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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 4 June 2025

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

Point of Order

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
Good afternoon. The first item of business is—

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):
On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am grateful that you have agreed to meet me this evening. However, yesterday, you repeated the claim in the chamber that you had not been aware of any invitations to meet me. The chief executive of the Parliament has now confirmed that he had a discussion with you last Thursday about my first request to meet you, so, on reflection, do you agree with the chief executive that you had that discussion last Thursday, and are there opportunities for you to correct the record?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Ross. That is not a point of order, but I will respond to it. I have, indeed, offered to meet you later today, and I look forward to that. I also intend to meet Mr Findlay.

Last Thursday, I told the chief executive that I wished to meet Mr Findlay as a matter of priority, given the nature of events subsequent to my decision to ask you to leave the chamber. Requests to meet Mr Findlay were made on Thursday and again on Tuesday. Those were declined.

Last Thursday, the chief executive told me that he had declined your request to meet him and, if possible, me, as he was aware that I was seeking to meet Mr Findlay. I therefore considered that matter closed. Your subsequent request to the chief executive's office on Tuesday morning to meet me was dealt with by my office, as I was unavailable, due to long-standing parliamentary commitments, and I was not aware of that request.

Douglas Ross: Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer. What you have just said now makes it clear that you were aware of requests back to last Thursday. In the chamber yesterday, you specifically said that you were not aware of any requests. It is important to you and to this entire Parliament that we give accurate statements to this chamber, so, on reflection, will you now correct the record from yesterday?

The Presiding Officer: I do not regard an email to the chief executive, another office, which was mentioned to me in passing and in which I am mentioned in passing, as a specific request to

meet me. My office has contacted your office today, Mr Ross, and I very much look forward to meeting you this evening.

We will now move on to portfolio question time.

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

Section 104 Orders (Scotland Act 1998)

1. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding improving the process for bringing forward orders under section 104 of the Scotland Act 1998. (S6O-04736)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government and the Scotland Office meet regularly to discuss the Scotland Act 1998 order programme, including ways to improve the process. Once the need for a Scotland Act 1998 order has been identified, the Scottish Government will always seek to ensure that a way forward is agreed between the two Governments as early as possible. However, timetables for all Scotland Act 1998 orders are influenced by a wide range of factors, including subject matter, complexity of drafting and securing UK parliamentary time.

Emma Roddick: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, but I have constituents who have been waiting a very long time for a change in the law in Scotland to allow mixed-sex marriages to be converted to civil partnerships. I have engaged with multiple Scottish and UK ministers on the issue—I have even been one of those ministers. Although everyone agrees on the change, and it has already been made in England, the process of getting an order seems to be unreasonably and unnecessarily long. Can the cabinet secretary speak to why that is the case? What can be done to expedite law making for Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I agree that it has taken a lengthy time to progress with the UK Government a section 104 order on converting marriages to civil partnerships. There is a need for a section 104 order—for example, provisions need to be made so that a marriage that would be converted to a civil partnership in Scotland would be recognised as such in the rest of the United Kingdom.

We will make progress. Scottish Government officials will write to the Scotland Office in the next week or so with full policy details of what needs to be included in the order. Officials will agree a timetable, and Scottish Government officials will keep people who are interested in the order fully informed of developments. I hope that the

Scotland Office will work to ensure that all arms of the UK Government are fully engaged.

More generally, the Minister for Parliamentary Business will continue to work with the Scotland Office and the UK Government to ensure that Scotland Act 1998 orders are progressed smoothly and quickly, which is in the interests of the people of Scotland, whatever their views on the current devolution settlement.

Gaza (Humanitarian Assistance)

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had regarding its support for humanitarian assistance, in light of reports of the increasing number of deaths in Gaza. (S6O-04737)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Since the outset of the current conflict, the Scottish Government has contributed £1.3 million in humanitarian funding for Gaza and the wider region. That has included £750,000 through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in December 2023 and £550,000 for the middle east through the Disasters Emergency Committee, Mercy Corps and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, which includes the further £300,000 that was announced at the end of April.

We receive regular briefings from United Nations agencies, the DEC and our humanitarian emergency fund panel members. They warn of the catastrophic situation that is being caused by the inhumane restrictions on aid imposed by Israel. The World Food Programme has enough food on the border to feed the entire population for two months, all while people in Gaza face starvation. The situation is utterly shameful and avoidable, and the international community, including the United Kingdom, must act now.

Richard Leonard: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. Last August, the cabinet secretary met Israeli Government representatives. Last October, Israel banned the UN aid organisation UNRWA. Last November, an arrest warrant was issued for Benjamin Netanyahu for the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare. Netanyahu and Donald Trump have handed over food aid in Gaza to private contractors, whilst blocking humanitarian aid from any other source. In just the last few days, scores of Palestinians have been killed and injured by Israeli forces whilst waiting for food from the US-owned Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

So, will the cabinet secretary today condemn the privatisation and militarisation of humanitarian aid in Gaza, back the reinstatement of UN agencies to provide all aid, support an immediate

ceasefire, pledge that his Government will enforce the International Criminal Court arrest warrant and support an immediate ban on arms sales to Israel?

Angus Robertson: I agree with Richard Leonard on all the points that he has made, and I make the point to him that the First Minister raised those concerns in his recent meeting with the Prime Minister. The international community can do more, but what is happening on the ground in Gaza at present is absolutely horrific and avoidable.

The United Nations and its agencies, including UNRWA, are those that should be taking forward the humanitarian supply of the population in Gaza. The privatisation and militarisation that Richard Leonard has raised in the chamber should not go on, and a ceasefire should be immediately respected by the Israelis.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Perhaps I can swing our attention back to areas that the cabinet secretary is responsible for. We have learned in evidence sessions at the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee that a significant proportion of Scottish Government aid to Gaza is being distributed on the ground in the form of cash or vouchers. In light of the grave concerns about Hamas control in the region, can the cabinet secretary provide us with any assurance and tell us what checks are in place to guarantee that Scottish taxpayers' money, which is intended to help people who are in great distress, is not being diverted to fund a proscribed terrorist organisation that is responsible for terrible, awful atrocities?

Angus Robertson: I would have thought that Mr Kerr would be aware that no aid is being distributed on the ground in Gaza at the moment, apart from by the privatised and militarised organisation that Mr Leonard brought up. I would thought that he would be aware of that, as it has been leading the news and is leading it today.

Stephen Kerr: Will you answer the question?

Angus Robertson: I have answered the question: no aid is being distributed on the ground. If the member has any further specific questions, I would be happy to answer them, but I would have thought that Mr Kerr would be better informed about the situation on the ground at the present time.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Question 3 has not been lodged.

Meetings with UK Government (Constitution Secretary)

4. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when the constitution secretary last met, and will next meet, with United Kingdom Government ministers. (S6O-04739)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): On 30 May, I met the Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Paymaster General and Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations. That meeting followed our previous meeting on 20 May, at which we discussed announcements arising from the European Union-United Kingdom summit. The announcements included a common understanding detailing policy measures that both sides have committed to as we take the new strategic partnership forward; a joint statement that sets out UK-EU co-operation across global issues and commits to annual leader-level summits; and a security and defence partnership that will formalise UK-EU foreign policy co-operation, allowing for greater collaboration on defence industry work. Currently, I have no planned meetings with UK ministers.

David Torrance: Labour said many things before it came to power, but, as we know, its performance in government has been found wanting. It spoke about the reset and better co-operation between the UK Government and the Scottish Government, but it is content to keep the Tories' United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020; it refused to share draft texts with devolved Governments before its agreement with the EU; and it has sold out our fishing communities. Is it not the case that the reset is just another broken electoral pledge that has been made to the people of Scotland?

Angus Robertson: The Scottish Government continues to seek a principled and pragmatic approach to engagement with the UK Government. Although the current relationship with the UK Government is more productive and constructive than it was with its predecessor, areas of significant concern remain, most notably in relation to information sharing and substantive discussion around significant developments such as the US trade deal and the EU reset deal, which were both announced without sufficient engagement with the devolved Governments.

There are also a number of areas in which the UK Government is falling short on its commitment to reset intergovernmental relations by failing to take account of Scotland's needs in its work on areas such as eradicating child poverty, migration

and the internal market act review. It is imperative that information sharing and engagement with the Scottish Government are both sustained and meaningful to maximise the potential for positive outcomes for the people of Scotland.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When the cabinet secretary next meets UK ministers, will he raise with them the opportunity to develop another tranche of city deal projects, as recommended in a recent report by the Economy and Fair Work Committee? I do not know whether the cabinet secretary has had the opportunity to visit the Perth museum, to which I paid another visit a couple of weeks ago. It is a tremendous project, with visitor numbers now substantially exceeding projections. It is funded through the Tay cities deal, and there will be opportunity to have many more such cultural projects in future if a new tranche can be provided.

Angus Robertson: I think that I am right in saying that the Perth museum has been shortlisted for an award, which I am sure all of us would welcome, and I look forward to taking up the member's invitation and going.

I also think that I am right in saying that the Deputy First Minister leads on the city deal programme, but I am happy to share Murdo Fraser's encouragement with her. If city deal projects are on the agenda for the next meetings that I have with relevant UK Government ministers, I will be happy to report back to Murdo Fraser at future portfolio question times.

MalDent Project

5. Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its assessment is of the impact of the MalDent Project on oral health policy in Malawi. (S6O-04740)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The MalDent Project has transformed oral health in Malawi. The country faces a severe oral health crisis, in that it has only nine public dentists to serve a population of 22 million people. Supported by Scottish Government investment, MalDent has spearheaded the creation of Malawi's first dental degree programme. We celebrate the recent graduation of the country's first home-trained dentists, which is a direct outcome of MalDent's work, and a further 137 students are currently studying dentistry. MalDent has also developed Malawi's first national oral health policy, establishing a crucial blueprint for effective oral health interventions, with a key focus on preventing oral disease, especially in children.

Elena Whitham: What plans does the Scottish Government have to build on that groundbreaking international development work? Does the cabinet secretary share my view that Scotland must take every opportunity to show the world that it is a good global citizen and a nation that wants to play its part in the global community, and that the international engagement of these islands does not begin and end at the behest of Westminster?

Angus Robertson: I assure Elena Whitham that we remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting our partner countries and others through international development and climate justice funding, while responding to global humanitarian crises as a responsible, compassionate and good global citizen.

We are building on the MalDent Project's success to deepen our institutional ties with Malawi in higher education. That commitment stems from a long-standing partnership between the universities involved that has been in place since 2005, and we are dedicated to fostering long-term institutional collaborations of that sort. That includes strengthening governance and infrastructure at the university in Malawi, supporting the dental surgery programme and investing in faculty development.

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): On Saturday we received the sad news of the passing of Councillor Betty Cunningham, a former provost of East Renfrewshire, who was known to many members on all sides of the chamber and who was described as a "force of nature". Among her many achievements, Betty was responsible for setting up an international trust after visiting Kaponda in Malawi in 2007. The trust has supported the provision of education, healthcare, and agricultural skills and opportunities, as well as taking hundreds of young people on cultural exchanges to Malawi.

One of the key areas of interest there is oral health. Can the cabinet secretary say how the Government is partnering with charitable organisations such as the Betty Cunningham International Trust on projects such as MalDent? Does he agree that continuing such partnerships is a fitting legacy for people such as Betty, who had such a love for and connection with Malawi?

Angus Robertson: I commend Paul O'Kane for asking that question and putting on record his condolences, which I share, to the family, friends and colleagues of Betty Cunningham, the former provost of East Renfrewshire. Her long commitment to supporting projects in Malawi was widely recognised, including through her receipt of an OBE for services to East Renfrewshire and to Malawi. I pay particular tribute to the Betty Cunningham International Trust, which she established and which built a health clinic and

nursery schools. There is much to commend in her lifetime of work and commitment to the people of both East Renfrewshire and Malawi.

A96 Union Bridge Works (Debate or Statement)

6. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will propose the scheduling of time for a parliamentary debate or statement on the works at Union bridge on the A96 in Keith, in light of reports that on-going delays have resulted in the trunk road being reduced to one lane with traffic lights for almost a year. (S6O-04741)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): At this time there are no plans to propose a Scottish Government debate or statement on the issue. As the member knows, any proposals for Government business in the Parliament are subject to consideration by the Parliamentary Bureau and then approval by the Parliament.

Chamber time is limited in the coming weeks, but there are many other routes to scrutinise the activities of the Government. Those include asking general questions, transport portfolio questions and topical questions.

Douglas Ross: The minister will be aware that I have tried to ask supplementaries to transport questions, but there have been no opportunities to do so, for understandable reasons. I attempted to ask a question on the matter at First Minister's question time about a month ago, but it was not selected because of the demands that the Presiding Officer has to deal with.

The issue has now been on-going in Keith for almost a year. I have asked twice for the Cabinet Secretary for Transport to come to Keith and hear from residents and businesses there about the impact that the road works are having. Will the minister, to whom I presented a petition on the issue back in December 2024, make the strongest possible representation to Fiona Hyslop that she should come to Keith to hear about what has been happening in the town as a result of those long on-going works?

Jim Fairlie: I am slightly confused, because I thought that the question was about the workings of parliamentary business. However, if Mr Ross wishes me to convey his message to Fiona Hyslop, I will endeavour to do so.

Creative Scotland

7. Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has any further plans to widen its review into Creative Scotland. (S6O-04742)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I agreed the remit of the review of Creative Scotland with the independent chair, Angela Leitch, and it was published on the Scottish Government's website last month. The review will consider Creative Scotland's purpose, functions, structure and partnerships—and, as well as its governance and leadership, its performance, finances and distribution of funds. The review is independent of the Scottish Government, and it will deliver its recommendations in November.

Sharon Dowe: Two weeks ago, the Scottish Government announced that the review of Creative Scotland would be widened to include the quango's leadership, performance and funding schemes. Can the cabinet secretary confirm whether the review will take account of funding decisions made in the current financial year? Does he accept that taking account of the review's outcomes will be essential if we are to prevent another fiasco such as that involving the project Rein?

Angus Robertson: In my initial answer to Sharon Dowe I confirmed that the review is independent of the Scottish Government, so it is not for me, beyond the remit that I have agreed with its chair, to point her to issues that should or should not be looked into. I am sure that the chair will look closely at the record of the question that the member has raised, and I have no doubt that the chair will give evidence to the Scottish Parliament at some stage, when such questions can be asked.

I point out to Sharon Dowe that I have taken every opportunity to encourage members, and everyone in the wider cultural and arts communities, to take part in the independent review, and I encourage her to raise her concerns directly through the review.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): A vital part of safeguarding cultural wealth and heritage is ensuring that we can effectively promote Scotland's creative talent and showcase it to the rest of the world. Can the cabinet secretary say more about how the Scottish Government is supporting Creative Scotland and the culture sector through increased funding in the 2025-26 Scottish budget?

Angus Robertson: We have demonstrated our commitment to the culture sector by making a funding increase of more than £34 million in 2025-26. That takes us to a level of culture funding of more than £50 million more than there was in 2023-24 and includes an additional £4 million for festivals. The funding will support our commitments to double the festivals expo fund and to expand its reach across Scotland, beyond festivals in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

We continue to help artists to access new markets, by building business relationships and promoting Scotland's culture sector internationally through the Scottish Government's network of international offices. As part of our international culture strategy, we have committed to carrying out a feasibility study on the establishment of a support service for cultural export and exchange. That will help to inform how we can best support international activity in the sector to overcome challenges to it.

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Last month, it was announced that the scope of the review of Creative Scotland would be widened. As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the review was originally announced in September last year. It has taken the Scottish Government more than eight months to widen its remit. When did the cabinet secretary realise that the remit needed to be expanded? By how much is that expansion likely to increase the cost of the review?

Angus Robertson: I do not expect any increase in costs for the review. I thought that it was important that the independent reviewer should be able to look at all relevant areas; if Mr Choudhury believes that there are particular issues that need to be raised with her as part of that review process, I encourage him—and colleagues, as I have already said to Sharon Dowey—to do that. It is in all our interests, and those of everyone in the cultural sector, that the review is as best informed as it can be, so if he has any needs, interests, concerns or expectations that he wants to raise directly, I encourage him to do so.

Festivals (Economic Importance)

8. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the economic importance of festivals to local communities. (S6O-04743)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government recognises that festivals and events are vital to local economies, especially when they are community-led ones with strong social and cultural value. The economic importance of festivals in every part of Scotland is best described by the festivals themselves: Orkney's St Magnus international festival adds £1.3 million to the local economy each year, and Wigtown book festival generates an estimated £4.3 million annually.

The importance that the Government places on festivals is underlined by the number of festivals that receive support from Creative Scotland's multiyear funding programme and by our commitment to work with festivals across the country through a strategic partnership.

Liam McArthur: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response and for the acknowledgement of the St Magnus festival's significance.

I turn his attention to another local festival in Orkney: the internationally renowned Orkney folk festival, which, earlier this month, proved to be another huge success, with record-breaking ticket sales and an economic impact that is now estimated to be around £1 million. I congratulate the organisers, volunteers and performers for their part in that success, and I should probably declare an interest, because my brother has played a part in all three of those categories over the years.

Concerns have been raised about the lack of support that is available through EventScotland; there appears to be a limit of three years of funding and a focus on growing or new events. The cabinet secretary will recognise that island festivals perhaps have a more limited capacity to grow and that sustainability is far more important.

I ask the cabinet secretary to speak to EventScotland and see whether there is a way to ensure that the way in which funding is allocated is island-proofed in accordance with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

The Presiding Officer: Let us keep our questions and responses concise.

Angus Robertson: I will try my best to do so.

I understand the point that Liam McArthur is making about continuity. That is why multiyear funding has been brought in through Creative Scotland. He raises an issue that is specific to the Orkney folk festival, and I will look at that closely.

I join him in congratulating the organisers, volunteers, performers, and, indeed, his brother. He asks me to raise with EventScotland the matter that he has highlighted—I am content to do so and I will get back to him on the points that he has raised.

The Presiding Officer: Three members wish to ask supplementary questions. If we can keep them concise, we will fit them in.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that local events, such as the Leith festival, the north Edinburgh community festival, the Newhaven gala and other, similar gatherings around the country play an important role in promoting small businesses, supporting artists and community groups, and helping to foster a sense of community cohesion and pride?

