic work over the years to support women, and they have worked with a proudly intersectional ethos. An assumption that all women are non-trans would be every bit as wrong as an assumption that all women are white, or able bodied, or heterosexual, and it would be just as likely to continue to create inequality.

I welcome the chance to debate such matters. It took 50 years from the first international women's day to equal pay legislation. It is now another 50 years later and we still have not fully delivered on equal pay. We have a lot more work to do. I hope that we will unite and unanimously agree to the motion tonight.

15:38

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I rise with no small degree of relief, given that it has been my privilege to address the chamber during the debates on the previous three international women's days. I did so as a representative of an all-male party in the Scottish Parliament but, thanks to the Shetland by-election last summer, that is no longer the case. It is also true that when I was first elected to the Scottish Parliament, our Westminster group was entirely male, too, but now it is majority female. Times change, and in a good way.

Rachael Hamilton mentioned Malala Yousafzai, and it is her words—

“We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back”—

that underpin the theme for this year's international women's day: each for equal.

International women's day is marked the world over and celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also calls on us to address the need for action to accelerate gender parity. Many Scottish organisations are working to that global end, and I will talk about one such organisation.

Scottish Love in Action is a charity that has supported work with marginalised children in developing countries over the past 20 years. It supports the work of VOICE 4 Girls in Hyderabad, in India, which is the country that the UN calls the most dangerous place in the world to be born a girl.

VOICE 4 Girls educates marginalised adolescent girls about their bodies, their health and their rights. The organisation empowers girls to stay in education, empowers them to not get married under age and teaches them that they have the right to a life that is free from violence and abuse. That, in turn, gives them the voice to speak up for their rights, and they usually go on to speak up not just for themselves, but for their sisters, their friends and their mothers.

Although Scottish Love in Action and VOICE 4 Girls support girls, they also support boys. It is critical to acknowledge that in order to improve the position of girls and women, it is necessary to educate the boys around them to stop the perpetuation of gender inequality in our schools and to address its existence in our society at large. Initiatives to promote gender equality in and through schools are imperative not just in India, but here, too, because gender disparity is not limited to other countries or to other cultures.

I often quote Coretta Scott King, because I think that her words are apposite. She said that the struggle for equality is never ending and that you have to win it with every generation. There is such truth in those words. Members do not need to look very far to see the measure of the struggle for equality that falls to our generation in this country and at this time: women still make up only 36 per cent of the members in this chamber, 23 per cent of council leaders, 13 per cent of senior police officers and 6 per cent of national newspaper editors.

The distance that we still have to travel in pursuit of gender equality in Scotland in 2020 can be seen in those numbers, and in the actions of those men in positions of power who still use that influence as a means to molest the women beneath them. It can be seen in the gender pay gap and in maternity discrimination, which has clung stubbornly to our workplaces; it can also be

seen in the reality that Holyrood has taken full 20 years to discuss, let alone grapple with, period poverty.

My life has been filled with the impact of extraordinary women. I have mentioned my great-aunt Joan previously, and I will do so again now. In April 1940, Joan worked in Foreign Office intelligence as part of the British legation to Oslo. She stood side by side with the celebrated spy chief Frank Foley, burning intercepts as Wehrmacht divisions overran the city. As a key member of the Foley group, she helped to rescue the Norwegian Government and King, escaping overland by car and foot through the snow, through Lillehammer and on to the coast. From there, after providing vital communications support to the Norwegian resistance, she was evacuated, eventually, by submarine back to Britain.

Great-aunt Joan was awarded an MBE in the 1941 new year's honours list for her service. She was only 23 years old. I wish that I had known her. In her short career, she was present at some of the most defining moments of global history. She was part of the delegation to Yalta, and I can only imagine the diplomat that she would have become if she had not sadly been lost to us when her plane disappeared over the Atlantic on her return journey from the San Francisco conference that established the UN at the end of the war.

When I think about my great-aunt Joan, I am reminded of the frontiers that she had to push back as a young woman in a man's world. That she was decorated and mentioned in dispatches several times in the male-dominated landscape of military intelligence is testimony to the strength of her character and her resilience. I see that strength in the women in my life today, and I honour them for it.

There are more statues to animals in Edinburgh than there are to women, and the exploits of powerful and inventive men are much more readily memorialised and mythologised on bank notes and in school text books than those of women. The greatness of women in our nation's history is seldom brought to the fore, which is why we need international women's day.

There is a letter in my attic from Anthony Eden who, as Foreign Secretary, wrote to my great-grandparents expressing concern over my great-aunt Joan's disappearance. Although it is quite something to have a letter in my possession that was signed by someone who would later become Prime Minister, I keep and treasure it in her memory and all that she achieved. I will use it to inspire my daughter when she is old enough to understand that the greatness of women is nothing new.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. We are short of time, so no additional time will be given back for interventions. Speeches should be of six minutes.

15:44

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate to celebrate international women's day 2020. As we have heard, this year's theme is each for equal, which highlights the fact that everyone—not just women—can play a part in taking action to create a more equal world. Individual actions make a difference.

The IWD website says:

"An equal world is an enabled world.

Individually, we're all responsible for our own thoughts and actions—all day, every day.

We can actively choose to challenge stereotypes, fight bias, broaden perceptions, improve situations and celebrate women's achievements.

Collectively, each one of us can help create a gender equal world."

I find it incredible that, in 2020, we still have to fight for our equality.

I will make some general points before outlining the work of the Scottish Government on advancing gender equality. I really liked the word that the minister used in a recent tweet that described women as "sheroes". If I recall correctly, she was referring to the wonderful Katherine Johnson, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration mathematician, who died last week at the grand old age of 101. Anyone who has seen the film "Hidden Figures", which I highly recommend, will know who I mean. That amazing woman of colour guided the first manned space flights and the first moon landing through sheer mathematical genius, and overcame racial and gender prejudice to do so. To state her contribution to our world during her long lifetime would take a lot longer than six minutes.

Katherine was a shero, as are the three women scientists—Italian and Polish—of the fantastic team that isolated the Italian strain of coronavirus and the brave women who spoke out against Harvey Weinstein, sparking the #MeToo movement. Here at home, the amazing Scottish Women's Aid workers, such as Dr Marsha Scott and her team, along with too many women support workers and third sector organisations to mention—they know who they are—are sheroes as well.

An article by Karen Boyle in *The National*, published this weekend, pointed out that

"Here in Scotland, the rape crisis movement predates #MeToo by 40 years."

Every one of those women is a shero.

However, sheroes are not just the women who hit the headlines or change the world. They are the woman who works full time and gets her kids to school with clean uniforms and everything that they need; the single mum who puts food on the table and often goes hungry so that her kids can eat; and the woman who cares for her elderly parents, or her disabled children. The women who juggle every day to make a better life for themselves and their families are all exceptional, everyday heroes.

In November 2019, I led a member's debate to highlight the amazing art installation, "GlassWalls", which Dr Emma Forbes, a principal procurator fiscal, initiated. Anyone who saw the exhibition in Parliament or in the City Chambers will know how powerful its portrayal of women's experiences of domestic violence was. Women from Glasgow's daisy project—survivors of domestic abuse who bravely come together for support and to support women who are going through it—assisted with the installation. They are all heroes in my book.

Domestic violence is the scourge of society—not just in Scotland, but globally—and a fundamental violation of human rights. I congratulate Ricky Ross and Lorraine McIntosh on their work with the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund to raise awareness of the desperate plight of women on the Congolese border. Sadly, that is just one of the many areas throughout the world where women are treated horrifically.

As co-convener of the cross-party group on men's violence against women and children, our meetings focus on what we can do and on what is being done to tackle that outrage in Scotland. The Scottish Government has a range of policies to deal with violence against women and girls and to advance gender equality. Our record £30 million investment in equalities will help to create a Scotland where everyone is protected and where violence, discrimination and gender-based inequality are consigned to history. However, it is an uphill struggle and it must start with educating our boys as early as possible in order to help them to become the new generation that calls out men's violence against women at every level.

As the minister outlined, the Scottish Government has recently announced the delivering equally safe fund of £13 million for services to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. The fund will give front-line services an extra £1 million a year and shows how seriously we take erasing the terror and damage of gender-based violence from our society.

We have already introduced ground-breaking legislation that criminalises psychological domestic abuse and launched a range of initiatives, some of

which other speakers mentioned, to support gender equality in schools, universities, colleges and workplaces. We have come a long way, but there is much work to do. I hope that we can collectively deliver equality throughout the world for future generations of women and girls.

15:49

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to speak in this international women's day debate. Sunday is, as we have already heard, international women's day, when people from all over the world will celebrate the economic, cultural, social and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

As I am here in the chamber today, it is only right to give a nod to the steps that all political parties have taken in recent years to encourage more women into politics. I am very proud of my party's women to win campaign: ask her to stand. I have seen its emerging success and I know that in 2021 it will be greater than ever.

The first officially named international women's day event was held in 1911. Each year, there is a different theme and, as the motion says, the theme this year is each for equal, which encourages us to reinforce that an equal world is an enabled world and asks us in our everyday lives to challenge stereotypes, fight bias, broaden perceptions, improve situations and celebrate women's achievements.

The motion acknowledges that this year is

"the 25th anniversary of the 1995 UN World Conference on Women, which produced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action".

That platform established that power should be shared between men and women at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. To celebrate international women's day this year, the United Nations is focusing on generation equality for those who grew up in the age of the platform for action.