Angus Robertson: Ben Macpherson is absolutely right to mention events in Edinburgh Northern and Leith. I add to that list the Meadows festival in Edinburgh Central—of course, other

festivals are available throughout the rest of the country.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting a thriving music industry in Scotland, including grass-roots music venues, which are key for emerging Scottish talent. The fact that 77 per cent of the recipients of multiyear funding represent organisations that focus on exhibitions, events and performances underlines our emphasis on supporting local platforms across Scotland.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The future of the Knockengoroch festival, which is billed as Scotland's oldest greenfield festival, hangs in the balance due to financial pressures that have arisen as a result of the festival having running costs of more than £320,000 in recent years. What action is the cabinet secretary taking to ensure that such vital regional festivals are allowed to thrive and survive?

Angus Robertson: I have given pretty detailed background information on the Scottish Government's commitment to funding for events. Liam McArthur raised the issue of continuity of funding, which we have been aware is a challenge for a number of festivals in Scotland.

I am content to take away the case that Alexander Stewart has raised with me and have conversations about it with officials, and I undertake to write back to him. I want to support the footprint of festivals and events across Scotland, including the one that he has raised with me.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Edinburgh's festivals are vital to Edinburgh's economy and Scotland's status as a cultural hub, but venues have recently reported that the high costs of accommodation are resulting in performers restricting their time at the Edinburgh fringe. Will the cabinet secretary discuss with ministerial colleagues, such as Mr Fairlie and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, further extending the running hours of ScotRail services to Glasgow and the west during the festivals, to ensure that more people can attend and more performers can access cheaper accommodation, and to spread the economic benefits of Edinburgh's festivals across Scotland?

Angus Robertson: Neil Bibby makes a really good point. That is why I initiated and set up the strategic partnership for Scotland's festivals. Such issues are so important that it is necessary to have more than just one meeting. Such meetings should take place regularly, and I have begun that process. The issue of transport is one of the first issues to have been raised, and I have sought to explore solutions such as the one that he outlined. I can tell him that I have already had a bilateral

meeting with the transport secretary to discuss the matter.

Neil Bibby is absolutely right. We want to make sure that the benefit of festivals in one part of the country can be shared throughout the rest of the country and that those festivals can be accessed by people from elsewhere. We are working in partnership with festivals across Scotland to make sure that that is the case.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. After four years in this place as a member of the Scottish Parliament, I come to you, after that question session, to ask specifically what I have to do, as a back-bench member of this Parliament, to get ministers to answer questions under scrutiny.

I ask that question because, yesterday, we had a long debate in this chamber about the breakdown of trust between the Scottish people and this institution, which should concern all of us. Today, I asked the cabinet secretary a very straightforward question. Over the past 18 months, the Scottish Government has sent £1.5 million to Gaza by one route or another. I asked the cabinet secretary a very simple question—I asked him whether he could give an undertaking to the Parliament that that money had not fallen into the wrong hands. Instead of an answer, what we got, frankly, was sanctimony.

If I may be so bold, Presiding Officer, I think that it is about time—and I ask you, on behalf of all members of the Parliament, to ensure that this is the case—that ministers are expected to give some semblance of an answer to a question that is asked of them in this Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kerr. The content of members' contributions is not generally a matter for the chair. It is, of course, the case that the ministerial code requires that full and frank responses are given to members of this Parliament.

There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next portfolio is justice and home affairs. Question 1 has not been lodged.

Family Law and Civil Justice

2. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to modernise family law and ensure the efficient functioning of the civil court system. (S6O-04745)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Scottish Government is taking a variety of steps to modernise family law and ensure the efficient functioning of the civil court system. For example, we recently laid commencement regulations to commence some further provisions of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020.

We plan to make further commencement regulations later this year and intend to lay Scottish statutory instruments on the regulation of child contact services. We have also convened a working group on child welfare reporters to consider how the current system is working in practice and what is needed for the new register of child welfare reporters.

Emma Harper: As things stand in our court service, there are no meaningful penalties that can be dispensed by sheriffs in cases where one party to a case is purposely engaged in delaying tactics for their own gain. Can the minister advise whether work is in hand to amend the rules and guidance around civil cases to allow parties to a case engaged in such behaviour—in particular in cases of family dispute involving children—to potentially be subject to sanction where needed for the proper functioning of the courts?

Siobhian Brown: Delay in child contact proceedings is not in the child's best interests. We plan to make further commencement regulations later this year in relation to the Children (Scotland) Act 2020, including section 32, which requires the court to consider how delays in contact cases can have a negative impact on the child's welfare.

Case management rules for family actions in the sheriff court came into effect in September 2023 and are intended to help prevent undue delay in proceedings relating to the welfare of children. If a party to a case considers that another party is causing unnecessary delay, they can raise that with the sheriff.

I recognise the negative effect that non-compliance with contact orders can have on a child. Where somebody believes that another person has not obeyed a court order, they can ask the court to vary the order to hold the person in contempt of court. There is a provision on penalties for contempt of court in section 15 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981, including a fine or imprisonment.

Conducting proceedings in such a manner amounts to an abuse of process and may also involve contempt of court and result in penalty. In addition, it is open to the court to use its power to regulate the expenses arising from the court action to penalise a party for their conduct in the course of proceedings.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): One of the biggest hindrances to the efficient functioning of the civil court system is the lack of availability of legal aid solicitors. One woman seeking divorce using legal aid unsuccessfully approached 116 different law firms, while Women's Aid Orkney reports that difficulty in securing legal aid has forced some women to stay in harmful relationships.

The minister's earlier script had a list of inputs, but what are the outputs that she commits to that will alleviate legal aid problems? Will they be achieved before the end of 2025?

Siobhian Brown: As Mr Kerr might know, the Scottish Government recognises that reform is needed in the legal aid system. I published a paper in February that goes into the exact details of what we are trying to achieve before the Holyrood elections next year, which I can send to Mr Kerr if he has not read it.

In the short term, we have identified priority changes that we believe will impact positively on users and providers, and bridge the gap between the current system and the future one in line with our reform objectives and expected benefits. This is the first stage in a long journey towards a more strategic, focused and managed legal aid system, including a framework for decision making. We are keen to hear views from all those across the justice system, including Mr Kerr, on areas of reform and matters of prioritisation.

Caledonian System

3. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the roll-out of the Caledonian system. (S6O-04746)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Caledonian system is currently delivered in 21 of 32 local authority areas, covering over 70 per cent of the population. The Scottish Government is committed to rolling it out further; by the end of this year, two more areas—Shetland and Angus—will begin training to deliver the Caledonian system, which will take the figure up to 23 areas. The Scottish Government has just written to all local authorities, detailing a change to the funding distribution and providing details of a £1.4 million increase in the Caledonian system funding line. We will also be engaging with all local areas to provide central support and training for those areas that wish to move to delivering the Caledonian system.

Pam Gosal: Rehabilitation is key to preventing reoffending. That is why my Prevention of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill would increase the uptake of rehabilitation courses for domestic abusers.

The Scottish National Party's 2021 manifesto said that it would

"also increase ... work ... to change attitudes of offenders ... by ensuring that the Caledonian Project is available nationwide."

However, the Government now says that the programme has been rolled out to only 21 of the 32 local authorities, with just two more expected by the end of the year. Does the cabinet secretary agree that access to rehabilitation programmes such as the Caledonian system should be guaranteed and available everywhere in Scotland?

Angela Constance: I certainly agree on the value and importance of the Caledonian programme. It is important to recognise that some local authorities use other programmes. The importance that I place on the Caledonian system is demonstrated by the increase in funding for this budgetary year—which means £10 million over two years. We are also supporting local authorities in improving information technology. Other risk assessment tools, such as the spousal assault risk assessment tool, are attached to the programme. We will continue to support the roll-out of the Caledonian system, notwithstanding the fact that local authorities in some areas have chosen to use other programmes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Pauline McNeill to be brief.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): It is time to focus on the attitudes of boys to women and girls, as we need to recognise that early intervention is the key to a long-term reduction in violence and domestic abuse. I am sure that the cabinet secretary has at least heard of Gareth Southgate's intervention lecture, which I thought was very good. In it, Gareth Southgate talked about the "manipulative and toxic influences" that are causing harm to young men. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is imperative to revise existing school programmes to focus on boys and their attitude to women and girls—complex though that is—to ensure that we have a real chance of reducing violence against women and girls in our society?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please be as brief as possible.

Angela Constance: In short, I agree with that. I will give two examples. Work on online harms is being led by the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise and the Minister for Victims and Community Safety. The endeavours that are led by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on attendance, behaviour and the curriculum are crucially important, and equally safe and relationships education are an important part of that.

Assaults (Teenagers)

4. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the number of serious assaults committed by teenagers has increased in the past five years. (S6O-04747)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I am, of course, concerned about any reports of increases in violence. Although Police Scotland has advised that the total number of serious assaults by 11 to 18-year-olds fell by 27 per cent between 2019-20 and 2024-25, there has been an increase in serious cases in schools—from six to 40.

Our approach to tackling violence among young people is focused on education programmes on the unacceptability of violence, effective punishment for offences, appropriate police powers and sustained school and community engagement with young people. To show our continued commitment to tackling violence, I am also pleased to say that I have increased funding to the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit by 7 per cent. Its total funding will be in excess of £1.2 million.

Alexander Stewart: Serious assaults by teenagers continue to rise. The number of children possessing knives is up 15 per cent among 11 to 15-year-olds and 14 per cent among 16 to 18-year-olds. In recent weeks, police have been called to a primary school to deal with a child carrying a knife, and, tragically, a 16-year-old lost their life on Irvine beach after a fatal stabbing by another teenager. Clearly, the Scottish National Party's soft-touch approach to justice is not working. Is it not therefore time to back the Scottish Conservatives' calls for more stop and search powers to tackle the epidemic of youth violence?

Angela Constance: Although there has been demonstrable progress in the reduction of crime and violence, including in offending behaviour by young people, I appreciate that that will be of no comfort to victims and families and it is important to recognise that that progress is not always felt in communities. It is therefore important that we acknowledge recent concerns and changes in the behaviour of some young people. It is important to recognise that most young people are law-abiding citizens.

With respect, I say that the member can keep his "soft touch" rhetoric. I am interested in the evidence about what works for now and in the future, and I am not interested in revisiting debates of the past on interventions that have not worked.

I am strongly of the view that police have adequate stop and search powers. They use those powers and have successfully extracted 900

weapons from citizens, 200 of which have been from young people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will need a bit more brevity in the questions and responses.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): It is widely understood that good youth work and innovative initiatives can have a positive impact on young people who may be engaged in violence or drawn into it. Therefore, can the Scottish Government advise when the next youth violence summit will take place and say more about what urgent action will be taken to expand prevention measures and early intervention?

Angela Constance: The next youth violence summit will take place in the next week or so, and it will have a particular focus on the value of youth work interventions.

The Scottish Government will continue to invest in interventions that are successful in engaging and educating our young people. I hope that we have demonstrated that through our on-going commitment and the recent announcement that the minister made about the cashback for communities scheme. There are also other interventions, such as the quit fighting for likes campaign.

Fatal Accident Inquiries (Statutory Grounds)

5. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further detail regarding the reasons why it is not planning a broader review of the statutory grounds for fatal accident inquiries, in light of the previous review of statutory grounds being undertaken nearly a decade ago and reports of growing public concern over preventable deaths outside of custody settings. (S6O-04748)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): A focused review in relation to deaths in custody was commissioned in January this year in order to allow a swift response to the recommendations for improvements to be made to the fatal accident inquiry system as it relates to death in custody.

Douglas Lumsden: The question concerned deaths outside of custody settings. In 2019, Aberdeen father and good Samaritan Alan Geddes was murdered by a man who had been released from prison just hours earlier. In 2023, the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland released its damning report, which highlighted a list of failures in the run-up to the release of Stuart Quinn. If Government agencies had acted differently, the outcome could have been different. Alan's sister, Sandra, continues to fight for answers, and the case is crying out for a fatal accident inquiry.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, when someone commits murder just hours after release from prison, there have obviously been failures and that the criteria for a statutory FAI must be widened to cover such situations?

Angela Constance: Mr Lumsden has been a keen advocate on behalf of his constituent Sandra Geddes, whom I had the pleasure of meeting as a result of an intervention from Mr Lumsden when the bill that became the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023 was going through Parliament. There were a number of changes at that time in and around throughcare standards in legislation and the imperative nature of good release planning.

Although the current review that I have commissioned is focused on deaths in custody, I say to Mr Lumsden that any wider learning points from the review will be given due consideration in a broader context.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary assure me that the Sheriff Abercrombie-led independent review of the system of FAIs into deaths in prison custody will meet and engage with families to hear directly from them about their experiences?

Angela Constance: It will be for the independent chair, Sheriff Abercrombie, to decide how to conduct the review, but I know from meeting him prior to his taking up the appointment that engaging with families and learning from their experience will be central to the review. The terms of reference that I set mean that the review will have to include the effectiveness, efficiency and the trauma-informed nature of investigations into deaths in custody.

International Criminal Court (Scotland) Act 2001 (Prosecution of War Crimes)

6. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on using the powers outlined in the International Criminal Court (Scotland) Act 2001 to prosecute nationals and residents of the United Kingdom residing in Scotland who have committed war crimes. (S6O-04749)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Although it is crucial that Scotland has the ability to prosecute international crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, any decision to initiate proceedings against any individual is a matter for independent operational partners and is not for the Scottish Government to comment on.

Mark Ruskell: What we are now seeing on a daily and hourly basis coming from Gaza is evidence of war crimes being committed by members of the Israel Defense Forces. Given that

the Metropolitan Police's war crimes unit has received a dossier of evidence that accuses 10 British citizens of committing war crimes, including the targeted killing of civilians and aid workers, what action can the Scottish Government take to ensure that the provisions of the 2001 act are followed through and ensure the safety of our communities when we potentially face war criminals living among us?

Angela Constance: I hope that the member appreciates that the Scottish Government is a firm believer in the rule of law both domestically and internationally. The International Criminal Court has four international obligations in relation to war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression. As a Government, we support any investigation into crimes against humanity and genocide. The International Court of Justice has insisted that Israel takes all steps to prevent the crime of genocide and it has ordered Israel to ensure access for relevant United Nations bodies so that the crime can be investigated.

As the member will appreciate, decisions on prosecution in Scotland are for the Lord Advocate and the Crown Office, which would require reports to be received by a reporting agency to make any further considerations.

"Sentencing Young People" Guideline

7. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in relation to its commitment that no young person under the age of 18 should be imprisoned, what discussions it has had with the Scottish Sentencing Council regarding reviewing the "Sentencing young people" guideline, which states that all sentencing options, including imprisonment, remain open to the court. (S6O-04750)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Decisions on sentencing are for the independent courts. Custody is available as a disposal when the person who is sentenced is under 25 years of age. The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 also permits the use of custodial sentences for under-18s. While the sentenced person is under 18, their sentence cannot be served in a young offenders institution and is instead served in an age-appropriate setting such as secure accommodation. If an individual's sentence extends beyond their turning 18, the remainder of the sentence will be served in a young offenders institution and prison, as appropriate.

Roz McCall: The public expect absolute clarity on what steps can be taken in the criminal justice system to bring the most serious offenders to justice, regardless of their age. That was confirmed by the First Minister's answer to my

colleague Russell Findlay on 22 May, when he reiterated that

"It remains open to prosecutors to prosecute a young person if they have committed a serious offence."—[*Official Report*, 22 May 2025; c 11.]

Given the on-going capacity crisis in our secure accommodation system, to which the judicial system could be forced to send young offenders because there is simply nowhere else to put them, will the cabinet secretary give more clarity to both the Scottish Sentencing Council and this Parliament on the precise criteria for sending a young person to prison? How do they interact with the Scottish Government's cast-iron commitment not to imprison anyone under the age of 18, as enshrined by law?

Angela Constance: The legal route to placing under-18s in prisons or young offenders institutions was closed by this Parliament, so there is no legal route to send young people to prison. I hope that I can reassure Roz McCall by saying that the budget that this Parliament has passed includes additional resource of up to £8.5 million to support the placement of children who are sentenced or remanded. Investment in preventing children from coming into contact with the criminal justice system remains a priority, whether that is through the allocation of resources from cashback for communities or the whole family wellbeing fund.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I agree that no young person aged under 18 should be in prison. However, we need to ensure that there are adequate numbers of places in secure units for justice referrals. In recent decades, we have seen a change in the profile of young people in secure units. For example, there are now larger numbers of young women in such units for non-judicial disposals, such as concern about self-harming. What work is the cabinet secretary doing across Government to ensure that an adequate number of the 78 places are available for justice referrals?

Angela Constance: That is an important area of work that involves justice ministers along with education ministers. As I said, we have increased the budget to pay for the placements of not only children who are sentenced, who are the responsibility of ministers, but also those children who are on remand, who would normally be funded by local authorities. We have taken that on board.

With regard to increasing capacity, there are also four fully-funded new secure beds in Rossie. We are committed to increasing resourcing when beds become available so that they are part of a contract to ensure that we have the facilities available for our children.

Cashback for Communities Programme

8. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on funding for the cashback for communities programme. (S6O-04751)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The commitment to a further three-year phase of the cashback for communities programme was included in the programme for government for 2025-26. To support programme delivery, up to £26 million will be made available, which is an increase of £6 million from the current phase. The programme is funded by money that is recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and it supports young people who are at risk of becoming involved in antisocial behaviour, offending or reoffending.

Information relating to the programme is available on the cashback for communities website, and the programme is open to applications from Thursday 12 June.

Willie Coffey: It is crucial that young people who are at risk of being drawn into criminal activity have access to support and to projects such as cashback for communities. Can the minister say some more about the impact of the investment in violence prevention in my communities in Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley and in communities across Scotland?

Siobhian Brown: Since 2023, we have invested more than £6 million for the delivery of a range of activities through the violence prevention framework. That includes the work of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, Medics Against Violence and YouthLink Scotland's No Knives, Better Lives programme, and the delivery of the mentors in violence prevention in schools throughout Scotland.

Some of that work is being delivered in Ayrshire, including the delivery of the hospital navigators service at Crosshouse hospital emergency department and the extension of that approach into the police custody suite as well. That investment seeks to help to prevent violence, reduce its harm and, ultimately, improve outcomes for young people and communities throughout Scotland.