All in all, Scotland is performing well in achieving the aims set out in the each for equal theme. However, there is always room for improvement. According to the Office for National Statistics annual release in 2019, the gender pay gap in Scotland rose from 5.7 per cent to 6.7 per cent. Although that is lower than the UK figure of 8.9 per cent, it reminds us all that we cannot rest on our laurels. It is always useful to remember that the gender pay gap is different from equal pay, which, as the motion says, has been enshrined in law in the UK since 1970. The PricewaterhouseCoopers "Women in Work Index 2019" reported that Scotland remains the top-

performing part of the UK in terms of representation of women in the workplace, which is a feat that should be celebrated.

In terms of the global picture, the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report 2020" revealed that in terms of economic participation and opportunity, it will take 257 years to close the gap between women and men. That forecast is up from the 202 years predicted in the previous report, so that is a step in the wrong direction. Several economic commentators have pointed out that there is a direct link between gender parity and the success of an economy. Increasing equality benefits everyone in society and that is why it is important that the push for greater female representation happens in all parts of the economy, including in the STEM sectors, which have historically struggled in that regard.

A Skills Development Scotland report in June last year revealed that a huge 91.1 per cent of modern apprenticeship starts in STEM frameworks are male. That could lead to longer-term problems when it comes to women getting into senior positions in the STEM sectors and could therefore affect measures such as the gender pay gap. There is a current focus on challenging gender stereotypes in Scottish classrooms. I spoke to a primary school teacher recently who said that when children were asked to draw a scientist, they tended to draw a man in a lab coat with wacky hair. Although it is all fun and games, that is the natural image in their minds.

I am aware that the gender equality task force in education and learning met for the first time last week. I will be very interested to watch the strategy that it develops over the next 12 months. Getting rid of gender-based stereotypes can have a huge impact on the number of girls taking on STEM subjects throughout their school career, which will improve representation in workplaces when they become women. We need to ensure not only that girls are encouraged to take STEM subjects, but that the school curriculum is able to accommodate those decisions. That is a focus that I would like to see here in Scotland.

Globally, many countries are yet to take large steps in bringing about gender equality. In Scotland and the UK, we are fortunately at the point where those larger steps have mostly been taken. At the same time, we should also take the remaining smaller steps so that we accomplish a gender-equal world where no matter what someone's job is, they take part on equal terms, irrespective of their gender. The world in which my children grew up is very different from the world in which I grew up and I know that the world of the next generation will be different again. We must all keep pushing to make that difference in gender equality. On international women's day this year,

we should celebrate how far we have come and consider the next generation and the world in which we want them to grow up.

15:55

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):

As the minister said in her opening speech, we have made progress towards male and female equality, but we are nowhere near it yet. With no amendments to the Government's motion having been lodged, it seems that we have cross-party consensus on upholding and protecting the rights of women and girls. Good. The rights of women and girls are fundamental human rights that have been fought for long and hard and should be defended vigorously.

That fight is not over. There is still so much to do on things such as female genital mutilation, prostitution and sexual slavery. Globally, women and girls are being refused access to education and they are trapped in conflicts in which rape is used as a weapon of war. Domestic violence is still a terrifying, terrorising reality for far too many. Around the world, the number of sex-selected abortions is rising, the number of deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth is needlessly high, and women and girls are prevented from making deeply personal choices about their reproductive healthcare.

In 2020, women and girls in Scotland should be under no illusion that the fight for women's liberation is won. I would go as far as to say that, in some ways, the world feels less equal and more dangerous for women and girls, not safer. Of course, progress has been made in many areas, and I whole-heartedly welcome that. At a time when the spectrum of men's violence against women seems to be at epidemic proportions, I am glad of the Scottish Government's action in relation to both funding of front-line services and legislation. I am very proud of the groundbreaking legislation that criminalises psychological abuse, recognising the reality for victims and that the terror inflicted on them is not just physical and certainly not one-off events but a continuum of coercive and controlling behaviour. That legislation will protect many women and girls.

We also have to talk about the increase in the number of women and girls who are being killed or injured in violence that is claimed to be consensual. I agree with the We Can't Consent To This campaign, which does not believe that women can consent to their grievous injury or death, and believes that they certainly do not invite the male violence that kills them. The claim of "Sex game gone wrong" must not become the new "She was asking for it" defence. There is work to be done there.

At a time when girls and women in this country are at risk of undergoing the unnecessary and painful procedure, which has lasting health consequences, I am glad that we have political consensus on the Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Bill, which, when enacted, will provide the option of protection orders, which female survivors have told us will help to keep girls and women safe from that particular affront to their human rights. We also have to talk about the fact that the women and girls affected need more than just protection orders. They need healthcare in a dignified, culturally appropriate setting—and not just for their maternity care—and they need housing and support. There is work to be done there.

As long as female bodies are objectified, commodified and reduced to something to be bought and sold, used and traded, we will not have equality or justice, and women and girls will continue to suffer violence. At a time when *Teen Vogue* suggests to girls and young women that prostitution is a job like any other, when the most common search criteria on a porn site are about abuses of women, abuses of girls, violence and rape, and when sex for rent adverts are still seen, I am grateful that the Scottish Government is clear on its position on the violence of prostitution and, importantly, is considering a more robust approach to tackling male demand for prostituted women and girls. I also welcome minister Ash Denham's announcement this morning of a fund to challenge demand.

Welcome as that is, there is further work to be done around the sexualisation of culture and the joining of the dots on the continuum of commercial sexual exploitation and violence. There is still work to be done.

Women as a sex class do not have equality and the fight is not over—not in this country and not globally. The rights of women and girls must be upheld, protected, advanced and defended vigorously. All humans have human rights, and, as parliamentarians, we have a responsibility as human rights defenders—a responsibility that I know we all take seriously.

To do the work that we all agree needs to be done, much of which must be done outside this chamber, women must be free to gather, talk and organise, free from the threat of violence, and free from threats to their livelihoods.

Talking about women's rights, and prioritising women and girls, does not mean disregarding or not caring about the rights of others; however, it may well mean difficult conversations. We have to be honest that, sometimes, rights might appear to come into conflict. Pretending otherwise does everyone a disservice and brings us no closer to the equal society that we all want to see.

I acknowledge all the work that is being done, and I am willing to play my part in the much more work that still needs to be done.

16:00

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate in advance of international women's day on 8 March, so that we—as women parliamentarians—can mark the occasion in the chamber. Over the years since I was first elected, in 1999, I have contributed to a great many debates about women and girls, sex inequality, and sex discrimination. Unfortunately, over the same period, this Parliament has dropped from second place in the world in terms of women's parliamentary representation—in 2003—to 35th place now.

I am proud to represent a party with a record of championing equality for women of all backgrounds, and which has used affirmative action to increase women's representation. However, we must all do better in increasing the representation of black and minority ethnic women and women with disabilities. In addition, given that women are still underrepresented in this chamber, I hope that all political parties will take action to address that for next year's election. Maybe one day, to celebrate international women's day, we can have a debate in a chamber that is filled solely by women MSPs.

As we know, a critical mass of women can make a difference by having an inherent understanding of sex inequality and of specific issues that women need addressed. As the minister said, we have led the way in this Parliament in that regard. To name but a few examples, we have had legislation on domestic abuse, my own breastfeeding legislation, and Monica Lennon's period poverty bill, which passed at stage 1 only last week. As such, we can recognise and congratulate ourselves as Government and as legislators on the work that we have done to help address the unequal treatment of women. However, there is still much to do and, sadly, many of the issues remain the same as those that we faced back in 1999.

As we have heard, the UN theme this year is each for equal, which highlights the personal responsibility of each one of us to challenge women's inequality. Although I support that, I must emphasise the need for collective action. The world-renowned feminist Gloria Steinem once said:

"The story of women's struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist nor to any one organisation but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights."

We can be under no illusion, worldwide, that the fight for women is as real and as urgent as it was when socialist women from 17 countries came

together in 1910 to claim a day as theirs, and to highlight the struggle of working women. Here in Scotland, recent Police Scotland figures show that, where sex is known, 79 per cent of domestic abuse incidents involved a female victim and a male perpetrator and 94 per cent of rapes and attempted rapes had a female victim.

Women are 52 per cent of the Scottish population, and yet we remain massively underrepresented in the public sphere. According to Engender, of the 39 different public areas that it researched, only five had achieved 50 per cent women. Men are still overrepresented in positions of authority and influence in Scotland. The “Sex and Power in Scotland 2020” report that Engender recently produced is sobering reading, and I recommend it to everyone. Men are tenaciously holding on to their power in boardrooms, in local councils, in schools and universities, in this Parliament—in fact, everywhere. The dominance of men is good for no one; it does not reflect the needs of the Scottish population and it perpetuates inequality for women and marginalised groups.

With nine women judges out of the 34 at the Supreme Court, and two women senior police officers out of a total of 15, it is no surprise that the one in five Scottish women who will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime struggle to get access to justice. Low conviction rates for rape, domestic abuse, and the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, together with one of the highest levels of women’s imprisonment in northern Europe, are clear evidence that justice and the law are not working for women in Scotland. The statistics that I quoted also show the absolute need for data that is gathered on the basis of sex, so that we can see those patterns.

Over the coming week, Scotland’s local councils will yet again be forced to cut local services because of underfunding, and women and children will bear the brunt of those cuts and the closure of services upon which they rely.

We should not forget that Professor Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, noted on his visit in 2018 the unequal burden of austerity that has been borne by women in the UK.

I will mention a social enterprise project that I learned about last week, which is partially funded by the Scottish Government. The access2safety service has been set up to help overcome the barriers to services that black and minority ethnic women can experience, including for domestic abuse, rape and sexual abuse, exploitation or abusive cultural practices. The service provides interpreters who are trained in recognising violence against women and trauma response. It empowers women by helping some of the most

vulnerable women in Scotland and creating jobs for marginalised women who speak their languages.

Ten years after the Equality Act 2010 was passed, the sex-based rights for women that were recognised in that act are being questioned by some people and there are attempts to silence women who want to discuss those legal rights. They are vital, for example, in providing safe spaces for women free from the presence of men and for ensuring that women can have female providers for personal intimate care requirements and can organise politically against sex-based oppression by males. The very suggestion of their removal is a timely reminder that we can never be complacent about our past achievements and, as democrats and parliamentarians, we have a duty to speak up and not allow our voices to be silenced by men.

Last week, Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, warned against complacency on women’s rights at an event marking the 25th anniversary of the “Beijing Declaration”. According to Ms Bachelet, the risks of setbacks to women’s rights are real and growing. She called on the international community to resist any challenge to “a hard-won affirmation” that

“women’s rights ARE human rights”.

I wish all my sisters in the Parliament a happy international women’s day when it comes.

16:06

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I welcome this debate in celebration of international women’s day. The motion gives all of us an opportunity to highlight the contribution that women make across society, nationally and internationally, as well as the injustices that women continue to face, which have been spoken of.

It is fitting that we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act 1970. I will focus my speech on the Glasgow City Council women workers who, after many years, have finally received justice in their case for equal pay and conditions.

I will start with a bit of background to the case. In 2007, an unequal—as we now know it to have been—pay and grading scheme was introduced by Glasgow City Council as part of the single status agreement that was implemented across Scottish local authorities. Glasgow decided to go with a uniquely amended version of a scheme that was used by London local authorities. As a result, many of the predominantly female occupational groups were transferred to an arm’s-length organisation called Cordia.

Those women were subjected to discriminatory measures that reduced their earnings in value compared to those of mainstream Glasgow City Council employees: overtime rates were reduced, pay rises were not applied to non-core earnings, and oppressive shift systems and increased workloads were imposed. The largely female workforce ensured that our elderly and vulnerable people were supported, that catering services ran smoothly and that cleaning services were delivered across schools, nurseries, libraries, care homes, museums and homecare in the community.

However—this is the good news—by working together and showing huge strength and determination over an unbelievable 12 years, the women won their case and ensured parity for the women workers of the future. Those women fought against the then Labour-run council, which, by all accounts, spent more than £2.5 million in defending that discriminatory policy. I have to agree with the commentators at the time that it was an incredible waste of public money and a betrayal of those women employees. Who knows how many more thousands would have been spent? I congratulate those woman and the SNP in Glasgow City Council and the Government for tackling that issue and achieving justice.

With the marking of the 50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act 1970, we should be applauding that case. However, despite that legislation and landmark victories for women over the years, pay discrimination remains a persistent cause of the gender pay gap. We are still quite a way from realising the right to equal pay for equal work. Pay discrimination affects individual women and is a feature of female-dominated jobs and sectors—I have just illustrated that in the Glasgow case. I would argue that the problem is that our economy undervalues the work that women do and that it has done so for generations. I could go further and really put the cat among the pigeons by saying that I believe that a lack of understanding—I am being polite—among a predominantly male hierarchy has led to systematic discrimination.

The Close the Gap briefing that we received for the debate, for which I thank Close the Gap very much, made interesting and disappointing reading. Research by Close the Gap on employer action on the pay gap found that, although 94 per cent of employers that were surveyed had an equal pay policy, fewer than a third had undertaken an equal pay review and only 3 per cent had taken any action to address pay gaps. Close the Gap has said:

“This undue complacency among employers is also evidenced in the Government Equalities Office research on reporting of gender pay gap data where the vast majority of employers surveyed”—

62 per cent—

“had no current, past or planned future involvement in pay reviews because they considered that they already provided equal pay.”

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):

The UK Government’s legislation asked only companies with more than a certain number of employees to report on their gender pay gap. Does Sandra White agree that there should be a duty to close the gender pay gap if it is quite wide?

Sandra White: I absolutely agree with Gillian Martin, as I am sure we all do.

The Scottish Government is making progress. The most recent gender pay gap figures indicate that Scotland is still outperforming the UK as a whole. The gender pay gap action plan, which was published by the Scottish Government in March last year, contains more than 60 actions to tackle the root causes of the gender pay gap and reduce it by 2021. However, key tools that are required to adequately address the gender pay gap, such as employment laws, remain under the control of the UK Parliament. It is a great pity that those powers are not devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Maybe, if they were, we could then update things, as Gillian Martin suggested.

In closing, I will reflect on the theme of this year’s international women’s day celebrations: each for equal. I whole-heartedly agree that we should all be responsible for creating and delivering a more equal world, and I hope that the majority of people feel the same way—I am sure that they do. We need action by everyone, and I advocate taking inspiration from the women who were so unfairly treated for such a long time by Glasgow City Council. They showed determination and a belief in equality even when their fight seemed unwinnable. They carried on and galvanised support, and they won.

16:12

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): It is a privilege to join the debate and to celebrate the upcoming international women’s day, which is next week. I have been fortunate enough to have lived and worked in several parts of the world, including Bosnia, Afghanistan and the middle east, where I have seen women’s positions in society vary immensely.

International women’s day is, of course, about celebration. It is about celebrating what women have achieved and what progress we continue to see in all areas of gender equality not only in Scotland but in countries across the globe. However, it is also about advocating for what still needs to be done to raise awareness of the barriers that still exist for women and girls in sport, health, the economy and politics, to name just a

few areas, and to tackle those barriers head on with practical and loud change.

Our theme for this year, each for equal, centres on the idea that equality is an advantage not just for women but for everyone. As the UN phrased it:

“Women and girls represent half of the world’s population and, therefore, also half of its potential.”

For communities and wider economies to witness the growth and productivity that they need to develop, that potential must be recognised and utilised at every level.

Employment opportunities for women in the UK have gradually widened over the years. Indeed, since 1971, there has been an increase of almost 70 per cent in the number of women in employment. Across more and more companies, we are witnessing a rise in more progressive workplace cultures that emphasise that a flexible working environment attracts a more diverse and talented workforce. An increasing number of women are starting their own micro businesses and creating their own career paths with greater independence. As far back as the 1980s, the British Army, through the Bett report, recognised the careers that wives had while married to an Army husband and how they could be encouraged in military life later on. That was successfully implemented.

Yet, despite those advances, barriers for women in the workplace continue to exist. For example, Close the Gap has referred to the gendered “part-time effect” whereby more women are in lower-paid and often undervalued part-time positions. Moreover, the underrepresentation of women of colour, those with disabilities and those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community continues to be a pervasive problem.

Recognising the problem is part of the solution. For instance, the United Kingdom was one of the first countries to implement gender pay gap reporting, which requires private and voluntary sector employers with 250 or more employees to publish their gender pay gap every year. That goes further than the argument of equal pay for equal work. Mapping the performance of industries and regions indicates the wider socioeconomic factors that limit women’s contribution to the community and the economy. From that, employers can be held to account and communities can have a greater understanding of how inequalities have taken root and can be addressed.

It is vital that women are included in the decision-making process as strong and welcome participators. Underlying and long-held perceptions concerning women’s involvement are at best unhelpful and at worst incredibly damaging to efforts to increase their visibility.

Aside from in the workplace, which has been my focus so far, we still see inequality and discrimination across too many sectors, spanning many different countries. That is evident in stereotypes, conscious or unconscious; in policies and laws that serve to restrict and limit women; and in societal expectations and traditions. Countries that support gender equality in their constitutions are, of course, not immune to those issues.

It has been encouraging to see strides made in Scottish politics to bring us closer to equal gender representation, and it has been inspiring to read about the range of events that will take place across Scotland next week for this year’s international women’s day, including in my region of West Scotland. For example, Glasgow will hold an international women’s day bike ride and its university will shine a light on women in science. Dumbarton library will host an event titled “Where are the Women?”, which will look at the many stories of women throughout history who were deserving of, yet deprived of, streets and statues honouring their name and legacy.

International women’s day is not just about pausing to reflect and advocate for one day of the year; it must go beyond that. Each for equal means that it will take everyone—a truly collective effort—to champion and support women in innovative and visible ways. It is not a problem solely for the few; we all have a shared responsibility to fix it.

16:17

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Like Elaine Smith, I draw members’ attention to the comments that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, made earlier in the week when she warned against complacency regarding women’s rights. She said that women’s rights

“cannot be an optional policy, subject to the changing winds of politics.”

She is absolutely right.

One in three women across the world experience violence that is perpetrated by men. Between 60 million and 100 million women who should be alive today are missing, presumed dead, because of male violence. One woman dies every minute due to problems relating to pregnancy, and 15 million adolescent girls around the world have experienced forced sex—and we can multiply that number several times for adult women. Seventy-two per cent of human trafficking victims are female, and the vast majority, many of whom are children, are trafficked for the purposes of prostitution. Women also work two out of three

of all labour hours worldwide but earn just 10 per cent of the world's income.

Last year, *New Scientist* reported that sex-selective abortions have stopped the birth of 23 million girls since 1970. They were aborted not because of their gender identity or because they were non-binary—they had no value because they were female.

There are many marginalised groups in the world, and they all deserve protection from discrimination. One of the ways that marginalised groups empower themselves is by organising themselves and excluding the group that has historically been responsible for their oppression. Black people form groups excluding white people, gay people have their own groups and so do trans people—indeed, the Scottish Trans Alliance has argued to the UK Government's Women and Equalities Committee that the law should be changed to allow for services and organisations exclusively for trans people. I think that that is absolutely reasonable.