The cashback for communities programme is also having an impact on young people in the area. The latest report, which covers 2023-24, shows that 197 young people in East Ayrshire were supported through seven local cashback projects.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): At the Criminal Justice Committee, we heard from Police Scotland that it would like some of the money that

is recovered from the proceeds of crime to return to the police service, as is the case in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It said that it sees

"real benefit in being able to do that, because you can turn that money back to deal with the type of crime that you are facing."—[*Official Report, Criminal Justice Committee*, 14 May 2025; c 28.]

Police Scotland also said that that would send a strong message to criminals that their money was now going to fund the officers who would chase them and their fellow offenders down.

Although the Scottish Conservatives support money going back to communities, has the minister considered using some of the proceeds in that way?

Siobhian Brown: The Police Scotland budget has been increased this year by £90 million, and we have committed £26 million to the cashback for communities scheme to be reinvested into our youth programmes across all 32 local authorities in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice and home affairs.

Education and Skills

UHI Perth (Funding)

1. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with UHI Perth in relation to its funding position. (S6O-04752)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): The Scottish Funding Council has statutory responsibility for oversight of higher and further education institutions in Scotland. Perth college is assigned to the University of the Highlands and Islands as the regional strategic body. Therefore, the SFC has been working with UHI and Perth college to address some of the issues, such as the interim appointments of senior staff.

Murdo Fraser: UHI Perth plays a vital role in the economy and community of Perthshire, yet it faces serious financial challenges, with a £2 million deficit and a principal who has just stepped down following the collapse of air service training—a long-established aviation training arm—leading to staff redundancies and a loss of student places. The college is now having to consider scrapping degree courses. That is a crisis and it has been made worse by the top slicing of the college budget to fund the executive office functions of UHI in Inverness. What is the Scottish Government doing to help the college before it sees more redundancies and course closures?

Graeme Dey: On top slicing, as Murdo Fraser refers to it, he might or might not be aware of an extensive piece of work that has been conducted by UHI in conjunction with its constituent parts to look at a future long-term and sustainable model. I would like to think that Murdo Fraser is as committed as I am to UHI as a concept and to its long-term future.

I recognise the issues that he describes, including the financial challenges at Perth college. The SFC and UHI have been working extensively and closely with the institution over a sustained period of time. I am happy to ask both institutions to engage with Murdo Fraser, if they have not done so already, to give him a fuller understanding of what that work has covered. I recognise that there have been difficult and challenging times for staff and students at the institution, but I point to the fact that UHI now has in place an interim acting principal who is highly respected and experienced, as well as a highly-regarded interim finance director. I am optimistic that things will progress from here.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Universities and colleges such as UHI Perth are facing increasing external pressure as a result of hostile United Kingdom Government policies, namely on immigration and the rise in employer national insurance contributions. The sector has been vocal about its concerns, so can the minister speak to the potential impact that Labour's immigration crackdown could have on our higher education sector?

Graeme Dey: There is no doubt that the proposals that have been made in the past couple of weeks are causing considerable consternation in our higher and further education sectors. That comes on top of the employer national insurance contribution bombshell that was dropped on them. That is why the Scottish Government is seeking changes to graduate visa routes so that we can have a bespoke arrangement for Scotland that meets our needs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 2 was not lodged.

Behaviour in Classrooms

3. **Alex Rowley:** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what support it is providing to teachers to help deal with behaviour in classrooms. (S6O-04754)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): In August, the Scottish Government published a joint action plan with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on relationships and behaviour in schools. The first progress report, which set out action that was

taken between November 2023 and March 2025, was published at the end of March, and showed that progress has been made against all 20 actions within the plan. In the coming weeks, we will be publishing new guidance, including on the use of consequences, to support schools to foster a positive, inclusive and safe school environment. We will also be publishing new guidance on developing risk assessments for violent, aggressive or dangerous behaviour.

Alex Rowley: The headline message this week from an Educational Institute of Scotland survey is that teacher workload is unfair and unhealthy. It is clear that contact time for teachers must be reduced, and that we need more additional support needs teachers and more teachers in general in our classrooms, as was promised, and smaller class sizes. Does the cabinet secretary not realise that those are the key actions that need to be taken if we are going to address the issues in our classrooms?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Mr Rowley for raising that important issue in relation to the EIS survey and I look forward to addressing the EIS annual general meeting at its conference in Aviemore tomorrow.

The member will know that a key condition of the budget was that substantive progress was made on reducing class contact time. That is absolutely pivotal to creating the headspace that is needed in driving reform. He will also know that the budget provided extra funding to councils such as Fife in relation to teacher numbers and additional support needs. I have to observe that the Labour Party decided to abstain on that budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a number of supplementary questions. I will try to get them all in.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The cabinet secretary mentioned the Scottish Government's action plan. That was published in August last year but, since then, more than 3,000 violent behaviour incidents have been reported in schools in Fife alone. We know that teachers are having to dedicate an increased amount of time to dealing with challenging incidents and that they are dealing with a lack of support for mainstreaming pupils and the upcoming changes in the Education (Scotland) Bill. That is simply too much for our dedicated teaching professionals, many of whom are contemplating leaving the profession.

In the update, will the Scottish Government give an idea of the effectiveness of the plan from last summer, particularly in light of the increasing expectations on our teachers?

Jenny Gilruth: Roz McCall has consistently raised issues relating to Fife. We have discussed those, and I am more than happy to engage with her further on that matter. I spoke about the advice on developing risk assessments for violent behaviour and on consequences that we will publish before the end of term. That was a key ask that came ahead of the publication of the behaviour action plan. There was a feeling from members of the profession that there were no longer consequences that they could deploy and be supported with. I want to be clear that teachers should be supported. We have exclusion in Scotland's schools, and I have been clear that it is in the gift of teachers to use that as and when appropriate.

On the member's point about effectiveness, the action plan runs over three years, and we will evaluate its effectiveness annually. I am more than happy to engage with the member ahead of that evaluation.

Ahead of the publication of the plan, I engaged with the Opposition on the issue—Mr Kerr was the Conservative party spokesperson at that point. That cross-party engagement was helpful. Perhaps it would be wise if we reconvened that group in August to look at the action plan on a cross-party basis and to talk about some of the issues that Ms McCall has rightly raised this afternoon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I need a bit more brevity.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Alex Rowley raised the important issue of support for teachers. Freedom of information releases show that South Lanarkshire Council, which is run by Labour, has received more than £12 million of Scottish Government funding to reverse cuts to teacher numbers, but it refuses to do so and will end up cutting 65 more teachers. Will the cabinet secretary speak about the impact that that reckless decision by Labour will have? Does she agree that councils, including in Glasgow and other areas, should use that funding to support teachers?

Jenny Gilruth: As colleagues will know, and as I iterated in my response to Mr Rowley, the Government has made available £186.5 million to increase teacher numbers. We made that deal with councils in good faith through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and I expect our councils to uphold their end of the deal. For example, I note that in excess of £12 million is being made available to help South Lanarkshire Council to do that. I hope that, when they are speaking with their local government colleagues, colleagues across the chamber will encourage them to uphold their end of the deal, which was made in good faith.

In relation to Fife Council in particular, I encourage Fife colleagues to engage with the Labour-run council in that part of the country to ensure that it is not planning to cut any teacher numbers.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the case of Carol Shaw, who was violently attacked by a pupil in her school. He lifted her up and threw her head first on to a concrete floor, endangering her life. Following the attack, he went to another teacher's desk, put his foot up on the desk and said:

"The stupid cow deserved it."

What does the cabinet secretary say about that horrifying attack? When she speaks about consequences, will she have a discussion with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs about how that individual escaped custody, despite the sheriff in the case saying that he could have received 18 months in custody?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Mr Ross for raising that issue. I am of course aware of the case, which has received extensive coverage in the press. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on that specific case, but I am already engaging with the justice secretary on some of the substantive issues, particularly in relation to the recent press reports that we have seen regarding knife crime. There is a real need for us to take a joined-up approach to education and justice.

Two weeks ago, the First Minister spoke about our work on the mentors in violence prevention. That work is happening in our schools today, and it is good work, but there is more that we can do on a cross-portfolio basis on the point that the member makes, which I support.

Violence in Schools

4. Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what it is doing to address violence in schools. (S6O-04755)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): As I outlined in my previous answer, we are currently implementing our relationships and behaviour national action plan in conjunction with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The plan contains a number of different actions around reducing violence and harm in schools.

In addition, since the publication of the violence prevention framework in 2023, we have provided more than £6 million to organisations, including the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit and YouthLink Scotland for its No Knives, Better Lives programme, to deliver a range of prevention and

early intervention activity, which includes specific work in our schools.

In the coming weeks, we will publish new guidance for schools on consequences and on risk assessments for violent, aggressive or dangerous behaviour.

Katy Clark: In a survey conducted among teachers by the NASUWT trade union, eight in 10 respondents said that they had been threatened with a weapon by a pupil in the previous 12 months, and 37 per cent said that they had been assaulted with a weapon. The cabinet secretary has said that the Government is working on guidance. Does she think that the action plan is working? What role does she believe that the police should have in addressing the issue? We are often told that schools are discouraged from contacting the police, even in serious cases.

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Katy Clark for raising an important issue. Her question covers a similar theme to that of Roz McCall's question on the impact of the national action plan, which was launched in August. What I said in response to Ms McCall will also apply to Katy Clark's question. It is important that we engage on a cross-party basis on that point.

Katy Clark also highlighted the point that Mr Ross made about the connection between justice and education. A number of our schools in Scotland have campus police officers. There is, quite rightly, a connection between justice and education—I often invited the police into my classroom to speak to my pupils about the role of law and order in society. I am more than happy to take away Katy Clark's points.

On the action plan, as I said in response to the previous question, further advice will be published in relation to consequences and on violent and aggressive behaviour.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a couple of supplementary questions, which will need to be brief.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Violence has no place in Scotland's schools. I welcome the £2 million additional investment from the Scottish Government to address youth violence and the carrying of weapons in and around schools. It is clear that we continue to see challenges in relation to misogynistic behaviour and gender-based violence in wider society.

Will the cabinet secretary comment further on the Government's work on the issue and on how the Scottish budget delivers on the priorities of the equally safe strategy?

Jenny Gilruth: We are fully committed to eradicating violence against women and girls. This

year, we are investing £21.6 million in the delivering equally safe fund, supporting 115 projects from 107 organisations that focus on early intervention and prevention, as well as support services.

As part of that investment, we are funding and supporting programmes to address gender-based violence and sexual harassment in our schools. That includes £1.89 million over four years to Rape Crisis Scotland to support the implementation of equally safe at school and the continued delivery of the national sexual violence prevention programme. In the past 10 years, the national sexual violence prevention programme has reached more than 135,000 young people.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): A freedom of information request by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed that teachers in Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire have requested self-defence classes. It is totally unacceptable that we are living in a country where our teachers are asking for self-defence classes.

What is being done by the Government? What will be done by management to ensure that, if a teacher requests that a pupil is not in the classroom, they will not be brought back into the classroom?

Jenny Gilruth: I am sympathetic to the member's points. He is alluding to management in schools. We need to be mindful of the position of local government as the employer and the position of the Scottish Government. I am happy to take the issue that he has raised to the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.

I know that having support from the management team in school is fundamental to supporting a classroom teacher in responding to challenging behaviour. The member raises an important issue, and I will address it accordingly with ADES.

Nursery Closures (Aberdeenshire Council)

5. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the children's minister last met with Aberdeenshire Council to discuss nursery closures. (S6O-04756)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): As I have explained previously, it is the statutory responsibility of local authorities to manage their early learning and childcare estate in consultation with local communities to which they are democratically accountable. Although it would not be appropriate for me to comment on an individual council's processes, I can confirm that senior officials have written to Aberdeenshire Council to highlight the requirements of statutory guidance in

relation to the mothballing of local authority services.

I understand that Mr Burnett is keen to take up my previous offer of a meeting, which I believe is now in the process of being arranged, and I look forward to it.

Alexander Burnett: I am glad that the minister is aware of the proposal to mothball four nurseries in Aberdeenshire. A full council meeting is taking place next Monday to make a final decision, but, despite numerous questions, we still appear to be going round in circles, with ministers saying that consultation is required under the guidance and council officers saying that it is not. I asked the minister to write to the council—which was done on 30 May—but it is disappointing that the contents of that letter were not shared with my office. Can the minister simply confirm that her letter to the council confirmed what she and the First Minister have said in the chamber, which is that a consultation should have taken place?

Natalie Don-Innes: I can confirm, as I said in my previous answer, that senior Scottish Government officials wrote to the council's director of education on 29 May to draw the council's attention to the existing mothballing guidance, including the provisions relating to consultation with affected families and communities.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): The minister will be aware that the Tories run Aberdeenshire Council, so Mr Burnett should raise the issue with his Tory colleagues. The Scottish Government is funding local authorities to deliver 1,140 hours of ELC to all eligible children, including those in Aberdeenshire. That policy is crucial to providing the best start in life for our children. Will the minister provide information on how the addressing depopulation action plan contributes to that objective?

Natalie Don-Innes: Ms Mackay raises an extremely important point. In relation to the challenges, the addressing depopulation action plan sets out the Scottish Government's strategic approach to supporting local communities that face population decline, of which lack of childcare is an important driver. We have made grants available to local authorities via the fund, and two of those grants focus on addressing childcare issues in areas that are affected by acute population decline. For example, Highland Council is examining the workability of subsidised childminding, and Western Isles Council was granted funding to pilot new models of training in childcare in order to bolster employability.

Additional Support Needs (Support for Pupils)

6. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that pupils with additional support needs receive consistent and adequate support. (S6O-04757)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): Delivery of ASN continues to be a joint endeavour with local authorities, which retain the statutory responsibility for the delivery of education and the responsibility to identify, provide for and review the needs of their pupils. We have provided record investment in additional support for learning, with local authorities spending more than £1 billion in 2023-24. We have continued to invest £15 million each year since 2020 to help schools to respond to the individual needs of children and young people, and the 2025-26 budget sets out a further £29 million of additional investment for ASN. I have also committed to a cross-party round-table meeting on, and a review of, ASL.

Oliver Mundell: The funding that has been set out does not match the need. Today is another day with teachers reportedly being in tears and at breaking point. A new survey by the NASUWT shows that 70 per cent of teachers say that support for ASN pupils has declined over the past five years, with more than a third saying that they rarely receive the financial support that they need to teach ASN pupils properly. That does not come as a surprise to me. Something is going wrong. What is the cabinet secretary going to do to change that?

Jenny Gilruth: When I met the NASUWT yesterday, we discussed at length additional support needs, among a number of other matters. Mr Mundell stated that the funding does not match the need, but more than £1 billion of investment was provided in the previous financial year and additional funding was provided in this year's budget. I must observe that Mr Mundell and his party colleagues did not vote for that budget and the extra funding. I am happy to engage with him on alternatives and what he thinks should be done, but it is not the case that less money is going to our schools—the budget provides extra funding.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I welcome the £29 million that the Scottish National Party Government has invested in additional support for learning, and I gently remind colleagues that Scottish Labour and the Tories refused to back the budget, which delivered that funding for education in Scotland. How will that funding support the role of local authorities in recruiting for our workforce?

Jenny Gilruth: As I have set out, in 2025-26, local government will receive £29 million of funding to improve outcomes for all children and young people with additional support needs. It is worth recounting that outcomes for children and young people with additional support needs are improving and that the attainment gap in relation to ASN is narrowing.

We are working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on that investment, and we are building on existing spend in relation to inclusion. Further funding is being provided through the budget to support local and national programmes that will directly support the recruitment and retention of our ASN workforce. That is pivotal to supporting ASN pupils in our schools.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The cabinet secretary has again listed the Government's inputs, but that does not take away from the fact that thousands of teachers are working the equivalent of an extra day per week and only 1 per cent of them have sufficient time to support pupils with additional support needs, according to an Educational Institute of Scotland survey of more than 11,000 teachers that was published this week.

Does the cabinet secretary accept that the Government's failure to address the crisis in teaching or address teachers' workloads is driving the growing ASN crisis in schools?

Jenny Gilruth: Pam Duncan-Glancy claims that I did not address output, but in my previous response I talked about output in relation to the narrowing attainment gap for pupils with additional support needs. That news is to be welcomed.

As I spoke about, the budget provided extra funding for ASN and teacher numbers. The budget agreement was contingent on our local authorities agreeing to reduce class contact time. The Labour Party abstained on that budget, so Ms Duncan-Glancy's rhetoric this afternoon does not meet the reality.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Your party voted against the money at Westminster.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please continue, cabinet secretary.

Jenny Gilruth: I am done.

Online Bullying (Schools)

7. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the scale of online bullying in schools. (S6O-04758)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): Any bullying is unacceptable and must be addressed promptly and effectively. Online bullying can take place at any time of day, during school time or after hours, and we recognise the impact that it can have on a young person.

In November, we published updated anti-bullying guidance, which has an increased emphasis on how schools can support young people who are experiencing online bullying. Together with the Minister for Victims and Community Safety, I am leading a joint ministerial task force that is focused on tackling online harms, which will seek to identify what more can be done to protect young people online.

Craig Hoy: Dumfries and Galloway youth council is an organisation that is run for and by young people. Last year, it highlighted bullying as one of its top five major local concerns. As the minister said, online bullying does not end at the school gates; it is often hidden and can cause untold misery for its victims every hour of the day.

In response, Dumfries and Galloway Council has announced a review of bullying, which is taking the views of schools, children, young people, parents and carers into account. However, councils cannot tackle that massive problem alone. Will the minister commit to ensuring that schools have the resources—both guidance and funding—to tackle concerns about online bullying? Will she update the Parliament on what engagement the Scottish Government has had with the United Kingdom Government to ensure that social media giants do everything that they can to protect Scotland's children from online harm?

Natalie Don-Innes: Mr Hoy has raised a crucial point. As he said, online bullying can take place outside the school gates, which adds an extra level of complexity. A lot of what we have been talking about in the chamber this afternoon is to do with tackling violence. Supporting our teachers has a part to play in that, as well as ensuring that incidents are recorded and children and young people have the confidence to come forward and report such incidents.