I also think that it is reasonable for women, if they wish, to organise on the basis of their sex. It is also legal. It is a kernel of decades of feminist thought to say that gender is imposed on women in order to uphold their oppression. By gender, feminists mean presentation, modes of dress and the falsehood of masculine and feminine personality traits. If we say that gender is somehow innate—that it supersedes sex—the logical conclusion is that women can somehow identify out of our oppression. Many feminists disagree with that, but increasingly that has become a problematic—indeed a dangerous—thing to say.

This weekend, Selina Todd, professor of modern history at Oxford University, found herself disinvited from making a short speech at a conference to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first women's liberation movement meeting in the UK, at Ruskin College. Professor Todd is a feminist and a socialist who has written extensively about women's history and working-class history. Since 2017, she has been president of the Socialist Educational Association. The decision to silence Professor Todd was not supported by the women who attended the conference and has been widely condemned, including by leading feminists such as Caroline Criado-Perez and Helen Lewis, but she is one of a growing number of feminist academics who have been censored for their views that biological sex matters and that women, as a marginalised group, should be allowed to organise themselves according to their own definitions. Indeed, Professor Todd now requires security to attend her work. Sadly, she is not alone. Professor Rosa Freedman, an expert in human rights law who has

worked for the UN and the University of Reading, has suffered similar abuse. The door of her office at university has been vandalised and urinated on, and she has been followed home by individuals threatening rape and violence.

Elsewhere, the philosophy professor Kathleen Stock has found herself deplatformed and subjected to a sustained campaign to have her ejected from her job at the University of Sussex. Sadly, many other prominent feminists have been subjected to similar treatment, including Dame Jenni Murray, who was mentioned by Rachael Hamilton, and Germaine Greer. Helen Lewis has been subjected to online death and rape threats. Lewis was subject to that abuse because she criticised a gamer in the United States who posted an image of a woman having her throat cut on the grounds that the woman was a TERF—a trans-exclusionary radical feminist.

It is not just in England that feminists have been silenced. Last year, in Scotland, a number of MSPs attended a meeting at the University of Edinburgh at which female academics and writers spoke about women's sex-based rights. One of them was the journalist Julie Bindel. She has spent her life campaigning against male violence, and that was what she spoke about that day. On her way out, accompanied by Professor Freedman, a man lunged at her, screaming abuse. Two security guards had to hold him back. That particular individual had taken the name of an American radical feminist he disliked, and he regularly threatens violence against feminists online. He was later arrested, but I understand that the Crown Office dealt with the matter informally, which is unfortunate, particularly as the majority of members of this Parliament afterwards signed a motion lodged by Jenny Marra MSP condemning the attack and asserting our right to discuss sometimes difficult issues, particularly at universities.

It is therefore disappointing that subsequent attempts by women to meet, including at the University of Edinburgh, have been shut down by threats of intimidation. It is even more worrying that women such as the feminist poets Jenny Lindsay and Magi Gibson have been subjected to online mobs trying to prevent their getting work or blocking their performances. When the Scottish Poetry Library last week said that that was unacceptable, a letter written by activists said that bullying was okay. If we really value women's rights, we cannot allow that to happen, and international women's day is an appropriate time to highlight that threat.

16:24

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I commend Joan McAlpine's speech, from among many

powerful speeches. I know what courage it took to say what she said, and many women will be proud of her.

As ever, I am proud to take part in the debate to mark international women's day.

I look back on my young days, when I had begun to realise what inequality for women meant. I reflect on that time and remember it as a time of tough challenges. I remember, too, the optimism and exuberance—the excitement of the possible. I yearn for such optimism now, in a world in which some of the debate around women's rights is so difficult, and where labelling women and impugning women's motives has become an unpleasant and corrosive habit among those who ought to know better.

International women's day should be an occasion on which to remember the battles that women fought for equality, on which to reflect on where we are on women's ability to achieve their potential, and on which to reaffirm our determination to speak up and speak out for women's rights, so that our sons and daughters might live their lives as they choose, rather than their lives being determined by stereotype and expectation.

International women's day is an opportunity to celebrate the past and the women through the generations who were not just pioneers, but who made change possible—who showed that women could be lawyers, doctors, engineers, adventurers and inventors and not just wives and mothers, and that they could wear whatever they liked. They include women who fought for equal pay, maternity rights and the right to work.

Those women include, in my generation, women who exposed the living reality of women, whose life chances were entirely shaped by the violence of the men in their lives—survivors who exposed the reality of domestic abuse, violence against women, sexual abuse and rape. We have seen the shocking truth of women being made refugees in their own communities, women fleeing violence, and women staying and living with it because it was “a domestic”. All too often, women were seen as the authors of their own destiny, and rape in marriage was not even a thing.

We celebrate the women who campaigned against male violence and the women who created the refuges in their own time and with their own resources, and who supported survivors of male violence. They did that without the agreement or sanction of Government or the state. Where they led, society, and we, now follow, by legislating for and resourcing women's services that are rooted in that understanding.

The importance of that legacy cannot be overstated and must be protected in all that we do

here. We celebrate the women who took the battle into the political domain to tell their brothers that women's rights are fundamental to an equal society, rather than something to address once that equal society has arrived, and that women's rights are not a bonus. They did so to change the laws on employment, inheritance and discrimination and to win the argument that male violence against women is not just personal but is the very stuff and purpose of politics.

We celebrate the women who won the argument for positive action for women's representation in order to ensure that equality and women's rights are woven into the fabric of political action, and that women are in the room when decisions are made.

Make no mistake—those conversations, debates and arguments were never easy, but women did not flinch from them—and we should not flinch now. No step on the road to equality is ever easy; no power has ever been ceded without resistance. That is as true now as it ever was, but energy and passion made change happen, so we need such energy and passion now.

In reaffirming our commitment to women's equality, we acknowledge how much further we have to go. Women remain disproportionately carers and low paid. Our girls outperform boys in education, but they do not run the world. Women still face violence and abuse and are still coerced, abused, humiliated and killed in their own homes. Just read the newspapers: across the world, women face female genital mutilation, trafficking, being forced into prostitution, being denied access to education and are even blamed for their own murders. Routinely, rape of women remains a weapon of choice in war.

In reaffirming our resolution to achieve women's equality on international women's day, I will draw a lesson from my lifetime: that is, the clear need for women to organise in defence of our own rights and the importance of women-only spaces for providing safety and places to plan. The right to women's spaces comes directly from an understanding of need and from experience, and must be protected. Our history tells us that when women speak up, speak out and organise, they change the world for the better for all.

Let us celebrate women's day by celebrating all the women who have had the courage to change the world. There is much left to do.

16:29

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate to mark international women's day. This year, as others have mentioned, the day is celebrating the theme of each for equal, which is

about creating an enabled world in which, internationally, women are empowered to be the best that they can be.

As has been noted by the United Nations, everyone—male, female and other—is responsible for their own thoughts and actions all day, every day. Everyone has the choice to challenge stereotypes. We can choose to fight bias, and we can broaden perceptions, improve situations and celebrate the achievements of women. It is important for us all to work to enable that to happen and to strive for gender empowerment and equality.

The subject that we are dealing with is broad, and we have heard much discussion and debate in the chamber today. I would like to focus on the international and outward-looking approach that we are taking in Scotland to tackling gender inequality.

The Scottish Government has a range of policies to deal with male violence against women and girls, and to advance gender equality here and abroad. The minister mentioned the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Bill that is coming to the Health and Sport Committee soon. As a member of that committee, I look forward to progressing that bill.

Whether here, in Scotland, in countries that are affected by war or anywhere else around the world, male violence against women is a fundamental violation of human rights. It is never acceptable, it is never excusable and it is never tolerable. The Scottish Government is therefore investing in front-line services and is introducing new legislation to tackle violence and discrimination against women.

The Scottish Government is committed to acting as a world leader and aims to set an international example of good practice in gender equality and in eradication of gender-based violence, in order that we can create a world in which women are safe and are encouraged to achieve their goals.

Over the past year in Scotland, we have seen the implementation of the equally safe strategy, which is our strategy to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls. In that context, I note Ruth Maguire's powerful speech. As well as dealing with issues of gender-based violence in Scotland, the strategy contains a commitment to preventing international discrimination against women.

Members might recall that, in January this year, just after recess, I secured a debate in the chamber on United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, which is on women, peace and security and was unanimously passed by the UN Security Council 20 years ago this year. It was the first resolution of its kind, with its aim being

specifically to address the impact of war on women, and the value of women in resolution of war and promotion of international peace, security and inclusion. Johann Lamont was right: women need to be in the room. When women are in the room when conflict resolution and the promotion of peace and security are being discussed, they bring a different perspective: they focus on health, housing and clean water and not just on ceasefires, weapons reduction and securing of borders.

At the heart of the equally safe strategy is the principle that all women and girls, regardless of background, race, religion or sexual orientation, should feel safe in their communities and should live without fear of violence and abuse. Internationally, Scotland—working in partnership with the United Nations—has pledged practical and financial support for women and girls to achieve that goal and to learn peace-building skills and conflict-resolution skills. In a programme that runs over three days and consists of talks, seminars and lessons, women and girls have access to international peacekeeping experts and female role models who are in positions of power. They have an opportunity to learn from each other about the fundamentals of peacekeeping.

That programme has been proved to have had a lasting and positive impact on the individuals who have taken part, and on the future of many war-affected areas of the world. In particular, the approach has hugely benefited Syria, and the actions of the Scottish Government have been recognised internationally as having played their part in supporting a peace settlement for Syria—one that is shaped by women as well as by men.

Our First Minister was the first world leader to address the United Nations General Assembly to discuss the importance of women playing our part at home and internationally. She spoke of the importance of societies and countries having a focus on welfare, and of peace promotion.

There are many other ways in which the Scottish Government is promoting gender equality, and the promotion and empowerment of women. All women in Scotland can stand for the Scottish Parliament and—importantly—we have a dedicated minister for equalities and a commitment to upholding women's rights.

It is worth noting the European countries and other countries around the world that have women leaders. They include New Zealand, Germany, Poland and Scandinavian countries. Recently, I met the President and Vice-president of the Nordic Council: both are women, and both are very impressive.

I note the importance of having an outward-looking international approach to tackling violence

and discrimination—against anyone, because men, women and others must all work together to promote equality.

I wish all women the best for international women's day on Sunday.

16:35

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I will start where Christina McKelvie started. At the Beijing conference in 1995, Hillary Clinton declared that “women's rights are human rights”.

That statement was a reminder that the rights and needs of women—in the workplace, at home and in society as a whole—do not and must not exist in isolation from what we consider to be the norm, but are integral to it.

A key theme in today's debate has been that equality for women is good for our economy. Although much has changed in the 25 years since Beijing, Parliament still needs to make much progress. When we consider how women have led legislation and directed policy and expenditure—on breastfeeding, on period products, on bus travel for the over-60s, on reducing isolation among older women, and on childcare provision—we see that huge steps forward have been made.

However, not enough has been done. Although we legislated on domestic violence in this Parliament—women pioneered the approach—there is still much to do. Pauline McNeill quoted the statistics: one in four women is affected by domestic violence and one in five women is affected by sexual assault. We cannot accept that. Members talked about the need for more women leaders in the police in order to ensure that there is justice for women in policing and in the courts. As Pauline McNeill said, until women are safe, we will not be equal. That is one of the comments that I will take away from the debate.

Engender's briefing for today's debate says that although women comprise 52 per cent of the population they are still underrepresented at the highest levels of business, journalism, the arts, sport and public life, and that the women who are represented at the highest levels are, largely, those who have had fewest barriers in their way.

The motion makes reference to “intersectional equality”, which is important. When we campaign for women's equality we must ensure that we are working for equality for all women. That means working to remove the barriers that are presented by race, class, sexuality, disability and religion, as well as gender. Equality for only some women is not equality. Elaine Smith made powerful comments about the need for justice for women who have been subjected to violence. That is the

context. We must ensure that we address all the intersectional issues in that regard.

Labour Governments introduced the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Equality Act 2010, both of which aimed to remove the discrimination that women face at work. However, women continue to face such discrimination, as several members have said. In the past 50 years, we have not eradicated the gender pay gap, which today sits at 13.3 per cent. That is not acceptable. If women are not treated equally in the economy, our economy does not perform as well as it should.

In Scotland, women still do 70 per cent of the unpaid labour in care and household responsibilities. That is not acceptable. That vital work is worth an estimated £10.8 billion to our economy. There is more to do. In our health service, women still face inequality. Although women make up 77 per cent of the health workforce in Scotland, only 30.4 per cent of health service chief executives are women. There is more to do there, too.

Rachael Hamilton talked about the need to ensure that women have access to all areas of employment, regardless of whether they live in an urban or rural area. That is vital. This week is Scottish apprenticeship week; I had the privilege of visiting Lothian Buses, where it was great to hear about the young women who are being recruited as apprentices and about the increasing number of women bus drivers. There also is something to be done about challenging the idea about jobs that are just for men.

We need to act on the vast discrepancy between representation of women and representation of men in top positions. Discrepancies in decision making and participation in society mean that women are not as able as men to fully exercise their citizenship, and when women are missing, so too are their perspectives.

The comments by Rona Mackay about international development and those by Emma Harper are central to the debate. In international development work, the contribution of women to tackling conflict resolution is really important, not only to get to the end of a war or a conflict, but to make the peace afterwards, so that people who have been at war can live with each other. That contribution is crucial.

Rona Mackay's comments about the importance of the work of the SCIAF show that, again, there is more to be done on domestic violence. The work is critical; we must take that away from the debate today.

I ask Christina McKelvie to pick up the issue of trafficking, on which we need joined-up work in relation to justice and housing in order to ensure

that women who have been trafficked do not continue to be oppressed.

There is much to celebrate, because we have made some progress. However, I want to finish on women's representation, which is not an issue only in Scotland. As has been mentioned by several colleagues this afternoon, less than 25 per cent of parliamentarians globally are women. That cannot be acceptable.

There are inspirational women. The references by Patrick Harvie and Alex Cole-Hamilton to Greta Thunberg and Malala were fantastic. Those women are an inspiration to us all, but they should also be allowed to be decision makers—not just activists who lobby from the sidelines. We want women with such experience, enthusiasm and passion to be involved in decision making.

This year, international women's day's theme is each for equal, which is to encourage everyone to play their part in a more equal world. We experienced a long campaign to get this Parliament set up; there was a lot of political argument across the parties. The Scottish Trades Union Congress and women in Scotland campaigned to ensure that we had equality. Our first group of MSPs was 50:50, but that remains unfinished business and it concerns not just women who are being elected, but a range of women that crosses disability, religion, sexual preference, race and class. We need to make sure that all women get access to our decision making.

Today is a celebration, but it is also a call for action. Although a lot has been achieved, much more needs to be done at every level in this country on representation, delivery of policy and the budget. There is more to be done. We have not achieved 50:50 yet. There is a long way to go, but that is the challenge. We have cross-party agreement. Let us take that out of this room and get some more action.

16:42

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to close for the Scottish Conservatives.

The minister set the scene by describing some of the progress that we are making, whether on shared maternity leave or the challenge of gender representation in Parliament. That theme has been picked up over the afternoon. Today is about how we all feel about how we are progressing, and then comparing and contrasting that across the world.

Rachael Hamilton reminded us of how perceptions and expectations in agriculture have changed over the years, and we have also talked about how education has moved forward. Today,

female students represent 52 per cent of the student population; in that sense, we are equal. However, looking across the subjects, we still see a difference between females and males. Engineering UK's 2019 report states that the engineering community must work hard to instil confidence in girls and young women so that they are capable of becoming an engineer, believe that they can do that and improve their "knowledge and perceptions", and thus increase the desirability of the engineering sector. The report states that, across key matrixes, girls continue to lag behind boys, including, perhaps most alarmingly, in the extent to which they believe themselves capable of becoming an engineer.

When my son graduated as an engineer, it struck me that, in his masters graduation class at the University of Edinburgh, not only were the majority of graduates men, but they were Chinese. We have to encourage both our boys and our girls to look to the engineering sector.

However, as we consider how to move forward, there is absolutely no doubt that the shadow of domestic violence remains, despite the significant work that the Parliament has done to tackle it. I agree with Pauline McNeill's comment that, until women feel safe, they will never be equal. We should all hold that thought close when we consider how to address the problem.

The contribution that I will take away with me from the debate was Joan McAlpine's passionate and brave speech about the rights of women—including the rights to be a woman and to have a safe space. We are now seeing almost a backlash against women simply for being women. Equality is about choice, freedoms, the ability to make the lives that we want to make and say the things that we want to say, and to be safe in whichever choices we make. We must ensure that such rights are protected, no matter what.

I have spoken in a previous debate on international women's day—in 2018, when the theme was press for progress. In that debate, I expressed my concern for women across the world who did not have the freedoms and equality that we now enjoy. I said that we should press for progress on those for them, which is an aim that many speakers in this year's debate have picked up on. This year's theme is each for equal: the idea that we are all individually responsible for challenging and improving gender equality, but that, collectively, we can achieve great outcomes.

Emma Harper has already touched on the next subject, which I planned to mention, too. In December 2019, I had the honour and pleasure of speaking at an international festival held by the women in conflict fellowship programme of Beyond Borders Scotland, to which I think that Ms Harper referred. The festival runs tri-annually. It is

a week-long event that brings women from conflict-affected countries to Edinburgh to participate in a series of workshops that explore various aspects of conflict resolution and peace building. On the day that I attended, I met 17 amazing, intelligent, courageous women from across the middle east, north Africa and south Asia, who wanted to hear about what it was like to be a woman in politics in Scotland.

Other members have reflected on those challenges in today's debate. Of course, we will not fail to keep working to improve women's life experiences in Scotland. However, they do not compare to the phenomenal challenges faced daily by the women whom I met—to access gender rights; to be able to go to school; to choose who to love or marry; to have the right to work; and to pursue their own lives free from the fear that they experience in their countries. Those women have dedicated their lives to resolving conflict and trying to bring about peace so that other women and their families do not have to live in fear and can begin to experience the rights that we have been discussing in our debate.

In highlighting international women's day, I would love to tell members about all 17 of those women and to celebrate their bravery. However, as time constrains me, I will mention just one. Soudaba was born and grew up in a remote area of Herat province. She was lucky: unlike many girls in Afghanistan, she received an education, because her father wanted her to learn. Through a US embassy programme, she managed to get a scholarship to the American University of Afghanistan. Not only did she graduate from there in law and English, but she did so as the valedictorian for the graduating class of 2019.

Soudaba's great passion is to contribute to achieving a sustainable peace in Afghanistan. She now works as a peace and reconciliation associate with the United Nations assistance mission in Afghanistan. There, she contributes to projects that promote peace and conflict resolution in remote provinces of Afghanistan, with a focus on women's inclusion in mediation, conflict resolution and peace negotiations. Alongside that, she has been working on providing practical legal courses and legal aid clinics that focus on gender equality, and on promoting women's access to free legal aid services and justice institutions. She does that every day, knowing that by doing so she is risking her life. Hearing that made me feel that my problems with and concerns about gender equality were nothing in the face of her experiences.