On the work that I am leading alongside Ms Brown, I can confirm that the online safety task force's priority will be to engage with the UK Government and social media and tech companies on those exact matters in order to seek a better way forward to protect our children and young people from online harm.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If he ensures that his party colleagues will behave, I will take a supplementary question from Martin Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I am very grateful, Deputy Presiding Officer. The bullying that occurs online frequently travels over the wi-fi that is provided by schools. On 16 December 2021, I posed a question on that to the then First Minister, who confirmed that the Scottish Government's responses

"must keep pace ... with the ways in which young people can be subjected to bullying."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 2021; c 29.]

The First Minister said that the Government would look at the technical difficulties that lead to wi-fi at school being the vehicle for such bullying. Has the Scottish Government concluded that review? What is the answer?

Natalie Don-Innes: Wi-fi in local schools would be a matter for local schools and local authorities. However, I am more than happy to write back to Mr Whitfield with more detail on the matter that he has brought to me.

Student Teachers (Mental Health and Wellbeing)

8. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is working with universities and placement schools to support the mental health and wellbeing of student teachers. (S6O-04759)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): We recognise the vital role that mental health and wellbeing support play in ensuring that student teachers can thrive in their professional development.

Universities have a responsibility to provide wellbeing services for all their students, including those who are undertaking teacher training. While they are on placement, student teachers are supervised and supported by a registered teacher, which ensures that they receive guidance and mentorship, and that supports their growth and wellbeing. Student teachers can also engage directly with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, which provides a range of wellbeing resources and advice to support early career teachers.

Ben Macpherson: Some constituents have raised concerns with me about the treatment and experiences of trainee and newly qualified teachers, and they report a lack of support. I have been told that the GTCS does not conduct exit interviews or gather data on the reasons why teachers leave the profession. Considering all that, will the minister advise what actions universities and placement schools should be taking to support student teacher mental health and wellbeing? Can any further relevant consideration be given to supporting trainee and newly qualified

teachers to help to ensure that committed, capable and passionate people remain in the profession?

Graeme Dey: I set out in my original answer the support that is currently available for the wellbeing of students, teachers and early-career teachers. I can confirm that we are considering what further support might be provided. I note Ben Macpherson's comments about the role of the GTCS in exit interviews, but the employers in this context are councils, so it is perhaps most appropriate that such work sits with them. I will ask education officials to ascertain to what extent that is happening and whether the data is being collated. I will undertake to apprise Mr Macpherson of the progress and consideration of possible further support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on education and skills. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business to allow for a changeover of front-bench teams.

Empowering Entrepreneurs and Innovators

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17785, in the name of Kate Forbes, on empowering entrepreneurs and innovators. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

15:22

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Entrepreneurs and innovators are the catalysts of growth that shape our economy. From the moment that I first entered Government, I have championed that agenda. I believe in a future in which Scotland reclaims its position as a global leader in innovation, and in which entrepreneurs do not just imagine a better Scotland but have the tools, support and investment necessary to build it.

Scaling firms have a profound economic impact and significantly outperform the broader economy. They are 40 per cent more productive than standard small and medium-sized enterprises and corporates, they pay higher wages, and they are responsible for the majority of net job creation. Remarkably, despite accounting for less than 1 per cent of businesses in the United Kingdom, they contribute more than 50 per cent of total SME turnover, amounting to £1.2 trillion.

I am proud to say that the value of our start-up community in Scotland goes beyond what can be measured by hard economic analysis. Many of our most promising and imaginative companies are working on problems of global significance such as the climate crisis, food security and drug discovery, and those firms are dispelling the myth that growth and wellbeing are contradictory economic principles.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Kate Forbes: Yes—although you do not look like Sharon Dowey.

Craig Hoy: Do I need to change, Presiding Officer, or can I simply self-declare?

Kate Forbes: I am relaxed as to whether it is Sharon Dowey or Craig Hoy who intervenes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let us go with Craig Hoy.

Craig Hoy: I think that we have corrected the record, but I have slightly lost my train of thought.

The minister is talking about young and ambitious entrepreneurs who are global in their mindset. Would she advise a young, ambitious, globally minded entrepreneur to base themselves on one of Scotland's islands at the moment?

Kate Forbes: Absolutely. As a representative of Scotland's islands—which I think that Craig Hoy mentioned—I would absolutely recommend that. A number of brilliant start-ups are located on our islands currently; indeed, I can speak from experience about some of the brilliant businesses that are located on Scotland's islands.

Despite the global economic headwinds that have challenged our economy, there are clear signs that Scotland's strategy is beginning to pay off. Over the past four years, we have worked closely with key figures in the private sector, such as Mark Logan and Ana Stewart, to execute a detailed plan to achieve that aim. Last year, Scotland's risk capital market bucked UK-wide trends, with Scottish firms raising more than £700 million in funding—a 19 per cent increase on the previous year, in sharp contrast to a 14 per cent decline across the rest of the UK.

There is an increasing volume of companies raising capital at a level that suggests that they have the potential to achieve substantial scale. In 2024, there were 17 investments exceeding £10 million worth a total of £373 million; the figures were up 90 per cent in deal volume and 70 per cent in value. I say that at the outset, because these kinds of debates can often get quite negative from the Opposition side. Can we at least collaborate and join forces in congratulating those in Scotland's start-up community on what they have achieved in those figures?

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I agree that we should champion success but, to truly succeed, we also need to acknowledge that there are issues. The Deputy First Minister might quote those figures, but we know, too, that the value of Scottish deals at £10 million and above actually fell by 69 per cent in 2022-23. Likewise, we know that other measures, such as the number of patents, have been falling. Does the Deputy First Minister not need to recognise the whole picture, not just the bits that show success? We need to show the weaknesses, too.

Kate Forbes: It is precisely because we needed to confront some of the challenges four years ago that we embarked on this journey to support Scottish entrepreneurs. The fact that the risk capital market has bucked UK-wide trends is remarkable; although there has been a decline across the UK, there has been an increase in Scotland.

That is because of the quality of the businesses. A stand-out example is the Edinburgh-based

gaming firm Build a Rocket Boy, which raised more than £86 million in a single investment round. It already employs 450 people, with further growth expected. Just yesterday, Wordsmith AI, a Techscaler member, announced a \$25 million series A investment achieving \$100 million valuation in a record-breaking 18 months. Those are remarkable success stories.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Kate Forbes: I will, particularly if it is to congratulate those businesses.

Murdo Fraser: I am very pleased to congratulate those businesses. As the cabinet secretary is talking about attracting investment, I wonder whether she will come on to talk about public sector investment. One of the most innovative sectors in the Scottish economy is defence, a sector that employs tens of thousands of people and which is growing. When is the Scottish Government going to revisit its short-sighted policy not to invest public funds in the fast-growing defence sector?

Kate Forbes: Intentionally or otherwise, the member is distorting the Scottish Government's position. The Scottish Government has a long-standing position of not using public money for munitions.

Members: Oh!

Kate Forbes: Just a minute. A matter of months ago, I announced £2 million of investment in the skills and training required, and we have also invested in defence companies with regard to diversification. If the member wants any evidence of that, I refer him to previous debates in the Parliament in which members have accused us of making those investments in defence. Both sides cannot be right.

There are straws in the wind that suggest that momentum will continue to build. Techscaler, which is where we incubate and grow Scotland's most promising start-ups, is performing beyond expectations. Since its launch, members have raised £118 million; there is strong demand for services; and membership applications are accelerating. That suggests a stronger pipeline of high-growth founders than we had anticipated at the early stage. If we are going to be proven wrong, we will at least be proven wrong on the basis of underexpectations rather than overexpectations.

That, in turn, is attracting the involvement of new investors and scaling firms. Data from RSM Consulting shows that Scotland is the UK's fastest-growing territory for the incorporation of new tech businesses. The same figures showed incorporations in London falling by 6 per cent.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Kate Forbes: I love a good debate, but I would like to finish my speech, too. I will take this intervention, however.

Liam Kerr: I am grateful, and it will be very quick. Does the Government think that the way in which the current rates regime is structured militates against small businesses scaling up?

Kate Forbes: No, because of the small business bonus scheme, which remains the most generous across the United Kingdom.

Daniel Johnson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention on that point?

Kate Forbes: I agree with Liam Kerr—and I have discussed this with Daniel Johnson in the past, too—that the rates system often does not take into account the fact that some of the most profitable businesses are the smaller ones. A start-up can be launched from a cupboard, where there are no rates, while a large and perhaps less profitable business has to pay them. I do not think that Murdo Fraser is listening to me at the moment, but I might have found a point of consensus with him—we might agree on those points. The rates system is based on an older version of the economy, in which the size of properties was linked to profitability, and that is just not the case in our new, tech-driven environment.

I see that the member has a quizzical look. I think that he agrees with my point—I was just giving him a little bit of ground there, in response to his question.

Although it is right that we celebrate successes, we acknowledge that there is more to do if we are to match the performance of our best competitors. That is why the budget made provision for a record investment of £30 million to accelerate Scotland's emergence as a leading start-up nation, and I want to take this opportunity to highlight some of the key programmes that the funding will support.

I will begin with the implementation of "Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship", Ana Stewart and Mark Logan's groundbreaking review of how we can support more women to start and scale businesses. Women remain significantly underrepresented in entrepreneurship; alarmingly, only 3.7 per cent of Scottish companies have an all-female founding team, and start-ups founded by women receive only 2 per cent of total investment capital. It is clear that deep-rooted societal barriers continue to limit women's full and equal participation and "Pathways" describes that, correctly, as

"a denial of opportunity on, literally, an industrial scale."

We have a duty to meet those challenges head on. Under the leadership of Ana Stewart, our newly appointed chief entrepreneur, we will invest up to £6 million in the report's key recommendations, with a particular focus on pre-start support and associated early stage grant schemes. That will be a powerful package of interventions, which will create best-in-class programmes to help women start and scale businesses, offer targeted financial incentives to back the most promising ideas, and ensure that support is delivered flexibly in ways and at times that work best for them.

Our universities are another source of untapped entrepreneurial potential. They are among Scotland's greatest national assets—hubs of innovation, creativity and enterprise. However, despite their global reputation, we have yet to unlock their full economic potential. Sweden offers a compelling example: by placing universities at the heart of its economic model and investing heavily in research and development, it now ranks second in the global innovation index and leads in generating university spin-outs.

Scotland needs to be just as ambitious. As a result, we are working closely with our universities on developing a new support package that will transform our ability to take innovative ideas from the lab bench to the business world by de-risking new technologies, accelerating commercialisation and attracting follow-on investment.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way on that point?

Kate Forbes: Do I have some time in hand?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will get the time back, Deputy First Minister.

Stephen Kerr: As ever, the Deputy First Minister talks a really good game. However, when she talks about universities, does she not accept that the current funding model is failing? Our university sector is in crisis. To talk this thing up as if none of that other stuff exists is a detachment from reality—which, surely, is not the hallmark of the Deputy First Minister.

Kate Forbes: The point that I am making just now is that we have great research and development—I think that we would all accept that there is some brilliant research and development. The member has raised questions about funding models, about which there is extensive debate at the moment, but we are talking specifically about the fact that a lot of that research and development does not get commercialised. How do we take it from the point of academic research and turn it into a business? That is what Sweden does well. Yes, there is a time and a place for a broader conversation about funding models, but what we are talking about is the fact that, over the

past few years, the commercialisation of that research has lagged behind.

The entrepreneurial spirit and enduring legacy of innovation extend far beyond our university campuses. Take John Walker, for example. From humble beginnings on Kilmarnock High Street in the 1800s, he built what would become the globally renowned Johnnie Walker whisky brand, which is now valued at more than \$10 billion.

To create the next generation of Johnnie Walkers, we will invest in igniting entrepreneurial dynamism across all our people and communities. First, we relaunched the £700,000 ecosystem fund. Secondly, we will continue to back Scottish EDGE's outstanding work to identify and support promising new businesses.

Thirdly, entrepreneurship is often seen as the domain of rare individuals with exceptional intelligence and drive, but that is simply not true. Research shows that quality entrepreneurial education and strong networks consistently build the mindset, skill and attitudes needed to succeed. That is why I am pleased to announce that, this year, we will relaunch the competitive entrepreneurial education fund, which will have a focus on embedding project-based entrepreneurial learning in schools across Scotland.

Finally, we are providing £141,000 to support a two-year pilot with the University of Aberdeen to train new computing science teachers, who will be able to equip young people with the skills that are vital for success in high-growth start-ups.

As the effect of our interventions in infrastructure, education and investment starts to yield momentum, our ambition is to establish Scotland as a global hub for start-up founders and investors, with a reputation akin to that presently enjoyed by Sweden and Finland. Techscaler and key policy documents such as the Logan review—or “Pathways”—and the innovation strategy have raised our profile. Indeed, Techscaler has been invited to showcase Scottish start-ups in Singapore, silicon valley, Helsinki, London, China and Japan.

At the start of this afternoon's debate, in which political points will inevitably be made—and I do recognise a role for constructive challenge—we should take the opportunity to congratulate those who are involved in the Scottish start-up scene on what they have achieved. The businesses that are driving that scene are raising Scotland's profile and are doing us proud on a global scale.

This September, Scotland has been selected to host the prestigious DICE conference, which will welcome senior executives from more than 100 of the world's top gaming companies. The world is beginning to perceive Scotland differently. It is an impression that we are keen to reinforce, and I

hope to work on a cross-party basis to continue to build on that work.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the Scottish Government's ambition to establish Scotland as one of Europe's fastest-growing start-up economies; welcomes the significant progress made towards this goal; congratulates Ana Stewart on her appointment as Scotland's new Chief Entrepreneur, and welcomes the record investment of over £30 million to accelerate Scotland's emergence as a leading hub for innovation, entrepreneurship and high-growth businesses.

15:36

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the fact that we are having another debate on the economy. We now have something of a trend of economy debates, which is a welcome departure from the previous state of affairs, when we would go for long periods without discussing Scotland's economic performance. That is a good change on the part of the Government. Today's focus on entrepreneurship and innovation is welcome, so I am delighted to be here.

Before I come to what needs to be done, I want to start by looking at the Scottish Government's track record, given that it has been in power in Scotland for some 18 years. The fact is that, throughout that period, Scotland's business start-up rate has consistently lagged behind that of the UK as a whole. According to the latest figures, which are from 2024, Scotland has a business stock of 762 businesses per 10,000 adults. The UK average is 996, so we are lagging far behind. That gap is particularly stark among the smallest businesses, where the figure is 738 per 10,000 adults for the UK but just 544 per 10,000 adults for Scotland. It is clear that we have a systemic issue whereby Scotland's level of private sector business activity is lower than the UK average.

According to last year's Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report for Scotland, Scotland's total early-stage entrepreneurial activity, which is known as the TEA rate, was the lowest in the UK nations in 2023. The overall TEA rate for the UK was 10.7, Scotland's was 9.1, Wales's was 11.5—it was doing very well—England's was 10.1 and Northern Ireland's was 9.7.

On all those measures, Scotland lags behind, so we welcome any initiatives to improve the rate of entrepreneurship and the rate of business start-up, so that they at least match the levels that we see elsewhere in the UK.

We know that there are particular sectors of society in which we have issues in encouraging people to start up a business. That is particularly the case with women and members of ethnic minority groups, as the Deputy First Minister

acknowledged. I pay tribute to the work that Women's Enterprise Scotland does in offering support, particularly mentoring and the promotion of role models for women who wish to set up and be involved in business.

If the Scottish Government wants to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, a really good starting point would be to listen to entrepreneurs, and Scotland has no more high-profile an example of a successful entrepreneur than Sir Tom Hunter. If the cabinet secretary has not read the report on how we might encourage economic growth that was published by the Hunter Foundation just a few weeks ago, I encourage her to do so.

The Hunter Foundation and Oxford Economics together highlight the success of Singapore—a small economy with few natural resources that is, in many ways, in a much less privileged position than Scotland—as an example from which we could learn lessons. Singapore is a country with a strong innovation ecosystem, significant investment in education and lifelong learning to help build a skilled and employable workforce, and a long-term strategy.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Last night, I was at Daniel Johnson's sponsored event with the Confederation of British Industry. Many people were talking about the flexible workforce development fund, which is delivered through colleges but which did not have any funding for the previous financial years. That has become a real problem. The digital skills gap is becoming evident, which reflects the conversation within the Hunter Foundation. Does Murdo Fraser agree that we should reinstate that funding?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Mr Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: I absolutely agree with my colleague about that funding programme. The Economy and Fair Work Committee, which Mr Johnson and I both sit on, heard a lot of evidence that it was of great value to business.

I had intended to be at Mr Johnson's CBI Scotland reception last night, but the event that I was at previously overran, and I was therefore not able to make it. I apologise to him for that.

The Hunter Foundation report highlights the importance of pro-business policies and the need to provide stable governance, a transparent legal system, low red tape and low taxation. It is not rocket science; those measures would help to provide the focus on long-term growth that Scotland needs.

Sir Tom Hunter has said:

"The status quo is completely unacceptable. Change needs to come and it needs to be radical—tinkering will only yield further decline.

The most important lever available to incentivise entrepreneurs and business is tax. Neither the Scotland or UK governments have chosen to use these levers to their full potential."

I agree with what Sir Tom Hunter says about the UK Labour Government, especially the ruinous decision that it took to increase employer national insurance contributions—a literal tax on jobs that will damage economic growth. However, issues around tax are also under the control of the Scottish Government, and the differential rates of income tax, together with the higher rates of land and buildings transaction tax, are undoubtedly causing problems for businesses that want to recruit above-average earners.

When I talk to people in the business community and in sectors such as finance, I find it interesting that, although higher income tax continues to be an issue, increasingly, they talk about the higher levels of LBTT for those wishing to purchase larger homes as being a real and significant problem in terms of the attractiveness of Scotland to those in that higher earner category, which affects the mobility of labour.

We know from last week's report from the Fiscal Commission that those higher tax rates are not, in fact, delivering. According to the SFC, the income tax hikes implemented by the SNP should be raising a net sum of £1.674 billion for the Scottish Government. However, the actual projected income tax net position, compared with what it would have been prior to the devolution of income tax, is just £616 million. That leaves an astonishing £1 billion gap between what Scotland's higher income tax might have added to the Scottish budget and what it is actually projected to deliver. This is what the SFC has referred to as the "economic performance gap", which is made up of slower aggregate earnings and employment growth in Scotland compared with the rest of the UK alongside the effects of Scottish and UK policies and taxpayer behaviour.

The Minister for Business (Richard Lochhead): Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: If I have time, I will.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back.

Richard Lochhead: On the topic of Scotland being an attractive nation for others to invest in or to move to, I, too, speak to many companies in Scotland, particularly in our high-growth sectors—such as the space sector, fintech and life sciences—and our universities. They tell me that their biggest concerns at the moment relate to issues such as the message that the UK is

sending out about people not being welcome to come to the UK and attacks on foreign students who want to study in our universities. Does Murdo Fraser accept that those are some of the biggest concerns that the business community faces at the moment?

Murdo Fraser: We have debated those issues many times before in the chamber. I say gently to the minister that the United Kingdom has had record levels of inward migration over the past five years and that Scotland has not been able to attract its population share of those new migrants. That is an issue that the Scottish Government could address.

We all want to increase the levels of innovation and entrepreneurial activity in Scotland, to make up for what is a pretty dismal historical record, but that will happen only with a change of direction from the Government, particularly in areas such as tax. I want the Government to start listening to entrepreneurs such as Sir Tom Hunter and to start changing its direction. That point is made in my amendment.

I move amendment S6M-17785.3, to leave out from "supports" to end and insert:

"calls on the Scottish Government to make greater effort to support businesses and entrepreneurship in Scotland; notes concerns identified by the Fraser of Allander Institute that only 9% of Scottish businesses believe that the Scottish Government understands the business community, and that the New Deal for Business has caused this relationship to stagnate further; recognises that Scotland has a lower business birth rate and stock rate compared to the rest of the UK, which has hindered entrepreneurship; congratulates Ana Stewart on her appointment as Scotland's new Chief Entrepreneur, but believes that a new approach is needed to deliver the high-growth economy that businesses and entrepreneurs need; welcomes the publication of *Lessons from Singapore for Scotland's Economy* by the Hunter Foundation, which urges the Scottish and UK governments to stop punishing entrepreneurs, deliver a long-term growth strategy and foster a more business-friendly environment through lower taxation, and believes that entrepreneurship and innovation can be enhanced through Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party plans to drive economic growth by cutting taxes for workers and businesses."

15:45

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The reception that I hosted last night on behalf of the CBI has been referenced. A key point that I made at that was that, in order to deliver growth, we very much need a shared agenda between businesses and the private sector and Government and politicians. It is in everyone's interests both in driving the tax revenues that we need and in delivering the public service that, ultimately, businesses depend on. Critical to that is making sure that we have high-growth, innovative countries—sorry. I meant companies, not

countries; there has been too much talk of Singapore.

That is why I welcome the debate, and I thank the Government for bringing it, because it is useful to talk about the type of economy that we need and the strategic issues that we want—

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP) rose—

Daniel Johnson: Already, clearly, I have attracted an intervention from Michelle Thomson.

Michelle Thomson: We have been talking a great deal about Sir Tom Hunter's report, but Oxford Economics, which did the research, also made it clear that Singapore's success rested to a large extent on higher-value manufacturing such as electronics and precision engineering. To that end, what commentary does Daniel Johnson have for the planned cut in the immigration of engineers? That is surely a worry.

Daniel Johnson: That was quite a leap. What we need is a coherent industrial strategy. It was a little disappointing earlier to hear the Deputy First Minister dodge the point about defence spending, for example, because, ultimately, we need coherence. The strategic defence review—*[Interruption.]* No, engineers is just one component. We need a balanced immigration policy. That is what the UK Government has sought to set out in terms of attracting people with the skills that we need. We need balance and coherence, which is what industrial strategy delivers.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way on that point?

Daniel Johnson: I will make a little bit of progress.

In order to have a debate such as this, we need context and realism about where we currently sit. Success stories are welcome, and I share the Deputy First Minister's congratulations and the celebration of the success that we have had. However, we need to reflect on not just the numbers that Murdo Fraser set out, but those of high-growth businesses. There has been an increase in the proportion of Scottish businesses that are high growth; it is up from 3 per cent to 3.2 per cent. However, when it comes to the number of high-growth businesses, we are 11th among the UK's nations and regions.

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Daniel Johnson: I want to make just a touch of progress.

Likewise, the business innovation rate has fallen from 50 per cent to 32 per cent in recent years. In business-related research and development,

Scotland is in the third quartile of regions and nations. As I pointed out in an intervention, the number of our patent applications has again been falling.

We have success stories and we must celebrate them, but there is an awful lot more work to do.

Kate Forbes: On data, it is important that we measure the right things. One of the data points that Murdo Fraser referred to was the TEA rate. He said that Scotland is lagging. The top three countries for the TEA rate are Ecuador, Guatemala and Chile. The TEA rate is irrelevant to high-growth enterprise, and those countries are not hotbeds of high-growth enterprise. I encourage us to refer to figures that will be relevant to the discussion about entrepreneurship and what we are trying to achieve. I made the point that RSM Consulting has illustrated that Scotland is the UK's fastest-growing territory for the incorporation of new tech businesses. Surely, that is what we are trying to achieve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Daniel Johnson, I will give you the time back for both interventions.

Daniel Johnson: I will allow Mr Fraser to defend his numbers; I was just providing some other context. We should look at the measure that the Deputy First Minister presented, but it is just one measure. All that I am asking for is a more holistic view.

The Scottish technology ecosystem report—STER—was very useful and important, but I ask the Government to question whether we are implementing every element of it as much as we could. There are a number of areas where we could go further, not least of which is ensuring that we embed the right skills in the education system and that we are delivering more computing science teachers.

We have already touched on the interfaces with higher education. There are still issues for innovation in that area, and it is good that the Deputy First Minister addressed that. However, there are still too many barriers, including that many higher education institutions are simply taking too high an equity stake in spin-outs, and those equity stakes are simply getting in the way of companies that are going for series A investment and so on.

We also need to look beyond technology start-ups. It was interesting that, again, we have had a presentation from the Deputy First Minister that has focused on that. It is absolutely right that we focus on technology start-ups, but they are not the only type of start-up. Critically, other areas where we seek to develop high-growth businesses, such as advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and food and drink, are more capital intensive. In those

areas, capital equipment and plant are more expensive than they are for technology firms. The barriers between the different stages of the pipeline, as set out in the Scottish technology ecosystem report, are much higher for those sorts of capital-intensive businesses, and we need a renewed focus on how we help them to thrive.

I point out that the contrast that the Deputy First Minister made between small and medium-sized enterprises and high-growth start-ups is interesting. There are two ways of looking at that. There is a lot of value in high-growth technology start-ups, but the other way of looking at those figures is that we have an issue with growth across the broad range of SMEs. As well as looking at high-growth start-ups, we must look at ways in which we can help all small and medium-sized enterprises to grow.

As John Tsoukalas's report on Scotland's productivity challenge sets out, 90 per cent of Scottish businesses have seen no growth during the past two decades. We must develop approaches that help all businesses to invest and grow and help all businesses of all sizes to reach their potential. With that, I need to close.

I move amendment S6M-17785.2, to insert at end:

“; believes that Scottish businesses across sectors have not had adequate support from the Scottish Government to break down barriers to innovation, and that support must extend beyond start-up stage to provide advice and investment for scaling up; notes that the proportion of businesses in Scotland that are innovating, that is those introducing or developing a new product, service or process, has fallen from 50% in 2012-14 to just 32% in 2020-22, and calls on the Scottish Government to reform Scotland's economic agencies to better support entrepreneurs and innovation in sectors across Scotland, including capital intensive sectors like life sciences and advanced manufacturing.”

15:52

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): Across the chamber, we all agree that we want to have a dynamic and successful business community in Scotland. I am not completely sure that the narrow focus on start-ups that is proposed by the motion is the whole story or a key solution.

The entrepreneurial mantra of 10 years ago—“move fast, break things, fail quickly”—seems outdated now, and a waste of talent and resources. We should be looking at building for the long term and for everyone, not only for a few people who have a high appetite for risk and, presumably, enough financial security that they can afford to take that risk.

My proposed amendment to the motion has two elements to it. The first agrees with the point in the

Labour amendment about supporting successful Scottish businesses to scale up. That is where there appears to be a gap in our economic planning. Half a dozen risky start-ups do not create the same number of jobs or bring the same amount of investment as a company that has a proven product or service and, say, 25 people scaling up to be a company of 50 or 100 people. Without support for scaling up, those start-ups—even if they survive—will stay small.

I have had correspondence from the owner of a successful small business who feels stuck. They have a successful business model and would like to grow, but they are too small for the Scottish National Investment Bank to invest in and they are not in a key sector, so the enterprise agencies will not help. Where do they turn? What other options are available to them?

We have many small businesses in Scotland that are successful and experts in their fields, but they are working so hard to do what they do that they do not have time or resources to do the research and investment that is needed for them to grow. That is where our enterprise agencies and our national investment bank should be stepping in to provide advice and finance, so that those businesses can grow, support local jobs and supply chains and connect with the opportunities of a transition to a green economy.

The second element of my amendment is around the nature of start-up businesses. The Economy and Fair Work Committee heard its first evidence on the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill this morning. The purpose of community wealth building is to ensure that more people have a stake in and a say on the economy, and that more people benefit from it. One way to implement that is to support the creation of businesses such as co-operatives, social enterprises and those that use other democratic and employee-owned business models. We need more of our start-ups to be businesses that create community wealth, and that workers and communities have a stake in and a say in. We need to be more supportive of employee buy-outs. Business models matter.

Witnesses at the economy committee this morning gave evidence that Scotland's enterprise agencies and other economic development organisations need to pivot to support community wealth building, which means that they need to provide advice, direction and practical and financial support to businesses that use those alternative business models, not just those that use profit-led models. That may mean that there is some upskilling and a change of direction for those agencies. The Scottish Government needs to give that clear direction to our enterprise

agencies and other economic development organisations.

We heard at committee this morning that employee-led firms are 9 per cent more productive than traditional firms.

Michelle Thomson: Will the member take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: I will take the intervention, but I will just finish my thought.

That is key to improving productivity as well as to ensuring that wealth and benefits stay in Scotland and with working people.

Michelle Thomson: Thank you very much for taking the intervention.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Ms Slater has 10 seconds left.

Lorna Slater: My apologies. I will wrap up.

Inclusive ownership is one of the five pillars of community wealth building that the Scottish Government has accepted. Let us think again about what a start-up can be, who benefits, who is building for the long term and who is creating wealth that stays in our communities.

15:56

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Implicit in the Deputy First Minister's speech was an acknowledgement—I could say an admission—that the Government went off track for a number of years, that it was seen to be anti-business, that it had policies of apparently never-ending increases in taxation and regulation and that there was a suspicion of business and entrepreneurship. The change in rhetoric today is a helpful sign that the Government is moving in the right direction, but there is an implicit acknowledgement that things went off track, which, along the lines that Lorna Slater outlined, contributed to the decline in investment in the housing sector but also in many other sectors that have feared the ever-growing reach and the approach of the Government. Nevertheless, it is a move in the right direction.

On top of that, there has been an unstable political environment in those areas, and there has been turbulence from things such as Brexit, Liz Truss's budget and the independence referendum. I am sure that the Deputy First Minister will not agree with the latter point, but all that turbulence has added to uncertainty in business, which has held back decision making and investment. That is why we need to get to a much more pragmatic, stable relationship.

I have seen good examples of progress. The improvement of the pipeline to support different businesses at different stages of their growth is a

good development. Programmes that instil knowledge, understanding and confidence, such as the rural leadership programme through Scottish Enterprise and others, are good examples of developing political and personal capacity and skills in certain sectors.

However, we still face challenges in a number of areas, and universities, which Stephen Kerr referred to, are probably the biggest example of that. We would not know it, but the University of Edinburgh, which is getting a lot of negative publicity just now, created 127 new companies in 2023-24. Universities are major generators of economic growth in this country. We used to sing all the time about the University of Dundee's life sciences, but that university still does not have a rescue package in place to ensure that its research capacity and, to be frank, its brilliance will continue. We need to address a number of problems.

Kate Forbes: It is worth briefly noting, because I am always in the business of restoring confidence in the University of Dundee, that it was named the top university in the UK for entrepreneurial activity.

Willie Rennie: I hope that that means that, by the end of the week, we will have an arrangement with the university to secure its future, because we have been waiting for that for far too long.

We have had problems with business research and development for a number of years. Scotland has always lagged behind the rest of the United Kingdom in that regard. The UK figure is currently 1.96 per cent, while in Scotland it is 1.45 per cent, which is way down on where we should be. That is an indicator of businesses' confidence to invest in their futures, and that is why we need a Government that brings stability and ensures that we invest in the right people and the right skills. I have concerns about the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill in that regard. We need to ensure that it tackles the real problems that we face in that sector, because if we do not have the skills, the people, the institutions and the right attitude, we will not be able to grow our entrepreneurial companies for the future.

I hope that the Government is listening and that it understands that those challenges need to be addressed if we are to grow.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

16:00

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to highlight some of what is going on in the Highlands and

Islands and in our nation as a whole. Scotland is rich with the talent, skills and facilities that are needed if we are to achieve our ambitious goal of becoming one of Europe's fastest-growing start-up economies, and that is particularly true in the diverse landscapes of the Highlands and Islands.

Whenever I travel elsewhere, I am struck by how big business often easily overwhelms many town and city centres, where I see endless branches of Greggs, Pret a Manger, McDonald's and other big names. I am always so grateful to return home to Harry Gow, Ashers Bakery, the Highland Weigh, One One Two, Island Larder, Bad Girl Bakery and the Redshank—I could fill four minutes listing a few more names. Those amazing local businesses are run for the local area by locals, and they are full of heart as well as truly high-quality goods and services.

However, it is not a given that we will keep them—we have to support them, and that means support from Government as well as local shoppers. That is why, despite our limited powers and an annually challenging budget, the Scottish National Party keeps offering that support. More than 95 per cent of non-domestic properties in Scotland continue to benefit from a property tax rate that is lower than that elsewhere in the UK, with more than 100,000 properties being entirely exempt.

We are leading in innovation, too. Beyond traditional sectors, the Highlands and Islands is embracing digital transformation. A couple of years ago, the Scotland 5G Centre, working with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, opened an innovation hub in Inverness to accelerate the deployment and adoption of 5G-enabled solutions. That includes pop-up networks to bring that 5G technology to geographically dispersed areas from Thurso all the way to Fort William.

We are very lucky to have all the benefits of the successful Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I see its impact every day, with many new and future workstreams as well as the outcomes of various opportunities that have been taken over the past few decades with HIE support. The northern innovation hub is a great example. Supported by the Inverness and Highland city region deal, the hub has now offered tailored support, funding, events and mentoring to more than 2,500 organisations across the Highlands, including Pat Munro, which got help with information technology projects, and Kirsty Elizabeth Studio in Fort William—a start-up that now features as a case study on HIE's website, showcasing what Highlanders can do with a little bit of support and a massive amount of entrepreneurial spirit.

Although the challenges that economies and communities face often feel more acute in my region, that presents us with the opportunity of

finding solutions that not only work for us but can inspire the rest of the country and often the world.

Unfortunately, however, is not just geographical or industrial issues that our businesses face right now—there are political barriers, too. Labour's decision to hit all employers with a national insurance hike is reducing the ability of small businesses to contribute to our economy and forcing them to choose between reducing their numbers of employees or paying those employees less than they might otherwise might have paid them. That does not make sense. Given how much the rise is costing the UK Government itself, nobody has yet been able to explain whom the rise is serving.

Brexit, in addition to a continued stubborn immigration policy that is not based on evidence or need, is also holding us back. UK policy is out of step with what Scotland wants and needs. It is now so much harder than it needs to be to recruit vital workers and attract students. Analysis estimates that Brexit trade barriers could impact Scotland's economy by £4 billion, with our exports being potentially £3 billion lower than if we had continued our EU membership.

We have the talent, skills and natural resources to be a major player in emerging and growing industries, whether that is renewables, space or life sciences, and the Highlands and Islands knows how to be part of them. I do not want us to miss out. To ensure that we do not, we need continued partnership with the likes of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the University of the Highlands and Islands, alongside the full powers of an independent nation within the European Union.

16:05

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This debate is a welcome opportunity to highlight the importance of empowering Scotland's entrepreneurs and innovators. Innovation will be key to Scotland's future, but it has also been key to Scotland's past. After all, it is one of the things that we are known for in Scotland. Our spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation was pioneered throughout the Scottish enlightenment, and Scotland has long been a cradle for ideas and progress. It is therefore not at all surprising that Scotland has countless inventions to its name, many of which we have heard about in the debate.

The Government's motion is at least right to speak about the importance of Scotland becoming "one of Europe's fastest growing start-up economies".

I, too, take the opportunity to congratulate Ana Stewart on being appointed as Scotland's new chief entrepreneur. However, we are debating yet

another motion in which the Government's rhetoric does not match its actions, as Murdo Fraser's amendment points out.

As members on our benches have raised many times before, the Scottish Government's approach to taxation is making it difficult for certain sectors to attract and retain top talent. That includes important sectors such as fintech. Those in that sector have warned that higher Scottish income tax is making it difficult for the sector to grow, while economists have warned that the approach risks shrinking the Scottish tax base. Headhunting companies have warned that their jobs have already been made more difficult by the introduction of the advanced rate of Scottish income tax. How is that situation supposed to help Scotland to become one of Europe's fastest-growing start-up economies? That concern is being raised by many economists.

Our amendment to the motion mentions the report that the Hunter Foundation published last month, which laid bare many of the problems that Scotland's economy is facing. The report is clear that Scotland needs a new growth strategy that fosters innovation in sectors with high potential. It is also clear that a much more business-friendly environment is required in order to make Scotland more attractive for inward investment. Any politician who has spoken to businesses across Scotland in recent weeks, months and years will be well aware of that. The Fraser of Allander Institute found that only 9 per cent of Scottish businesses believe that the Government understands their needs. Speaking about his foundation's recent report, Sir Tom Hunter said that Scotland was facing a "managed decline" under the Scottish Government but that Scotland can still reclaim its place on the global stage if we bring forward the right policies, including on tax. I endorse that view.

The Scottish Government should have an ambition for Scotland to become a leader in innovation and entrepreneurship, but the Government's record does not match its ambition. To make that vision a reality, Scotland needs a new approach that is based on commonsense policies, including cutting income tax, which is so important. That will also help to incentivise more of the world's brightest talent to stay in Scotland. We want to attract talent and we want businesses to flourish, but they are being stopped by the Government's policies.