Every one of the 17 women whom I met through the programme proved the theme of collective individualism. Each was facing conflict and pressures and yet was able to listen to the stories of abuse and harassment, positive experiences

and challenges that we face in Scottish politics and to see similar themes and struggles.

Those women are not angry, negative or pessimistic; rather, they are optimistic and believe that change will come if we all support one another. The message of solidarity and support that we send them can give them the strength to continue fighting for women's rights.

Today, I will do something that I do not normally do. I will strike the each for equal pose, because I suddenly realise why such pictures matter. I hope that all members will send out their pictures this weekend, so that we can tweet them around the world and let people, such as those 17 women, know that we are thinking of them today and that we are standing in solidarity with them.

16:50

Christina McKelvie: How do I follow all those wonderful speeches? The Parliament is always at its best when it comes together and sticks up for something that it believes in. People who have been here for 20 years will know that the Parliament has always been the place to watch and the place to lead on women's equality. I am very pleased to have led the debate and to have heard all the contributions.

The journey in support of women's rights and empowerment did not begin at the conference in Beijing in 1995—and it certainly did not end there—but it was a significant milestone. It showed what could be possible when civil society, grassroots activists and Governments worked together on a common cause. The resulting "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" remains one of the principal guiding documents for advancing women's rights and realising equality.

In her contribution, Elaine Smith said that women's equality rights are "real" and "urgent". I could not agree with her more. I am incredibly grateful for the contributions from across the chamber. I will deal with some of the key points that came up in the debate. Many points were made, and I have pages and pages of notes about what members were interested in.

A key issue that was raised was how we tackle violence against women and how we will not all be equal until we deal with that. I hope that we will make that difference through the work that we are taking forward through the equally safe strategy in the Parliament, with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, in schools and in workplaces. However, it will take more than legislation to fix the problem, no matter how proud we are of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018; it also will take cultural change. I hope that all the work that I have mentioned will make that difference.

Patrick Harvie, Sarah Boyack, Maurice Corry and a number of others raised issues relating to intersectionality and how incredibly important that is. We have to ensure that all our work in the Parliament—whether it relates to black and ethnic minority women, women with disabilities or people across the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities—reflects that intersectional approach. As Patrick Harvie said, we are not a homogeneous group; we all have different characteristics. We should all reflect on that.

Sandra White gave an impassioned speech, as she always does, about equal pay. She will know that, as a lowly Unison rep in Glasgow, I fought hard against the reforms to workforce pay and benefits. I was happy that there was such a good resolution, but it came too late in the day for some.

There is an incredible story of a woman I met a few weeks ago at the funeral of a colleague I had worked with when they were a Unison workforce terms and conditions officer. She had got back £28,000 from her equal pay claim. She said, “Do you know what that meant for me?” I said, “Tell me,” and she said, “I was able to walk away from the terrible relationship I was in.” She had been abused financially and physically, and that was her ticket to freedom. We should never underestimate the difference that having financial security can make to somebody’s life.

We have talked a lot today about issues relating to women’s health, and I hope that we can work together, through the women’s health plan, on access to reproductive rights.

Pauline McNeill said:

“until we are safe, we will not be equal.”

I will use that watchword everywhere I go now. If I get the opportunity, I will credit her with the phrase, but I might just steal it and use it myself. She is absolutely right.

I am grateful to all the organisations and individuals who have done their bit for gender equality over many years, both inside and outside the Parliament and across civic society and our charity sector. We all probably have lots of experience of that work.

I find international women’s day to be an uplifting day. It comes down to the feeling of solidarity that it evokes and the focus that it gives to celebrating women and their achievements. We have heard about many of them today, including Greta and Malala—women who are known by their first names. Michelle Ballantyne mentioned meeting 17 women, and Patrick Harvie, Rona Mackay, Alex Cole-Hamilton and Sarah Boyack all mentioned their sheroes. Rona Mackay mentioned a particular favourite of mine—Katherine Johnson. She also mentioned the #MeToo movement,

Marsha Scott, and, more important, those everyday heroes—the women who do their bit every single day.

We are talking about women and girls who are standing up, speaking out, breaking the mould, flouting stereotypes, challenging the status quo and embodying the idea of—this is the term that is used for us now—“dangerous women”. We are also talking about women and girls who are carers, workers, students and activists. Every single one of them is incredibly important.

When people spend five minutes with the young women I have met in the Parliament Project, the Scottish Women’s Convention and the young women lead programme—my goodness—they know that our future is in good hands.

I am incredibly privileged to hold this ministerial role, because it brings me into contact with so many inspirational people—women—from all walks of life and at all stages of life. I am talking about women who are courageous and passionate about tackling issues that are important to them and their communities, including gender equality and other issues.

I saw that passion at the Feisty Women conference in Dundee just last Saturday. I saw that care, compassion and kindness at the Edinburgh Rape Crisis centre that I visited last week. I saw that activism at the national advisory council on women and girls circle event just a few weeks ago. I felt the generosity of the shared experience from the FGM activists and others who have helped me on my work on the Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Bill. I have already mentioned what I feel about the young women in the young women lead programme.

On Saturday, the Parliament will be a joyful place—not that it is not always a joyful place, but it will be filled to the gunnels by women, because the annual Scottish Women’s Convention international women’s day event will be taking place here.

I thank the convention for the work that it has done over the past 20-odd years. I especially thank one of my personal sheroes, Agnes Tolmie—many in the chamber will know who she is. During this annual event, women from communities across Scotland fill the chamber. There is so much energy that one cannot help but feel hopeful and inspired. I would like there to be more diverse women in the chamber, and at that event, too. The intersectional approach that we have all spoken about is incredibly important in that regard.

For me, international women’s day belongs to all those women. Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned his great-aunt Joan. What a wonderful story—but

what a sad end. What could she have achieved if she had been with us that bit longer?

On Friday, I will be with South Lanarkshire Council's cross-party women's group, hosting an international women's day event. It is not just national activism, but local activism that inspires me.

It is absolutely right that we use international women's day to acknowledge where we need to take action that takes us towards gender equality, and to reaffirm our commitment to taking that action. Johann Lamont told us about the legacy of the women's movement—the women who have changed the world—and how we should draw on that legacy to make improvements for the future.

I am also clear that we have to do more to understand the situation, that we must reflect on our policies and strategies, and that we must tackle the intersectional discrimination and inequality that women and girls face. I hope that the chief statistician's work on sex and data will be welcomed by many in the chamber, especially Elaine Smith, who spoke specifically about that issue.

We will not have achieved gender equality until all women and girls are equal. Some 25 years on from Beijing, we can be proud of a lot in Scotland. It is important to celebrate the progress that we have made and continue to make. However, we must ensure that, during the next 25 years, we not only fiercely guard the progress that has been made but strive to keep on making progress towards gender equality.

Members raised a couple of issues with me about women in STEM. I hope that they will welcome the gender champions work that is being done for women in STEM. On the Deputy First Minister's gender equality task force in education and learning, I have to say that Razannah Hussain is a formidable co-chair and will keep him right in every way. A lot of work is being done in STEM.

On the women in agricultural task force, I had the great joy of launching the programmes at the Royal Highland show last year with a group of amazing women farmers. I have recently been invited along to a dairy farm in my constituency that is run by a young woman. She also has two wee kids—I do not know how she does it. I will be really keen to see how the agri task force is supporting her in her work.

We have had a fantastic debate. This year's theme was each for equal, and we should all take our #EachforEqual photographs in order to send that solidarity out. The theme clearly reminds us that we all have a part to play.

I whole-heartedly agree with Malala, who says:

"We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back."

I look forward to working with everyone across the chamber to advance this work and to ensure that each for equal becomes a reality.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-21100, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out revisions to this week's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 4 March 2020—

after

1.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Communities and Local Government; Social Security and Older People

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: UK Government Negotiating Mandate

and after

followed by Education and Skills Committee Debate: STEM in Early Years Education

insert

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill

(b) that, for the purposes of Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions on Thursday 5 March 2020, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted; and

(c) that, for the purposes of Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions on Thursday 5 March 2020, the words "of up to 15 minutes" in Rule 13.9.3 are suspended—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There is only one question this afternoon. The question is, that motion S5M-21073, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on celebrating international women's day, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament unites to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2020; welcomes the theme for this year, #EachforEqual, which recognises that collectively everyone can play their part in taking action to create a more equal world; acknowledges that 2020 also marks the 25th anniversary of the 1995 UN World Conference on Women, which produced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a blueprint for advancing women's rights; further acknowledges that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the 10th anniversary of the Equality Act 2010; recognises that, while much progress to achieve equality has been made, it has not yet been achieved in Scotland or around the world, and is necessary for the economy and society to thrive; agrees that a focus on intersectional equality is essential to tackle the different forms of discrimination that women face, and reaffirms its commitment to upholding, protecting and advancing the rights of all women and girls, which are fundamental human rights, and to achieving an equal society.

Pre-eclampsia (Diagnosis)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-20650, in the name of Miles Briggs, on improving diagnosis of pre-eclampsia. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament understands that the condition pre-eclampsia affects at least 6% of all pregnancies in Scotland, and that 70% of women admitted to hospital with suspected pre-eclampsia do not actually have the condition, which it considers results in cost implications for the healthcare system and unnecessary stress and inconvenience for the women and families involved; further understands that, in 2016, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published guidelines recommending blood testing of placental growth factor (PIGF), stating that PIGF-based testing "can help rule out the condition in women presenting with suspected pre-eclampsia", and that this testing is currently being implemented in NHS England; believes that PIGF-based testing is not routinely used in Scotland despite repeated calls for its implementation by the charity, Action on Pre-eclampsia; considers that there is a disparity in care for pregnant women in Scotland, including in the Lothian region, compared with England, and notes the calls on the Scottish Government to address what it sees as this disparity.