With the correct approach, Scotland can be a leading hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. That is what we wish to achieve, but the Scottish Government must play its part to make that dream become a reality. It will be only a dream if the Scottish Government does not listen to the individuals and organisations who are telling it that

its tax policy is harming entrepreneurs and innovators.

16:09

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Entrepreneurship and innovation are central to driving economic growth. One might suggest that they are the twins of purposeful change in the economy, driving a culture of development and productivity improvement. All innovation involves what the late Professor Tom Burns called the "application of novelty" and he said:

"All novelty involves some degree of risk."

Innovation and entrepreneurship are social phenomena that exist at their best in cultures that support change and risk taking; they do not thrive in risk-averse cultures. I would contrast that with our activity as parliamentarians and Government ministers. In the main, there is too much of a tendency to see each and every failure in policy making as bad and a matter to be condemned. That encourages risk aversion among policy makers. If the initiatives that we take to support innovation and entrepreneurship were never to lead to some failures, that in itself would be a major failure.

Rachael Hamilton: It is not policy makers or Opposition members who are criticising the policies that are failing; it is the industry and the sector.

Michelle Thomson: That is simply not true. Every single week, I listen to baying from across the chamber about multiple policies. My point is that we must allow for some risk taking if we are to drive innovation and entrepreneurship, and businesses accept that. I am making that point to all of us, and to civil servants. There is a fundamental dichotomy at play that will not serve us well in the world.

Stephen Kerr: Does Michelle Thomson not agree that part of the problem is that, as a Parliament, we spend a disproportionate amount of time talking about social issues and very little time discussing the sort of issues that we are discussing this afternoon? Even this afternoon, we have a very short debate.

Michelle Thomson: I completely agree. It is well known that I would spend most of every day talking about such matters. We need a wealthy economy to support the social changes and contribution that we want to make.

Thomas Watson, the founder and long-term chair of IBM, probably put it better than I can when he said:

"If you want to increase your success rate, double your failure rate."

Fundamentally, if we want to drive innovation and entrepreneurship, we all have to understand that we need to increase our tolerance for risk. That is even more important in today's world, given the speed of change.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I absolutely agree with Michelle Thomson on that. One of the most important things for that to happen is to ensure that we are accountable for public money. That is critical in the Parliament—we must have more accountability. Michelle Thomson and I sit on the Finance and Public Administration Committee, and we are always asking for that. Does she agree that it would help if we increased accountability for where public money is spent to ensure that it is spent successfully?

Michelle Thomson: I am always in favour of oversight and accountability, but I am making a separate point. One can have accountability and a clear line of sight on funding, but, specifically on the matter of entrepreneurship and innovation, we must accept that we need to increase our threshold for risk. That will include public sector funding. We also want to crowd in more private finance, because the private sector has more of a view about this.

That leads me to the end of my remarks, but I have enjoyed the debate, nevertheless.

16:13

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): It is a great honour to speak in today's debate. My colleague Daniel Johnson and I come from a business background, and Colin Smyth has a background in economic issues.

I am proud of Scotland's history of business and entrepreneurship. When I ran businesses, I was lucky enough to meet many successful innovators and entrepreneurs who had an idea and who worked hard to make it succeed. Although the proportion of Scottish businesses that are innovating by introducing or developing a new product, service or process has fallen from 50 to 22 per cent in the past 10 years, Scotland is brimming with potential to create a new generation of entrepreneurs in various sectors.

Edinburgh has growing finance and technology sectors that employ tens of thousands of people and are innovating in ways that can be applied across our economy. Taking advantage of those sectors and allowing talent to thrive are key if we want to remain competitive.

The most recent data from Scottish Enterprise shows that the Government is the most frequent investor by deal count in Scotland. Keeping in mind how agencies such as Scottish Enterprise

and the Scottish National Investment Bank contribute to innovation and growth should be a priority.

Scotland's investment and innovation system is complex and it lacks a focused economic strategy. We should be removing complexity for businesses and introducing a single point of contact across the Government for international investors, to make Scotland the most attractive part of the UK in which to operate.

Grant funding from those agencies should also be used more effectively to scale up businesses. Areas in which innovation has a key role to play, such as renewables and hydrogen, are forming an increasingly large part of our economy as we transition to net zero. If we cannot scale up those effectively, we will be left behind.

The last point that I will talk about is skills. Developing a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship is a whole-system issue on which the Government, businesses and education can all work together to deliver in the areas in which we have an advantage, such as tech. Every year, Scotland is creating around 13,000 digital skills jobs, but we are producing only 5,000 graduates to fill them. The Government can be a bridge between business and education to deliver the graduates that businesses need. That involves providing opportunities in tech skills in secondary and further education by increasing the number of computer science teachers. It involves increasing co-operation among our business schools to ensure that graduates are ready for the modern economy, and it involves enabling workers to reskill.

Scotland has the talent to innovate in new and exciting ways that will grow our economy, but we must act to ensure that talent is channelled and supported so that entrepreneurs and innovators can do what they do best.

16:17

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate in support of the Scottish Government's ambition to establish Scotland as one of Europe's fastest-growing start-up economies. It is also an opportunity to highlight the fantastic entrepreneurial spirit in my constituency.

Scotland is home to some of the world's brightest business minds, and we have a proud history of invention—from television to telephone, and from penicillin to colour photographs. Looking ahead, the Scottish Government is committed to empowering entrepreneurs and innovators across our country. In my constituency of Clydebank and Milngavie, I am proud to have met some of our

excellent entrepreneurs and innovators. As I have only four minutes, I can mention only a few.

I know that many of my colleagues will agree that caring for a plant can often be challenging. I was therefore really impressed when I met Clydebank's Happy Leaf, which was founded in 2022 by Amy Roberts and Iain Quinn. In 2023, it received a Scottish EDGE award of £10,000 to develop a smart sensor that is placed in the soil of a plant and it sends messages to a phone app explaining what care the plant needs. That is a novel idea and I am sure that many will make great use of it.

Last year, I met Milngavie's Andrew Flynn, co-founder of POTR. POTR was also successful in the Scottish EDGE award, securing a £100,000 investment to create what is believed to be the world's first self-watering origami plant pot. Since that time, it has achieved a life-changing deal to sell the plant pots in Japan, and it has secured momentous deals to sell with Bloom & Wild, Uncommon Goods and John Lewis. Most recently, POTR secured a new partnership with Waterhaul, allowing it to meet increasing demand for its ocean pots, which are built from discarded fishing gear. That is an incredible innovation, with sustainability truly at its heart.

I would like to mention another constituent, Kim Burgess, who also won a Scottish EDGE award and secured £10,000 for her novel personal protection approach for anyone who might feel vulnerable in public. The product comprises a highly visible deterrent that has the potential to revolutionise personal safety and ensure that the most vulnerable groups in society feel safe and confident. When I met Kim, I was so impressed by her invention, and I commend her entrepreneurial talent.

Those are a select few examples of people in my constituency, and I am delighted by each and every one of their achievements. There are so many more that I could mention.

To ensure that we deliver truly meaningful support, it is vital that we continue to listen to and learn from our entrepreneurs and the business community. I am therefore proud that the Scottish Government is taking that approach and is committed to delivering a support network that nurtures talent and helps businesses to thrive.

The SNP is acutely aware of the pressures that businesses across the country face and is taking decisive action to offer support, despite our limited powers and having to work with a challenging budget. Therefore, it is welcome that the Scottish Government will invest up to £34.7 million in entrepreneurship, innovation and social enterprise in 2025-26, which represents a 50 per cent increase compared with the 2024-25 budget.

Meanwhile, the UK Labour Government is betraying Scotland's businesses with a tax on jobs and broken promises on energy bills.

On the world stage, there can be no better investment than investment in Scottish innovation. We have the talent, skills and resources to be a major player, but we are constantly hampered by successive UK Governments. Scotland needs the full powers of an independent nation, within the European Union, to allow us to fully flourish, and we need that now.

16:21

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): This has been a very useful debate. Willie Rennie is not in the chamber, but I would like to believe that what we hear from the Deputy First Minister is a change of tone from the SNP Government. However, I am not entirely convinced, because that would require a change of policy—as Craig Hoy is saying from his seat—and I do not know whether the SNP has it in it to provide a change of policy.

I will give an example, which is one that we discussed yesterday. Frankly, I might have got overemotional in dealing with the minister, Richard Lochhead, but the Government has failed to be coherent in any sense in relation to the Rolls-Royce project that Scottish Enterprise vetoed.

When I listen to Kate Forbes—I think that she knows that I like her a great deal—she sounds very credible, but, when we look behind the curtain like in "The Wizard of Oz", we discover the same old SNP with the same old negative anti-business rhetoric. I really enjoy listening to Michelle Thomson—I think that she knows that, too—but, unfortunately, she is not representative of the vast swathe of SNP MSPs who are fundamentally hostile to the whole idea of wealth creation through enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Let me comment on what Michelle Thomson said, because she said some really important things in her very good speech. She talked about risk, and I would like to marry that up with the complete equation: it is about risk and reward. People will take risks if they can see that there is a chance that that risk will pay off in reward, but we have created an anti-reward culture in Scotland. If someone does really well in Scotland, they probably will not stay in Scotland, which is heartbreaking.

The figure for net migration into the UK is massive—far too high—but the SNP Government has to ask itself why, as was pointed out to it, hardly any of those people, in proportional terms, come to Scotland. We must ask ourselves what we have done in our country that has put off people coming here and making a future here,

even if one agrees with having mass migration, which I do not.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Year after year, there is net migration to Scotland, and the figures for people coming to Scotland are pretty similar to the figures for people coming to the north of England, so it is unfair to characterise the Scottish migration position in the way that Stephen Kerr has done. Given that immigration policy is reserved, surely the policies of the Home Office play a role in the problem that he has identified.

Stephen Kerr: The problem in the Home Office is that there has been too much immigration. This is one of my frustrations—I am not a member of Parliament for the north-east of England, so, to be completely frank, I am not particularly bothered about the north-east of England; I am partial to Scotland, so I want to look at what is happening in Scotland. We have to learn the lessons that are on offer from our experience of what has happened in recent years.

We can talk about migration—the Greens love to talk about mass migration, as do some SNP MSPs—but we should be talking about our broken education system, which Foysol Choudhury talked about. We have people in this country who are sitting doing nothing or who are—this is a bigger crime, in many respects—massively underemployed, which is because we have not got the skills economy correct. If you want an enterprise economy and a growing economy, you do not cut budgets that relate to building education and skills, yet the SNP cut those things.

You can dress it up in any fancy language you like, but we are talking about our people and their get-up-and-go, ideas, energies and creativity. Scotland is second to no country in the world when it comes to people, but the SNP Government has cut vital skills and education programmes every time that it could. What Foysol Choudhury had to say about that was absolutely right.

I have run out of time, but I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. I hope that Kate Forbes can lead the resistance in the SNP Government to restore capitalism and enterprise to the vocabulary of this country's Government.

16:26

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): This is an important debate, and there is not enough time to discuss all the different ways in which a culture of creation and a mindset of entrepreneurship are thriving in Scotland. However, what could we do to continue to enhance that culture, how do we create an even better environment for sustainable growth, and

how do we make our country an even better place in which to live and do business?

As has been touched on, Scotland has the talent, skills and facilities to be one of Europe's fastest-growing start-up economies, because it starts from a position of strength. Although it is interesting to look at other nations' models, as other members have done, we need to consider the context, which is that we are a devolved nation, while Ireland and Singapore, for example, have very different circumstances and constitutional arrangements.

It is a fact, as Willie Rennie said, that Edinburgh, and its university, is important to Scotland's economy. As an Edinburgh MSP, that is of particular interest to me. Recently, a lot has been said—rightly—about the reindustrialisation of Leith, the massive renewable hub growth that is taking place at the port, the opportunities and innovations there, the diversity of that economy and how it has the potential to grow. The creative industries—film, television production and other aspects of that part of the economy—thrive in my constituency, and the capacity for growth is really interesting. The cabinet secretary mentioned tech and computer games. Build a Rocket Boy is based in Leith, and Skyscanner started in Leith, years ago.

My constituency highlights—other members have said this—the fact that we need to apply our attention to two things: people's skills and place. The reason that so many people base themselves and their businesses in Edinburgh and my constituency is because of the quality of life here. A lot of that is to do with affordability, which is why the housing situation that we face is so important. People have been establishing and creating businesses in our capital city because it has been affordable and, compared with elsewhere, has provided a high quality of life and services.

That is why we need to think about issues such as housing market diversity and LBTT and why we need to give particular consideration to Edinburgh and its housing crisis. Some people champion build to rent, which has a role in our housing market, but it is a model for transient workers. We need to think about how to build capacity for those who stay for longer. Build to rent is not a panacea to solve the housing crisis, although it plays a part.

The challenges for the hospitality sector have been articulated in the chamber in a number of different ways. In Edinburgh, although there is huge demand for hospitality businesses, their costs can be higher because of property values. We cannot take the hospitality sector in our capital city for granted. For example, the shore area in Leith is thriving, but there is a vulnerability about it because of the challenges of the national insurance hike and general economic conditions.

People come here to start businesses, to live well and to enjoy themselves, and that is a great place to build from.

16:30

Lorna Slater: I invite Michelle Thomson to make the intervention that she was unable to make in my opening speech, if she is willing to do so.

Michelle Thomson: That is very kind—I really appreciate it. Lorna Slater mentioned this morning's meeting of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, and I was going to point out that the witnesses were really talking about the large-scale lenders making the shift. It is really important for us to bear that in mind in relation to what we are able to influence in this Parliament, as I think that the reference to that kind of large-scale corporate lending was drawn from the United States. My intervention was just to make a clarification.

Lorna Slater: I was actually referring to the conversation in today's committee meeting about the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill itself and how, as currently drafted, its provisions are about putting the onus on public sector bodies such as our enterprise agencies to pivot. Both in the chamber and in the Economy and Fair Work Committee, we have talked about mainstreaming alternative business models. What Michelle Thomson says is also true; maybe we were just identifying different parts of this morning's committee conversation.

One of the things that I would like to do in my closing speech is challenge some of what passes as economic orthodoxy that we have heard in the chamber this afternoon—namely, the idea that everybody moves around the world for tax advantages only and that everybody only wants money, and that that is their primary goal. I have an advantage over many of the members across the chamber who made that claim, as I moved to Scotland specifically to bring my skills as an engineer here and to be part of Scotland. I did that not because I thought that it would make me more money, but because the lifestyle that we enjoy in Scotland—a social democratic country and a small nation with big connections—is so powerful.

Rachael Hamilton: Has the member heard of something called tax flight? That is happening in Scotland right now. Members of the business community and successful businesspeople are leaving because of the SNP's tax regime.

Lorna Slater: I have great difficulty in understanding why Rachael Hamilton brings that evidence. Even someone earning more £100,000 in Scotland pays a fraction of that more in income tax, whereas in Scotland we have free university tuition, baby boxes, free prescriptions and cheaper

house prices than in many parts of the UK. The overall cost of living in Scotland is lower, and any businessperson who cannot do that math strikes me as not being very credible. *[Interruption.]* Living in Scotland is a very good deal. If we look at all the advantages that we get—everything from free social care to free bus passes for our kids—it adds up to a significant sum in social benefit. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Ms Slater, I ask you to resume your seat.

The member has taken two interventions. She has been generous with interventions. I think that we should listen to the responses and the speech that she is making.

Ms Slater, please continue.

Lorna Slater: It is not just me who thinks, "Tax, tax, tax. Everybody is only worried about tax." I will quote the *Financial Times*. When the World Bank did surveys with investors on what determined their willingness to invest in a country,

"The top reasons were almost always the same: first came macroeconomic and political stability (which has been put into jeopardy in the UK)"

because of Brexit, followed by

"high-quality infrastructure and skills. Low taxes and enterprise zones were always near the bottom. The key to growth is to create an environment where there are great commercial opportunities—tax rate differences of a few percentage points are largely unimportant if you are making a lot of money."

A better policy response would be to use any remaining fiscal space to invest in a serious productivity agenda. This would include mechanisms for increasing investment in infrastructure, skills, research and innovation, alongside incentives to firms to adopt

new technology or improve management practices.

That brings me on to my second point, which is to challenge Willie Rennie on what he said about regulation. Regulation can support businesses. Someone who works in the construction sector told me that investment in his business has been stalled by the lack of regulation on heat in buildings and by the lack of commitment from the Scottish Government on targets and the number of heat pumps to be installed. Setting a clear direction for investment in regulation allows companies to put the money into training and equipment.

The *Financial Times* also has something to say about EU regulation. It makes a comparison with companies in the EU, which are subject to much higher levels of regulation than those in the UK, noting that EU regulations, while often seen as burdensome, have also driven innovation by compelling businesses to adapt and modernise. It

could be argued that a lack of constraints through regulation in the UK has allowed UK businesses to rest on their laurels, rather than undertaking the innovation, investment and modernisation that they need to undertake to compete.

16:35

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Scotland has a proud history of invention and innovation, from the telephone to the television, and from the pneumatic tyre to penicillin. That legacy lives on today in the entrepreneurs and innovators across our country who are working hard to build businesses, generate ideas and create jobs in every community. However, if we are serious about empowering those entrepreneurs—not just celebrating them—we need more than press releases or appointments; we need a plan that delivers.

While I welcome Ana Stewart's appointment as chief entrepreneur—and I thank Mark Logan for his valuable work—the motion before us paints a picture that simply does not reflect the reality that is experienced by many businesses. As Daniel Johnston highlighted, the rate of innovation-active businesses in Scotland has fallen from 50 per cent to just 32 per cent, putting us behind every English region and Wales. Despite a small improvement in the number of high-growth firms, Scotland ranks 11th out of 12 UK regions on the Government's own innovation scorecard. Other key indicators are going in the wrong direction: business R and D investment is low, patent grants have dropped sharply and academic income from business collaboration has fallen in real terms.

Entrepreneurs do not need another ambition from Government; they need practical support. They need the investment to scale, the capital to grow and the skills pipeline that meets their needs. On all three fronts, the Government is falling short. Let us be clear: this is not just about tech start-ups in our cities. Innovation must be inclusive; it must reach rural communities, social enterprises and sectors that have often been overlooked. That includes support for more women and minority entrepreneurs—something that Ana Stewart has rightly championed through the pathways work that she co-authored. Good ideas need more than good intentions, however; they need funding, access and consistent support.