17:03

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank colleagues from across the chamber who signed the motion allowing today's debate, and I commend a number of fellow elected representatives who have campaigned on the issue for a number of years—longer than I have—including Kenneth Gibson MSP and Patricia Gibson MP. I also pay tribute to and welcome the continuing good work of Action on Pre-eclampsia.

Pre-eclampsia, which most often demonstrates itself through high blood pressure, is the most common of the serious complications of pregnancy. Mild pre-eclampsia affects up to 10 per cent of first-time pregnancies and severe cases affect one to two in 100 pregnancies. It is caused by a poorly functioning placenta—an organ that joins the mother and baby and supplies the baby with nutrients and oxygen from the mother's blood.

Although we do not know exactly the root cause of pre-eclampsia, medical science is expanding our knowledge every day. By definition, pre-eclampsia occurs after 20 weeks—earlier in very rare cases—and the majority of cases occur in the third trimester. This multisystem disorder can affect different parts of the body including the liver, kidneys and the cardiovascular and clotting systems.

I therefore decided to bring this debate to Parliament to discuss the pathways currently

available for expectant mothers and the available opportunities to improve the diagnosis of the condition and the care of Scottish mothers who have it. The current clinical pathway in Scotland for pre-eclampsia includes taking blood pressure and urine measurements, but both blood pressure and proteinuria are relatively poor at predicting its clinical onset and progression. Indeed, it is estimated that 70 per cent of women admitted to hospital with suspected pre-eclampsia do not have the condition. Understandably, that has cost implications for our NHS and puts those women and their families under significant and unnecessary stress in many cases, as well as the inconvenience of their being hospitalised.

There is a solution, though, which is the use of placental growth factor testing, which I will discuss. It has been part of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines since 2016. In 2019, NHS England announced the roll-out of PIGF testing through the rapid uptake programme in order to help rule out pre-eclampsia, which was a welcome step forward in England. The use of PIGF has been shown to reduce demand on maternity services, improve patient safety and patient experience, reduce admissions and reduce unnecessary in-patient monitoring services.

A previous trial called the PARROT trial—"Placental growth factor testing to assess women with suspected pre-eclampsia: a multicentre, pragmatic, stepped-wedge cluster-randomised controlled trial"—demonstrated that, compared to traditional methods, the PIGF test, alongside blood pressure and urine checks, reduced the average time to diagnosis from 4.1 days to 1.9 days. It also significantly cut the rate of serious maternal complications and maternal death, with no increased risk to babies and no increase in premature deliveries or neonatal unit admissions.

As things stand, that test is not routinely available in Scotland and many mothers-to-be and families here think that that disparity in care between women in England and women in Scotland is unfair, and I share their concerns. The Scottish Government's position to date—I hope that the minister will clarify this during the debate—is that ministers need to wait until the results of a second trial—PARROT-2—are known, before adopting routine PIGF tests. However, that trial might take up to five years to report and there is already strong clinical evidence to recommend using the PIGF test. In addition, it is supported in national clinical guidelines, including NICE diagnostic evidence 23—DG23—which states that the test,

"used with standard clinical assessment"

is

“recommended to help rule-out pre-eclampsia in women presenting with suspected pre-eclampsia between 20 weeks and 34 weeks plus 6 days of gestation.”

Furthermore, the PARROT-2 trial, the results of which ministers have said they want to wait for, will look only at the effectiveness of repeat PIGF testing. However, given that no PIGF testing is taking place in Scotland, I do not think that the trial will add the value that ministers have suggested that they are waiting to see.

What campaigners and I want to emphasise is that, although the PIGF test is a powerful tool in ruling out pre-eclampsia, it is not a certain diagnosis of the condition. However, the tests are highly accurate in ruling out the chances of a woman developing pre-eclampsia requiring delivery in the next 14 days. Care can therefore be targeted and unnecessary admissions reduced, while women who are at greater risk can receive the appropriate surveillance to reduce possible complications. NICE’s economic evaluation of the test suggests a potential cost reduction of between £2,488 and £2,896 per patient, compared to standard clinical assessment, depending on the test used. The potential saving and investment for the NHS is therefore significant.

I believe strongly that mums-to-be in Scotland who might be at risk of pre-eclampsia need as much support as possible and should be able to access the best possible ways of ruling out the condition. PIGF testing is working highly successfully in England and is helping many pregnant women and reducing pressure and costs on the English NHS. It is unacceptable that pregnant women in Scotland cannot access those tests routinely and that there appears to be no clear path identifying their adoption here.

I hope that the debate presents an opportunity for ministers to consider the success of the testing elsewhere and the clear NICE guidelines, to review their current position and to introduce the tests so that women in Scotland can have the same level of treatment as those in England—anything else will not be acceptable.

17:09

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate Miles Briggs on securing the debate and I thank him for his kind words at its commencement. As I proceed, Miles will find that I agree completely with his speech.

I also thank Action on Pre-eclampsia for its campaign to secure the adoption of placental growth factor testing in Scotland, a matter that Patricia Gibson MP has actively pursued at Westminster and in meetings with the minister and the cabinet secretary for health. The blood test has been proven to improve patient safety and

experience through faster and more accurate diagnosis, easing anxiety and hospital admissions; it also reduces unnecessary in-patient monitoring tests and demand on maternity services; and it could potentially decrease admissions for suspected pre-eclampsia in lower-risk women. An economic evaluation carried out by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence showed a potential cost reduction of between £2,488 and £2,896 per patient, compared with standard clinical assessment. As a result, in England, the test has become almost routine, as we have heard.

With pre-eclampsia affecting around 6 per cent of pregnancies, it is necessary to have proactive testing and appropriate treatment integrated in our maternity healthcare system. Pre-eclampsia can lead to the serious injury and even death of both baby and mother. In the 30 per cent of cases in which a mother suffers from a severe form called HELLP syndrome, the mother loses her life.

My wife Patricia and I endured our own personal nightmare with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde when the entirely preventable loss of our son at full term occurred due to a failure to diagnose pre-eclampsia in Patricia, who was 41 years old at the time, pregnant with her first baby and therefore known to be at increased risk. Patricia nearly lost her life, too, and spent 19 days in intensive care and high dependency after her liver ruptured.

We sought only an apology and an assurance that steps would be taken to ensure that such a circumstance did not happen to anyone else. That was fought tooth and nail by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde’s lawyers, no doubt at great public expense, for seven years. Health boards surely have a duty of care to patients and their families in such circumstances. The sad truth is that pre-eclampsia is not always diagnosed properly or treated effectively. When it occurs, the patient, her child and family should be treated appropriately and with respect.

The 2020 programme for government commits to establishing a women’s health plan and, on 18 September, I asked the health secretary when the women’s health group would be convened and whether it would prioritise the diagnosis of pre-eclampsia. The response was positive. Apart from the obvious fact that pre-eclampsia only happens to women, we must look at economic inequalities based on living in deprived areas, which is a high-risk factor for many of my constituents. Inequalities also exist in some ethnic minorities and age groups, with women aged 40 and older more likely to suffer from pre-eclampsia. A family history of the condition can also play a part.

The health secretary assured me that the group would be convened shortly and that testing for and treatment of the condition would be prioritised in

its work plan. With several months having since elapsed, I would appreciate an update from the minister as to what steps have been taken so far by the women's health team to improve the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of pre-eclampsia.

I understand, as Miles Briggs discussed, that it was decided to wait for the outcome of the so-called PARROT-2 research into repeat testing, but NICE guidance does not suggest that further evidence is needed before the routine adoption of placental growth factor testing. It seems that that will only kick things further down the road and delay the day when Scottish women can benefit from the test, as women south of the border can.

I welcome Scottish Government funding for the maternal newborn and infant clinical outcome review programme run by MBRRACE-UK, which stands for "mothers and babies: reducing risk through audits and confidential enquiries across the UK".

We must ensure that women are aware of how to reduce risk factors such as obesity, smoking or drinking in pregnancy that are associated with an increased risk of serious adverse outcomes, including miscarriage, birth defects, thromboembolism, gestational diabetes, postpartum haemorrhage, dysfunctional labour, wound infections, stillbirth and, indeed, pre-eclampsia. We must help mothers to minimise such factors wherever possible.

17:14

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I remind the chamber that one of my daughters is a midwife in the Scottish NHS, and I add my thanks to my colleague Miles Briggs for bringing the debate to the chamber.

Pre-eclampsia is a condition of which I became aware through a constituent of mine, Fraser Morton, who first came to my surgery early in my political career after he and his partner had quite recently lost their son in childbirth—an unimaginable situation for any of us to contemplate.

Since that tragedy, however, through consistent campaigning he has changed things for the better for parents, and he continues to push for more change. I know that his partner, during the later stages of her pregnancy, suffered with pre-eclampsia; or, to be more accurate, the misdiagnosis of June's condition was eventually accepted as a major contributory factor in the death of their son.

Listening to Kenny Gibson, I thought that it was fantastic that he was able to come to the chamber and speak as he did of the tragedy that he and

Patricia Gibson experienced. They have been fighting for change, and I hear that echoed in Mr Morton's experience. That should make us all stand up and take note. When such tragedies occur, we always say that we need to learn from those occurrences, and that we want to create a system in which we do that. However, listening to Kenny Gibson, and knowing what Mr Morton went through, it seems that we have a long way to go before the system allows that to happen. In Mr Morton's case, it was a death that should not have happened—that, in real stark terms, is what we are discussing. It is about preventing parents from having to go through the unimaginable trauma of losing a child in childbirth or in the later stages of pregnancy.