On investment, the number of risk capital deals under £10 million fell last year. Larger deals collapsed, with the total value down by 69 per cent. There is a chronic lack of long-term capital, particularly for capital-intensive sectors such as manufacturing and life sciences.

We face a growing digital gap when it comes to skills. As Foysol Choudhury rightly said, we are

creating far more digital jobs than we are producing qualified graduates. The number of computer science teachers is falling, and employers are struggling to recruit people with even basic IT skills.

When it comes to in-work training, which is critical for both new entrants and workers who are looking to reskill or upskill, many businesses have told the Economy and Fair Work Committee recently that they are deeply concerned about the funding mechanism changes that the Scottish Government is proposing in the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill. There is a real risk, and a fear, that those changes will undermine the ability of training providers to meet the needs of businesses, just so that, rather than simply funding our colleges better, the Government can shore up its bad decision to cut college funding by 17 per cent since 2021. Our colleges are facing growing demand, with long waiting lists for skills-shortage subjects and falling apprenticeship numbers—all while they are being asked to do more with less.

The Government is doing the same with our enterprise agencies. South of Scotland Enterprise had its budget slashed by more than 25 per cent—£8.7 million has gone from the organisation that is responsible for supporting SMEs, fostering innovation and creating jobs. Nevertheless, SOSE continues to deliver, from the Techscaler hub in Dumfries to support for innovative, sustainable manufacturing businesses such as the Eco Group in Annan. Ambition needs to be backed by resources, however.

The Government claims that it wants to build a world-class entrepreneurial culture—that is a central goal in the national strategy for economic transformation. However, two years on, Audit Scotland has, rightly, questioned the lack of clear investment plans and noted weak transparency in how the NSET is being delivered. The most recent progress report offers generalised updates but little clarity on what is working and what is not, or why.

We cannot afford a strategy that continues to overpromise and underdeliver. We need a different approach—one in which our enterprise agencies pivot, as Lorna Slater said, and are empowered to provide long-term strategic support for entrepreneurship; in which colleges are properly funded to deliver the skills that businesses need; in which in-work training and digital education are seen as national priorities; and in which the Scottish Government uses its influence to bring together industry, academia and communities to drive innovation and to share its rewards. That is why Labour is asking the Parliament to support our amendment. Although early stage support matters, it is scale-ups, skills

and sustained investment that will deliver lasting impact.

Scotland has the talent. We have the ideas. However, unless we match ambition with action and get the basics right, innovation will remain concentrated in too few sectors and too few places. Let us deliver a truly inclusive, entrepreneurial Scotland, where innovation thrives in every community, rural and urban, and where those who drive our economy forward are backed every step of the way on that important journey.

16:41

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I thank colleagues across the chamber for their contributions to the debate, which is a genuinely important one for Scotland. Without entrepreneurs who are willing to invest and take risks in Scotland, Scotland will not be able to succeed and the bill for the social contract that Lorna Slater mentioned will go unpaid.

However, under the SNP, we are missing opportunities to deliver a culture that would allow entrepreneurship to flourish. Too often, it is clear that Scotland plc is not actually open for business. The entrepreneurs, risk takers and wealth creators go where the opportunities exist. To deliver that culture, the Government must seriously rethink the way that it thinks and start to think like business thinks.

Lorna Slater's contribution revealed that there is a gulf between some of the parties in the chamber and those who would, and could, set up businesses in Scotland if the operating environment were different. We need to create the culture and atmosphere here, in Scotland, that will allow those businesses to grow. As has been said in the debate, that means bringing higher education institutions with us and making sure that they are not only well funded but global and entrepreneurial in their outlook. To respond to the Deputy First Minister, there is no point in our having the best R and D in Scotland's universities if those universities can barely afford to turn the lights on.

Like many across the chamber, I have read the recommendations of the Hunter Foundation's report "Lessons from Singapore for Scotland's Economy", and I found those recommendations incredibly useful. The points that the report makes about Scotland are true. For example, it says that workers in Singapore are almost twice as productive as their Scottish counterparts. That and many of the other points that were made by Sir Tom Hunter should be lessons that the SNP learns—and quickly—otherwise Scotland will continue to fall behind our international competitors and the worrying trend that we are

seeing in business registrations and failures will continue, particularly among the SMEs that should be the engine for growth now and in the future.

We need to address what is generally perceived to be a hostile tax environment: the Government is not pro-business, pro-development or pro-investment. We also need to target those sectors that can potentially grow.

Michelle Thomson: Will the member give way?

Craig Hoy: Briefly, yes.

Michelle Thomson: I thank the member—I will try to be quick. I must make the point that, yes, tax is a consideration, but, if we are talking about creating an entrepreneurial culture, we have to factor in the economic system as well. Surely the fact that so many key powers—over monetary policy, control of interest rates, money supply, corporation tax, employment law, migration, energy strategy, pensions, export support and so on—lie with Westminster should be factored in to it as well?

Craig Hoy: That was more of a lecture than an intervention. It is, pitifully, the case that only 9 per cent of Scottish businesses think that the SNP Government understands the business environment. That is the reality of the situation. The mood music and the operating environment are critical to attracting entrepreneurs and investment, and I have first-hand experience of that.

At the age of 33, after nearly a decade of running a publishing and conference business in London, I took out a mortgage on my house and flew out to Hong Kong with £50,000 to establish my own communications and conference business. The first stop was Hong Kong, which, like Singapore back in 2008—it has changed a bit since then—was avowedly international, low tax and pro-business. I recall the company formation process, which was very simple and easy, even for a resident. Through the grapevine—most likely, the grapevine in the Foreign Correspondents Club—the chief executive of Invest Hong Kong, who was an avuncular Brit called Mike Rowse, called me in to welcome who he thought was another large-scale British investor to the city. He maintained an interest in my venture even when he found out that the "50" that I was referring to was £50,000 rather than £50 million. However, as Mike said, from small acorns grow mighty oaks.

It is often the smaller start-ups that need the greatest support. Mike's message then was very simple, and it can be articulated as, "Welcome to Hong Kong. Invest in Hong Kong. Tax is low. Regulation is light touch." There were incentives to invest—for example, there was a tax holiday for SMEs in their first five years, which meant that, if they made a profit, they did not pay tax, up to a

certain level. There was a two-tier profits tax—today, the lower level is just 8.25 per cent on the first £200,000 in profits. There were double taxation treaties in place to make sure that entrepreneurs and their companies could not be taxed twice. There was no VAT, and there were attractive tax deductions for capital expenditure. There was a low income tax rate, and no income tax had to be paid on earnings that were generated overseas. Those were all concrete measures that encouraged me to set up a business there, and Invest Hong Kong provided support for businesses big and small.

After growing that business in Hong Kong, I set up a similar business in Singapore. Again, the message was quite clear: Singapore was open for business, and, when you walked in through the door, there were people there to help you. In a very Singaporean way, there was a slightly more draconian set of rules to abide by, but, once you understood the nature of the legal system there, it was easy to navigate. Again, taxation was low.

I welcome the aspiration in the Scottish Government's programme for government to establish an organisation called "InvestScotland", which the Government says will be a one-stop shop for investors who are looking to come to Scotland. However, providing the mechanism to bring people here will not cut it if entrepreneurs and investors get to Scotland and realise that our taxes are too high, our skills base is not fit for purpose and our infrastructure and planning system will hold them back—and that is leaving aside the constitutional uncertainty that has been created by the SNP's on-going obsession with independence, which I believe has been an issue.

When the most recent Scottish Government budget was considered, we advocated for tax cuts for individuals and businesses. We also advocate for a cull of the quangos that are producing the red tape that is holding many businesses back. There is a recognition that the Government needs to do more to ensure that we have the right skills, which will involve properly funding our colleges, universities and apprenticeship schemes. The Scottish Government must make that an absolute priority, otherwise there will be massive skills gaps that will prevent people from locating and growing their businesses here.

The Scottish Government has not thought seriously about the business environment in this country, nor has it thought seriously about the international lessons that—as Sir Tom Hunter said—it can learn from Singapore and other Asian nations, as well as from nations closer to home.

There is a commonsense solution to the fact that the SNP is failing to create the space and the environment in which Scottish entrepreneurs and those whom we might want to attract here to set

up businesses can thrive. However, there is a template that would enable the Government to do that, and I urge it to adopt that template quickly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite the Deputy First Minister to wind up the debate.

16:48

Kate Forbes: One of the vital characteristics of an entrepreneur is a healthy dose of optimism, positivity and enthusiasm. We heard that in some speeches but less so in others. Given all the debates that we are now having on the economy, things can only get better when it comes to rejecting the doom and gloom and pursuing growth, prosperity and positivity. We need to engage with the substance of the issues.

Craig Hoy: Will the Deputy First Minister take an intervention?

Kate Forbes: I would like to make some progress.

In understanding the headwinds in the Scottish economy and the challenges that businesses are grappling with, we need to rise beyond the Google bad stat on generic economic matters in Scotland and get into the substance of the issues.

Today, we are discussing the role of entrepreneurship, in particular, and how we support Scotland's entrepreneurs—for all of the reasons that we have debated in our speeches so far. One of the points that has frequently struck me is that, if we measure the wrong thing, we will deliver the wrong outcome. We have heard a range of statistics in relation to entrepreneurship from a number of speakers, and it is clear that what we measure and what we invest in will deliver the result that we want.

In other words, if we simply measure the statistics around total early stage entrepreneurial activity that Murdo Fraser was criticising, we might start to replicate Ecuador, Guatemala and Chile. There is a role for looking at that. The same goes for some of the statistics that Daniel Johnson talked about, such as the fact that the number of deals of more than £10 million had fallen between 2022 and 2023. Yes, but the 2022 figures were boosted by a small number of huge deals, such as GoFibre, which was worth £164 million.

The latest data shows that, in 2024, there were 17 deals of more than £10 million, totalling £373 million. That is a 90 per cent increase in deal volume and a 70 per cent increase in value. In other words, Scotland is growing. I am more than delighted for the credit to go entirely to Scotland's businesses. I am here to celebrate what they have achieved in the past few years. The evidence is clear that the policies that have been implemented and the investment that has been made during this

parliamentary session are starting to turn the tide. We are seeing a significant increase in investment across the board.

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Kate Forbes: I will take some interventions soon.

We can even go beyond the figures and look at the examples of companies with high growth potential. TauRx in Aberdeen, which is developing a novel Alzheimer's treatment, has been valued at more than \$1 billion. That is a great example of a business that delivers economic value, and is also providing a solution to a problem—Alzheimer's—that many people have, sadly, experienced.

I will happily take any interventions.

Liz Smith: It is incumbent on us all to celebrate the successes. However, when it comes to the statistics that are published by Mark Diffley and his organisation, does Kate Forbes recognise that there are serious concerns among those in the business community about some aspects of what they see as a rather threatening environment in Scotland?

Kate Forbes: I absolutely accept that there are issues that the business community raises with me and, I imagine, with all of us. However, we in this Parliament frequently fall into the trap of talking about business as though it is homogenous, and of talking about economic growth and prosperity as though there is a linear line to delivery. There is a role for all of us to have generic economic discussions and debate. What I was keen for this debate to do, however—although this is not my prerogative to decide—was to hone in on one element, or subset, of the economy and talk about the high-growth potential entrepreneurs that we want to develop.

I talked about Sweden. Let us be unashamed about the fact that we want to see more unicorns. We want to see more high-growth businesses that go all the way from being small start-ups to hitting the heady heights of being a unicorn. That will be a different journey for them than it might be for a retailer on Edinburgh's High Street, and different from the experience of some of the other businesses that we all represent. Understanding how we do that is really important.

We have talked a bit about universities. Daniel Johnson made the point that universities take too high an equity stake in spin-outs, and I agree that that has been a barrier in the past. However, one of the interesting outcomes of the renewed focus on entrepreneurship and the policies that we have been progressing in the past few years is that the average equity stake that is taken by universities is falling. In 2024, it was the lowest since records began in 2011, falling to 11.8 per cent from 14.1

per cent in 2023. In other words, universities are actively changing their policies on equity, with Edinburgh and Aberdeen leading the way. We commend that. However, if we had not had the discussion three or four years ago about what needed to change, when it came to that really focused approach, we might not have seen that change.

Scotland has a successful track record on university spin-outs. In 2023-24, the number of active firms that spun off from Scottish higher education institutions increased by 9 per cent compared with 2022-23. That is an impressive figure. However, back in 2016-17, the increase was 56 per cent. We are moving in the right direction, and that is to be commended.

Another area that members debated and discussed was tax. Clearly, there are dividing lines in the Parliament on tax rates and the tax position, but we have to grapple with the fact that some of the top performers for entrepreneurship in Europe are Denmark, Sweden and Norway, which have high-tax systems with a strong social contract. The Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland recently laid out that approach. In other words, even if members want low taxation and they think that that will deliver a result, as Lorna Slater said, it takes a lot more than tax rates to develop and deliver a successful ecosystem. Low tax does not inevitably mean world-class ecosystems. We have to do some of the heavy lifting on that.

Craig Hoy rose—

Kate Forbes: I will bring in Craig Hoy, considering his self-professed entrepreneurship experience.

Craig Hoy: Does the minister not realise the problem? If businesses believe that they will get good public services and a good quality of infrastructure, they might think about investing in Scotland despite the SNP's high taxes. However, in Scotland, we have high tax but poor quality public services.

Kate Forbes: To use Craig Hoy's argument, the fact that, for nine years now, we have been the top destination outside London and the south-east for foreign direct investment indicates to me that businesses like what they see in Scotland and they are choosing to invest.

I will reiterate the steps that we are taking in Scotland, because, if we have learned anything from our work on entrepreneurship, it is that the interventions that we take have to be flexible and have to work with entrepreneurs, and, as Michelle Thomson said, we have to take a less risk-averse approach to some of those investments, because, by definition, some of that high-growth investment will be of higher risk.

Stephen Kerr: The Deputy First Minister is dealing with those things without reference to some very basic foundations. For example, I do not think that she has mentioned the words “school” or “college”. Those are areas in which the SNP has clearly failed Scotland, particularly in this parliamentary session, yet she sets that aside. It always begins with our people. Why will she not address the issue that surrounds our people and the imbuing of enterprise and the entrepreneurial spirit, which needs to start at a very early age?

Kate Forbes: Our people are core to the work that Mark Logan set out in the Scottish technology ecosystem review. Our people and education are vital. In my opening remarks, I definitely made a lot of mention of education and Stephen Kerr will hear the word “education” again shortly.

I will go through the five steps that we are taking to develop the best ecosystem for start-ups. The first is in launching the ecosystem fund, which was always designed to be flexible, to allow entrepreneurs to access sometimes just a little bit of funding to help them on to the next step.

The second is in backing successful schemes such as Scottish EDGE. There has been much mention of Sir Tom Hunter. That scheme identifies and supports promising new businesses.

The third is in our relaunch of the entrepreneurial education pathways fund, which, this year, for the first time, provided entrepreneurial education throughout primary and high school. It was highly successful last year, and it means that entrepreneurship is not just the domain of rare individuals with exceptional intelligence or drive but a democratic approach.

Rachael Hamilton rose—

Kate Forbes: I am being told to wind up. The final step is supporting new computing science teachers, with a substantial investment for the two-year pilot at the University of Aberdeen to train new computing science teachers, who will educate in high schools. That means that our young people can access some of the best education that they can to have a bright entrepreneurial future.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-17801, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 10 June 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Care Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

7.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 11 June 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Deputy First Minister Responsibilities,
Economy and Gaelic;
Finance and Local Government

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 12 June 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

followed by Ministerial Statement: Greenhouse Gas Emissions Statistics 2023

followed by Scottish Government Debate: A Migration System that Works for Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 17 June 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Scottish Languages Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 18 June 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands;
Health and Social Care

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist
Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 19 June 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body
Questions

followed by Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 9 June 2025, 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.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-17802 on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-17803 on committee meeting times.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Regional Strategic Bodies and Regional Colleges (Glasgow and Lanarkshire) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 1.00 pm and 3.30 pm on Thursday 12 June 2025.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-17785.3, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17785, in the name of Kate Forbes, on empowering entrepreneurs and innovators, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:01

Meeting suspended.

17:03

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-17785.3, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17785, in the name of Kate Forbes. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-17785.3, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 28, Against 83, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-17785.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17785, in the name of Kate Forbes, on empowering entrepreneurs and innovators, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Arianne (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)

Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-17785.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 55, Against 57, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-17785, in the name of Kate Forbes, on empowering entrepreneurs and innovators, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Dowey. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-17785, in the name of Kate Forbes, on empowering entrepreneurs and innovators, is: For 84, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament supports the Scottish Government's ambition to establish Scotland as one of Europe's fastest-growing start-up economies; welcomes the significant progress made towards this goal; congratulates Ana Stewart on her appointment as Scotland's new Chief Entrepreneur, and welcomes the record investment of over £30 million to accelerate Scotland's emergence as a leading hub for innovation, entrepreneurship and high-growth businesses.

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

No member objects, so the final question is, that motions S6M-17802 on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-17803 on committee meeting times, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Regional Strategic Bodies and Regional Colleges (Glasgow and Lanarkshire) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 1.00 pm and 3.30 pm on Thursday 12 June 2025.

Point of Order

17:09

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your advice as to what the Education, Children and Young People Committee should do, because the convener of the committee, Douglas Ross, repeatedly bullies witnesses who come to us, especially female witnesses, but this morning, a male witness. It is embarrassing for the committee—the committee has discussed it, and Mr Ross refuses to listen to the committee. I seek your advice as to what we should do.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you, Mr Mason. I would say that, in the first instance, that is a matter for the committee itself and for its convener.