I want to mention the misreading of cardiotocography scans, which is a major contributor to baby deaths. Through Mr Morton's considerable efforts, it is now mandatory for all neo-natal staff to undergo CTG scan training twice a year. Let me tell you, it was—as I have already said—quite a journey. We had to lobby two cabinet secretaries for health and sit in front of the Health Improvement Scotland board and the NHS Ayrshire and Arran health board to eventually effect the change that would address an obvious weak spot in the system.

The reason why I tell that story, and that of the on-going efforts of Mr Morton, is to highlight that raising such issues in this place can lead to change—change that can save babies' lives and prevent the pain and trauma of losing a son or daughter.

In the motion, Miles Briggs calls for placental growth factor testing to be routinely available to tackle the misdiagnosis of pre-eclampsia and the serious ramifications of that. The reality is that Scotland's pregnant women are being denied PIGF testing. Following the PARROT study and the publication of the NICE guidelines—which recommended that it should be adopted—PIGF testing has been adopted in England. As Miles Briggs said in his opening speech, it leads to reduced demand on maternity services, improved patient safety through a more accurate and faster diagnosis; reduced anxiety, and has the potential to reduce admissions. However, most importantly, using that test alongside blood pressure and urine tests cuts the rate of serious maternal complications before birth, such as pre-eclampsia, stroke and maternal death.

The Scottish Government, rightly, looks for an evidence-based approach to policy. I say to the Scottish Government that the evidence here is pretty solid and that, by introducing PIGF testing alongside other changes such as CTG scan training, it is possible to reduce mortality in childbirth for both parent and child. It should not

take someone such as Mr Morton to force that kind of change. The test should be available in Scotland, and I ask the Scottish Government to make that change.

17:18

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I join colleagues in thanking Miles Briggs for bringing the motion to the chamber this evening. Like colleagues, I am heartened that many members are here for the debate and have been asking parliamentary questions. I know that Alex Cole-Hamilton has done so and Kenny Gibson has been—I do not have the words for Kenny Gibson right now. Both he and Patricia Gibson have been so courageous and relentless in their campaigning, and we all admire how much they have put into the issue.

Even if you have not gone through it, we all understand that pre-eclampsia is a frightening and life-threatening condition for too many pregnant women and their babies. I thank Action on Pre-eclampsia for its helpful briefing, for all the support that it provides to families, and for all its campaigning work over the decades.

Miles Briggs's motion is very straightforward. In it, he highlights a glaring inequality whereby women and their babies over the border in England can get those tests—the benefits of which are well evidenced and clear—while women and their babies here in Scotland do not have that benefit.

I understand that the tests are not that expensive—it is possible that the cost is below £100—so I hope that, by the time that we get to the end of the debate, we can find a way forward. I do not see why there needs to be further research. Kenneth Gibson is right that it is welcome that we have a focus on women's health; the Scottish Government has done positive work, but we need to bring it forward.

As others have done, I pay tribute to Kenneth and Patricia Gibson for speaking out about the loss of their baby son, Ken. That is not easy to do and I know that, by speaking out about their experience and their loss, they will have helped not just people in the constituency but thousands of people across Scotland and beyond. That is important when we bring personal stories to the chamber.

I do not think that there is a lot more that we can add. It seems to me that the issue is really simple. I know that ministers have a lot of issues on their desks that are complicated and need more research and investment, but for this issue there is a solution on the shelf—it is ready made and we can learn from colleagues elsewhere. I admit that I did not know a lot about the issue, so I am grateful

to Miles Briggs for introducing the debate. These debates raise awareness. I read *The Sunday Post* articles last year, in which professionals were quoted, and I also read about the family impact and the trauma that can stay with families for many years. I pay tribute to Fraser Morton, as Brian Whittle has done.

I hope that this is an issue on which we can all agree. This is a short debate, but we do not have to re-invent the wheel. There is a solution, and I would welcome hearing from the minister that he will take on board what Kenneth and Patricia Gibson have said. Miles Briggs's motion has not a word that can be criticised. Action on Pre-eclampsia has been very clear. If we have to have further trials in Scotland, how long will that take? If the issue is about resources, are ministers looking at that?

We can all agree on the issue. It would be a really positive outcome if we could get an update from the minister that the work will go ahead and that tests will be available to women and babies in Scotland very soon.

17:22

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): I thank Miles Briggs for securing this important debate.

I think that we are in agreement that it is essential for pre-eclampsia to be diagnosed and treated as soon as possible. Every maternity health professional in Scotland is trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of pre-eclampsia in their patients. They are also trained in how to manage the condition effectively, so that women across Scotland receive the highest-quality care that is tailored to their needs.

I will touch on Brian Whittle's points about learning lessons from adverse events. It is important that we learn from adverse outcomes in the maternity setting and we are clear that systematic, multidisciplinary, high-quality reviews into death in maternity settings are hugely important. That is why we commissioned the development of the perinatal mortality review tool, which supports our professionals to undertake robust reviews. The reviews highlight learnings so that boards can continue to improve outcomes for the women and their families in their areas. All health boards in Scotland are registered to use the perinatal mortality review tool.

The UK has the lowest incidence of maternal mortality from pre-eclampsia in the world. Out of all the women who give birth here, the number who die from pre-eclampsia is now fewer than one in every million. That is testament to the skills, knowledge and dedication of the incredible staff in our NHS in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK.

The latest MBRRACE-UK “Saving Lives, Improving Mothers’ Care” report was published in December last year. It tells us that, thankfully, pre-eclampsia accounted for just 2 per cent of all maternal deaths—5 deaths—between 2015 and 2017 across the UK. Nevertheless, it is important that we remember the huge impact of such loss. I add my thanks to Kenneth Gibson for speaking out today and sharing his and his wife’s personal experience.

Around 50,000 babies are born each year in the NHS in Scotland, and we know that hypertensive disorders, including pre-eclampsia, affect around eight to 10 per cent of pregnant women. Health boards throughout Scotland also return information to the Information Services Division of the NHS in Scotland on the number of babies delivered by mothers with pre-eclampsia. In Scotland in 2019, fewer than 1.5 per cent of babies who were reported to ISD Scotland were delivered because of pre-eclampsia. That has been the case in each of the past five years, and that illustrates the impact and importance of the great work that has been done to date across maternity services in Scotland, which are delivered by our excellent NHS care staff. Nevertheless, it is important that we remember the individual impact of that, that we are not complacent and that we continue to look at what more we can do to ensure that Scotland is a fantastic place for women to give birth and start their families in.

There has been talk across the chamber about access. I will come to that in a minute; I am minding the time.

Miles Briggs talked about PARROT, or placental growth factor to assess and diagnose hypertensive pregnant women: a stepped wedge trial. The results of PARROT on placental growth factor testing were encouraging, as we have heard. They suggested that testing could reduce the time that is taken for doctors to diagnose pre-eclampsia. However, only single testing was looked at, and negative results using the test are valid for only 14 days. Further research is needed to ensure that we act on robust evidence in the best interests of patients and their families.

Monica Lennon asked how that testing would go forward. Scotland is directly participating in that work. NHS Lothian is taking part in PARROT-2, which is an independent research study into repeated placental growth factor testing. Therefore, PARROT is available for women involved in the area.

Brian Whittle: The NICE guidelines are pretty clear. What is it about them that the minister disagrees with?

Joe FitzPatrick: I was just about to come on to the NICE guidelines.

We recognise that placental growth factor testing shows promise in improving the detection and diagnosis of pre-eclampsia. It is vital that any such testing is robust and evidence based. The NICE diagnostics guidance, as it stands, takes the view that there is currently insufficient evidence to recommend the routine adoption of placental growth factor testing.

There has been some talk of an inequality between Scotland and the rest of the UK. However, as I have said, the PARROT test is taking place in Lothian. It has been suggested that there is universal access to the test in other parts of the UK, but we understand that that is not the case. By the end of last year, we were aware of only 33 of 223 trusts in England that had implemented the testing.

To return to Scotland, I cannot thank Kenneth Gibson enough for the work that he has put into the issue. That is never easy, because such things always bring back memories. However, his personal experience and that of his wife are very powerful.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and I met Patricia Gibson MP in September last year, and we explained that we were committed to developing a women’s health plan in our programme for government, which was launched on 3 September last year. The expert women’s health group met for the first time on 5 February this year, and it was agreed then that testing for pre-eclampsia would be part of the group’s work plan. The group will consider recent and emerging evidence as part of that work. The group is scheduled to meet again in May, and placental growth factor testing is a confirmed agenda item for that meeting. It is absolutely on the agenda for the next meeting.

At the end of August last year, my officials spoke with the chief executive officer of Action on Pre-eclampsia. It was really positive to hear about that charity’s great work in maintaining public awareness of pre-eclampsia. We know that it also runs training events for professionals, and I am delighted to hear that a study day event is scheduled in Scotland for 11 March, which is next week.

We are continuing to look at the evidence and to work with officials, and our officials continue to engage with officials in NHS England on placental growth factor testing to really understand the emerging evidence from the experience in the 33 trusts in which that has been rolled out. The majority of boards south of the border have not yet rolled it out.

I assure members that the issue is very much on the Scottish Government’s agenda, and I look forward to being able to report back on the output

from the women's health group as we move forward.

Meeting closed at 17:29.

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