Celebrating 50 Years of Summerston

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-16094, in the name of Bob Doris, on celebrating 50 years of Summerston. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the community of Summerston, in the Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency, on reaching the significant milestone of having been established for 50 years; understands that the first residents settled in the area from late 1974; believes that, in the years that followed, they witnessed a strong, close knit and civically-minded community develop; recognises the contribution of all those who have been involved in building Summerston's community spirit over the decades, none more so than Billy Souter who sadly passed away this year; commends the Summerston Community and Environmental Group (SCEG) on its efforts to both improve the area's environment and celebrate the five decades of Summerston as a community; acknowledges the work of SCEG in, it believes, it being "hands on" in its efforts to enhance the local area; notes that a community action plan was developed by SCEG following a major community consultation to help further improve the area; believes that a successful, piper-led, winter lantern parade, supported by Summerston schoolchildren and the wider community took place on the 27 November 2024 to mark the 50th anniversary, which kickstarted a number of events planned over the next 12 months; considers that constructive community activism and participation is a key component in helping communities such as Summerston prosper; supports the coming year's activities, and wishes the people of Summerston every success on the area continuing to thrive for the next 50 years and beyond.

17:11

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I thank all the MSPs who have supported my motion, allowing it to be debated in the Scottish Parliament. I also thank the Summerston residents who have joined us in the public gallery for the debate. They are members and volunteers of the Summerston Community and Environmental Group.

Today's motion celebrates the community of Summerston reaching its 50th year. In particular, it celebrates the efforts of the amazing Summerston Community and Environmental Group to improve and enhance the local environment and to develop and promote a positive civic pride in Summerston.

Summerston has been my home for the past 13 years. It is the only home that my two children, who are nine and four respectively, have ever known, and we are very lucky to stay there. There are three excellent local primary schools: Caldercruilt, Parkview and St Blane's, which my nine-year-old son attends. John Paul academy is a

local secondary school that offers so many opportunities for young people locally and beyond.

I want to begin by speaking about Mrs Fowler, a lady whom I never had the privilege to meet and who has long since passed away. Wilma Mather, who is here this afternoon and was instrumental in establishing SCEG a few years ago, told me about Mrs Fowler. Wilma said that she did everything to help people and was always willing to help to sort out local issues. If someone passed away, Mrs Fowler made sure that they got a good send-off.

Official records do not always capture the rich social histories of communities such as Summerston and the people who make those communities so special. I suspect that, over Summerston's five decades, there were a few Mrs Fowlers who did so much to knit a new community together as it grew and expanded from the first housing developments in the area, including housing co-operatives in Westfield and Invershiel. I know that the Summerston Community and Environmental Group would welcome a social history project to celebrate and recognise the often untold and unwritten history of the community, which can quickly be lost over time if it is not written down and recorded.

However, today's debate is about celebrating our current crop of community champions. I want to name some of them—Wilma and Sharon Mather, Jean Wilson, Simon Baxter, George and Helen Carnochan, Vicky Dewar, Janice Ross, Pierre Parrier, Angela Smith, Sam Allwood and Scott Milligan. I thank every one of them for what they and others do.

There is one name that is missing from that list but is specifically mentioned in my motion, and that is Billy Souter. Sadly, Billy passed away a few months ago. Billy was the beating heart of Summerston—he was absolutely committed to the Summerston Community and Environmental Group, because he was absolutely committed to Summerston.

Everyone knew Billy. He volunteered for years at John Paul academy, and he was a one-man environmental improvement team—always driven, always energetic and always committed to the Summerston community. I suspect that we all know Billys in the communities that we all represent across Scotland: people just like him, who should be celebrated. His loss is felt keenly by many, and, fittingly, there will soon be a memorial bench in his honour.

I want to comment on the work of the Summerston Community and Environmental Group in a very particular way. The group is well aware of some of the environmental challenges that Summerston faces. As it should, it challenges local elected representatives to improve the local

area. However, SCEG also asks what it can do to assist in improving the local area.

It will not surprise many to learn that, with three primary schools, a secondary school and a retail park with various takeaways and a large supermarket in the area, litter has become a significant challenge. In its efforts to tackle that, the group has done all that it can to ensure that local cleansing services respond timeously and as often as possible, but it also organises regular large-scale pick-ups.

SCEG also thinks strategically. As the Summerston retail park is a particular challenge in relation to environmental issues, we are, together, seeking a meeting with owners of the commercial units and the businesses that operate from them to identify sustainable and long-lasting improvements. We hope that that meeting will be scheduled soon.

There are other visible signs of SCEG's work. The Summerston in bloom project has been a major success, with large community planters now positioned at various locations across Summerston, improving the local environment—they look absolutely stunning in full bloom. To bring the local community together, there are now regular Easter and Christmas fairs and summer gala days. For a while, it was not always so. The fact that the community now anticipates, expects and looks forward to such events is testament to SCEG's success.

The Summerston Community and Environmental Group has given particular attention to ensuring that the Summerston at 50 anniversary is appropriately marked and celebrated. Those celebrations kicked off late last year with a winter lantern parade, in which many children from local schools paraded around Summerston, led by a piper. It was a poignant and special event.

The celebrations will culminate on 30 August with a community festival in the grounds of John Paul academy. Local schools will be heavily involved, and there will be musical performances, sporting events, many activities and good food. It will also be a multicultural event, celebrating Summerston in its rich and diverse entirety. I certainly look forward to attending.

In my remaining time, I will say a little about SCEG's formation. When the irrepressible Wilma Mather attended my drop-in advice surgery in Ledgowan hall in Maryhill a few years ago, she was focused—my goodness, she was focused—on improving Summerston. Her actions, and the actions of other community volunteers, following that meeting—actions that I, in some small way, sought to support—led to SCEG's formation.

I knew that something special was happening when hundreds of people attended a community consultation event that we jointly organised locally. The views that were gathered from the community were used to inform the actions, always community led, that the Summerston Community and Environmental Group would take forward.

SCEG has two big ambitions for Summerston. I am sorry—that is not true; it has many big ambitions for Summerston, but I will mention just two. SCEG wants to see improvements to the quality of core paths, both those within Summerston and those that connect it to other local communities such as Cadder and Acre. It also wishes to see a large open and grassy area near St Blane's primary school become a high-quality and welcoming community amenity—a landscape in that area right at the heart of Summerston. Given SCEG's constructive and can-do attitude, I suspect that we will see progress sooner rather than later.

I wanted to put on the public record in Scotland's Parliament the ambitions and successes of some of the current crop of community activists in Summerston. In 50 years' time, when a future generation of people in Summerston look to celebrate 100 years, they can look back with pride and admiration for those who went before. Such proud social histories should be recorded, and the dedication of community volunteers past and present should be recognised and celebrated.

I finish by offering my heartfelt thanks not only to the Summerston Community and Environmental Group for all that it does but to all the volunteers whose efforts have made Summerston a better place to live over the past 50 years.

17:20

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate, and I am pleased to speak in support of the motion. I also congratulate the community of Summerston on reaching its 50th anniversary. That is a remarkable milestone that speaks not only to the resilience of the people who have, over the decades, made Summerston their home—as Bob Doris has—but to the power of strong grass-roots community building.

In 1974, Summerston welcomed its first residents as part of Glasgow's wider response to housing needs. What was notable was not just the physical development but the social fabric that quickly grew from it. In the half century since, Summerston has become the embodiment of what a successful housing estate can look like: civic minded, environmentally aware and, above all, community driven. I was delighted to be invited by

teachers at John Paul academy to speak to a modern studies class last year. As ever on such occasions, I was very pleased to hear from the younger generation and to answer their questions.

Another well-regarded facility in the Summerston community is the Glasgow Riding for the Disabled Association's centre, which is based at Caldercuilt Road. Every year, hundreds of children and adults living with disabilities learn to ride and enjoy the benefits of equine therapy.

I also pay tribute to Billy Souter, who is mentioned in the motion. His passing is a real loss to the community. From what I have read and heard, he was central to the life of the community and his legacy lives on in the vibrancy of the neighbourhood today.

The work of the Summerston Community and Environmental Group has been exceptional. Not only has the group led real, practical improvements to the area; it has done so in a way that brings people together. The 50th anniversary lantern parade, which was led by a piper and involved local schoolchildren, was more than a celebration; it was a statement of unity and a demonstration of the pride that people feel in where they live.

We should not take that success for granted. Over the decades, Glasgow has seen many large-scale housing projects, some of which, unfortunately, did not foster the same sense of stability or identity. We have only to think of places such as the Red Road flats, which have now been demolished, or the long struggle to regenerate parts of Sighthill and the Gorbals. Despite good intentions, those developments lacked the sustainable approach to community planning that Summerston seems to have had from the outset.

Now, as Scotland continues to face a housing crisis, there is an urgent need for both planners and politicians to ask the right questions. How do we build not just houses but homes? How do we create places where people not only live but thrive? In Summerston, we have a working model of what can be achieved when community is treated not as an afterthought but as a central pillar. We need more Summerstons—developments with green space and primary schools like St Blane's, Parkview and Caldercuilt at their heart. We need real local engagement and active community groups that help to bind people together.

Although this is a moment to look back and celebrate 50 years of progress, it is also a time to look forward. I support the energy and dedication of those in Summerston who continue to build something better, and I hope that, in 50 years' time, people across Scotland will be looking at many more communities with stories like this one.

17:23

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands)

(SNP): I thank Bob Doris for bringing the debate to the chamber and sharing his very positive thoughts about his community, and I pay tribute to his passion for that local area. It is wonderful to hear about all that the people of Summerston have achieved, directly from their MSP, and it is clear that they have his respect as well as his support.

Bob Doris's motion highlights

"that constructive community activism and participation is a key component in helping communities such as Summerston prosper".

I believe that that is true, and I have seen it in many of the areas that I represent, as well.

This summer, I am looking forward to my usual packed surgery schedule and to catching up with communities that are leading in participation. From the likes of Eigg and Knoydart, which continue to demonstrate the value of community ownership as well as participation, to development trusts around the whole region that are taking control on tackling local issues by building homes, starting energy developments and identifying opportunities to take on empty buildings or vacant plots of land, there are countless examples of communities getting it right.

Team Hamish in Nairn took the tragic loss of young Hamish and his mother and has ensured that Nairn and the wider area will never forget that family. I have enjoyed and taken joy in seeing others enjoy phase 2 of the vision for Nairn every time that I am in the town—I have seen kids play and eat their ice creams as parents and guardians watch on from nearby seating.

At last week's opening of the new Whin park, city leader Councillor Ian Brown highlighted that the renovations were the result of collaboration not just with the council and its partners but with people in the community, including children and young people, who took part in the design process. That is fantastic not only because it means that the end result is one that young people actually want but because I am sure that taking part in that process now will make it more likely that those young people will use their voices in future, speaking up and becoming people with a real stake in and passion for their community.

Where I live in Merkinch, the local nature reserve has been protected and enhanced by community activists such as Dell McClurg and Caroline Snow. I know that many local people were instrumental in clearing rubbish, planting trees and advocating preservation, and it has always been my pleasure to join them in litter picks, at meetings with the council and at events for nearby residents. It is hard to picture what the area would be like without the Friends of Merkinch

Local Nature Reserve. Again, the local primary school plays a part—children have designed the benches that sit along the paths through the reserve.

Bob Doris recognised the wide impact that volunteers and regular community events can have in lifting spirits and encouraging people to feel a real connection and duty to their local area. That is incredibly important—when people do not feel a part of things, they are less likely to look after what they have and build it better.

I am looking forward to joining the Kessock ferry swim next month, and I hope to see many of our local activists, volunteers and leaders there, as well.

Once again, I thank Bob Doris for sharing the successes of Summerston, and I hope to hear that the community continues to experience the benefits of the work that has been done up until now and builds on it.

17:27

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Bob Doris, who is one of my colleagues from the Glasgow area, for bringing the motion to the chamber. It is my honour and privilege to be a member of the Scottish Parliament for the Glasgow region and, in particular, to represent the area that we are discussing today, Summerston.

I echo Bob Doris's commendations of the Summerston Community and Environmental Group for its tireless efforts in raising awareness of the support and opportunities in the area; in ensuring that Summerston is a clean and vibrant place in which to live; and in organising events that bring the community together. The group is organising more than 30 activities in the area to mark 50 years of Summerston, and it will engage with 500 residents during the 12 months of the anniversary. I am sure that it will get a fantastic turnout of local residents at all the events, not least because of our mentioning its work in the nation's Parliament today.

Summerston is full of people who work hard to make the community and Glasgow a better place to live in. One such person is Ryan Rooney, one of the community champions at the Summerston Asda store, who is a key link between the store and causes that matter to local residents. Another example is the volunteers who run Summerston Youth Football Club, making sure that grass-roots football is available for the children and young people of Summerston, which gives them a positive experience of sport that will stay with them for life.

I also want to highlight the teachers, parents and pupils at the local schools—John Paul

academy, Parkview primary school and St Blane's primary school—as well as everyone who is involved in supporting and running Bellcraig community centre for their role in keeping it a vital part of Summerston over the past 40-plus years.

As well as celebrating the past 50 years of Summerston, I, too, am asking that members consider the next 50 years. It is our duty as parliamentarians—one that I know that we all take very seriously—to ensure that communities thrive. What does that mean in practice? To me, it means supporting and growing community assets, including Bellcraig community centre and hubs like it across the city, so that people have better places to gather together over shared interests and get to know their neighbours better. It also means making sure that we lead by example in this increasingly diverse world and do our best to ensure that the communities that we represent are tolerant, peaceful, happy and safe places to live and grow up in.

Although we might disagree politically in this chamber, the vast majority of my friends and colleagues across the chamber put politics to one side when the debate ends, and we get on personally outside these walls for the good of communities such as Summerston. Parliament and the communities in our constituencies would be much poorer if we or our constituents let ourselves be irreconcilably divided by politics and forget that, by working together, we can achieve more than we can alone. In fact, as has been proved by the many community groups in Summerston, that is the only way to make a difference in this world.

As we get towards the end of the parliamentary year, I hope that members will leave the debate inspired by the efforts of the people in Summerston, many of whom Bob Doris and others have mentioned, whether that is by the commitment of the Summerston Youth Football Club coaches, the enthusiasm of Ryan Rooney, the dedication of teachers and parents or the tirelessness of the Summerston Community and Environmental Group.

I congratulate Summerston on its 50th anniversary and commend the work of everyone who takes the time to make the communities around it better with no motivation other than to see the people in the area have a better experience of the world. I again thank Bob Doris for securing the debate to allow us to do that for Summerston today.

17:31

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn): I thank my friend Bob Doris for securing the debate and highlighting the good

work that has been done in Summerston. I join him in welcoming those who have travelled from Summerston to be with us in the public gallery. As with all those who visit the Parliament, they are very welcome—I hope that they have enjoyed seeing the good work that they undertake in their community reflected in the debate. In that regard, I congratulate the entire community of Summerston on reaching the significant milestone of 50 years, on working together for the benefit of those who live in the area, and on arranging a series of events to mark the anniversary.

I am particularly pleased to be responding to the debate. As Mr Doris will be able to testify, I cut my teeth in the Scottish National Party in Glasgow Maryhill, which is where Summerston is located, and for much of the time that was alongside Mr Doris. There are stories that could be told, but they will remain untold in the chamber.

Bob Doris: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Those stories might be about to be told.

Bob Doris: I thank the minister for giving way. This story does not involve the minister; it involves two other MSP colleagues who cut their political teeth in Summerston: Fergus and Annabelle Ewing. Their dad was elected as a local councillor in 1977, and they well remember leafleting all the flats and houses in Summerston. I want to put that on the record, as it is part of the cultural and social history of the area.

Jamie Hepburn: It is a blessed relief that that was not one of the stories that Mr Doris could have told, but it is appropriate that he remarked on that and for those of us on the SNP benches to reflect on the great contribution of the Ewing family to our party. Summerston is part of that story.

Summerston is not far from where I grew up, so it is an area that I know well. Indeed, I not only know the area but, as I represent a new town, I recognise the importance of milestones. The 50-year milestone is significant for any community, but many people have lived in Summerston for the entire duration of those 50 years. They have raised families and made lifelong friendships. In that regard, it is a particularly important anniversary.

It has been heartening to hear how the Summerston Community and Environmental Group has been proactive in improving the area, making a significant difference through the development of a community action plan, a range of community events and ambitions for wider environmental improvements. It has been nice to hear about the Easter, summer and Christmas community events, which are now a regular feature for the group. I recognise the hard work

that has gone into celebrating the 50th anniversary through the celebration event that the group arranged.

We know that many of the community activities that we have heard about today would not happen without a range of volunteers giving their time in Summerston. Indeed, across the country, volunteers make a difference in their communities. The hands-on effort of community volunteers in Summerston has helped to enhance their local area and improve the lives and wellbeing of those who live there. It is particularly appropriate that the debate has been scheduled during volunteers week. It is appropriate that, in this instance, we say thank you to those who volunteer in Summerston and to all who give their time in their communities across the country.

Bricks and mortar go only so far in creating a community; ultimately, the people create the community. From everything that we have heard from Bob Doris, that is certainly the case for Summerston. It has been terrific to hear about the work that is taking place there to activate, engage and empower local people. I pass my sincere thanks to everyone who is involved in that effort. It is a great example of what we see in communities across the country.

The debate gives us all an opportunity to reflect on what we see in our local areas. We heard Emma Roddick do that. I see much of the same in my area, through organisations such as the Cumbernauld Community Forum, the Cumbernauld community garden, the Craigieburn community garden, the Kilsyth Environmental Group, the friends of Colzium and the Kilsyth and villages community board. Thank you for indulging me, Presiding Officer, in mentioning a few organisations in my area. I do not often get that opportunity when I am responding on behalf of the Government. Those organisations are in my area, but there are of course examples of similar organisations throughout the country. In Summerston, we have a great example in SCEG, and I place on record my thanks to it for all that it does.

The Government has an agenda of community empowerment, to enable people and communities locally to shape services in their area that impact them directly and to take action to support the creation of successful places across Scotland. That is why we introduced the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and why we have a range of activity to create community wealth building as an approach to economic development. We have also introduced a bill to ensure the consistent implementation of community wealth building across Scotland, which people in Summerston and communities across the country will be able to take forward.

As we know, one of the First Minister's priorities is to grow the economy, improve public services and eradicate child poverty. That starts with a place-based approach, which is developed in tandem with communities—with people such as Mrs Fowler, Wilma Mather, Billy Souter and the others who Bob Doris mentioned as being involved in the life of Summerston.

I thank Bob Doris for bringing the debate and I again congratulate the community of Summerston. I wish them every success in building on their excellent work to date, and I know that Summerston will continue to flourish for the next 50 years and beyond.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

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