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Thursday 24 September 2026

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Thursday 24 September 2026

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME	**1**
Residential Rehabilitation	1
Gynaecology Care (Highlands)	2
Temporary Migrant Workers (Exploitation)	5
Violence and Abuse Against Retail Workers and Shoplifting	7
Brain Tumour Diagnostics and Treatment (Research)	8
Police Provision (Glasgow City Centre)	9
Proposed Railway Station (Newburgh)	10
Face Coverings (Ban in Public Places)	11
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	**13**
PARTY LEADERS	**13**
Drug Deaths	13
Child Poverty	15
Middle East (Boycott)	17
Drug Deaths	19
Drug Deaths (Nitazenes)	21
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY QUESTION TIME	**24**
MSP Staff (Employer Pension Contributions)	24
MSP Staff (Job Families and Pay Scales)	25
Facial Template Authentication	25
MSP Staff (Travel Expenses Scheme)	26
MSP Staff Trade Unions (Memorandum of Understanding)	27
MSP Employer Pledge (Consultation)	28
MSP Constituency Offices (Technical Standards)	29
First Minister's Question Time (School Visits)	30
MSP Staff Pay (Data Collection)	31
CREATIVE ECONOMY	**33**
The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan)	33
Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)	38
David Kirkwood (South Scotland) (Reform)	40
Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)	43
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	46
David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)	50
Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP)	53
Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP)	55
Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)	57
Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)	59
Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)	61
Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)	63
David Green	66
Murdo Fraser	68
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	70
Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)	73
Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab)	75
The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith)	77
POINT OF ORDER	**82**
DECISION TIME	**84**
INQUIRY INTO WHITE WORKING CLASS EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES	**98**
Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform)	98
Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)	101
Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)	104
Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)	106
Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	107

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP) 109
Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con) 112
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab) 114
Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform) 115
The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith) 117

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 24 September 2026

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 13:30]

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The first item of business is general question time. To accommodate as many questions as possible, I ask for concise questions and answers.

Question 1 from Amanda Bland was not lodged, but an explanation has been given.

Residential Rehabilitation

2. **David Smith (West Scotland) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of its commitment to a 16 per cent increase in residential rehabilitation bed capacity, for what reason a right to rehabilitation enshrined in law for everyone was not included within the programme for government. (S7O-00280)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd): The Scottish Government has not changed its position that people affected by alcohol and drug harms should have access to the treatment and recovery support that is right for them, including residential rehabilitation, where that is clinically appropriate.

We continue to focus on increasing access to residential rehabilitation and wider treatment services through investment, service improvement and a rights-based approach, rather than by creating a new statutory right to a specific form of treatment.

David Smith: The drug deaths figures that were released yesterday demonstrate that the approach taken by the minister to drugs policy is not working.

Even more concerning was the response from the minister to members' questions yesterday in the chamber. She stated that nobody had died inside the Thistle safer drugs consumption facility. If that was not health misinformation, it was certainly grossly misleading. Will the minister confirm, for the record, that there was, in fact, a death directly outside the centre in March this year?

Will the minister go further? Even the term "safer drugs consumption" is grossly misleading. Will she state for the record that there is no such thing as safer drugs, because there are no safe drugs?

Maree Todd: It is a matter of public record that an individual died outside the Thistle in March this year. The heartfelt condolences of everyone in the chamber go out to his family and his community, who will be mourning him, as we look at the figures of last year's deaths.

On the question that the member asked me, he is absolutely correct that there is no such thing as safe drugs consumption. The focus of the Thistle is on safer drugs consumption; it is about harm reduction.

When we consider the number of deaths that we face in Scotland, we must redouble our efforts to stop deaths, as well as ensuring that we have strong pathways into treatment and recovery. We need to do all those things, not just one of them.

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I remind the chamber that I chair Moving On Inverclyde, which is a local recovery service.

I am aware that there are some residential rehabilitation centres where beds are lying empty. What engagement has the minister had with local councils to encourage them to engage with organisations such as Abbeycare and Jericho to ensure that such facilities are fully utilised? I have been repeatedly informed by various organisations that many local authorities continue to underspend their alcohol and drug recovery services budget.

Maree Todd: The member will be aware that, to ensure the continuity of such critical services, the Scottish Government took steps to support the recent takeover of the Jericho society facilities in Inverclyde and Dundee.

We continue to engage with local services to ensure that residential rehabilitation is available to those for whom it is deemed clinically appropriate. To support more people to access residential rehab, we have made an additional £2 million available through the additional placement fund.

The Scottish Government recognises that a diversity of treatment options is important to empower individuals to have more choice and to meet the needs of individuals who seek different types of recovery. That alone should be the driving factor in matching an individual with a treatment provider.

The Presiding Officer: We come to question 3. I call the late David Green.

Gynaecology Care (Highlands)

3. **David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD):** I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to other members for arriving late. To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve access to gynaecology care for women in the Highlands. (S7O-00281)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance): Phase 2 of the women's health plan will transform gynaecology services. A

national plan for gynaecology will be published early in 2027 and will explain how women and girls will receive timely, high-quality and effective care closer to home. Redesigned services will reduce inequalities in access and outcomes, including for those in rural and island areas. Last year, NHS Highland benefited from part of the additional £13 million allocated to target long waits for gynaecology treatment.

David Green: My constituent Mary Richard was told that she would have to wait four years for an operation, which she described as a raw deal compared to the care that she previously received at Caithness general hospital. Another constituent was referred to Raigmore, only to be told that she would have to wait a year for an initial consultation. Those waits are unacceptable, so what steps will the cabinet secretary take to improve access to pain management for patients who are waiting for treatment and to strengthen skills in recognising complex gynaecological conditions so that cases are identified earlier?

Angela Constance: I am very sorry to hear about the experiences of the member's constituents. He is correct to say that long waits are utterly unacceptable.

I say to the member, for his information, that we have seen long waits for gynaecology services decrease across Scotland. For example, long waits in out-patient services are down by 70 per cent and long waits for in-patient day care are down by 47 per cent year on year. However, we have not seen such improvement in NHS Highland—I assure the member that I am completely aware of that. Part of our rationale for national health service simplification is to ensure that we can share capacity, resources and skills and, by removing boundaries, can create more equity of access.

The member raises the important issue of pain management. With any patient care, it is crucial that women are, first and foremost, listened to and that that is dealt with at clinical level.

The Presiding Officer: We have a number of supplementary questions.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): In the Highlands as well as in other parts of Scotland, the centralisation of sexual health services has meant long waiting lists and poorer access for women. The cabinet secretary is right to say that that is acknowledged in the women's health plan, but there does not appear to be any additional funding to address the problem. Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that women are tired of being shuffled around by a Government that is failing to prioritise women's health and will she bring forward a plan to bring routine sexual healthcare back into community settings, accompanied by funding to meet the backlog?

Angela Constance: As the member is aware, we have a good track record in the targeted use of funding, one example of which is the one that I gave in my original answer to Mr Green of the additional £13 million to be invested in gynaecology services.

I will get back to her regarding her specific question about sexual health, but the issues that she and other members raise are in essence about equity of access. I stress that as we progress our journey of NHS simplification and reform, I hope that we can all work together to ensure that the arrangements put in place will still have local connectivity and will improve equity of access.

Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Regarding gynaecology, I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is committed to improved outcomes and diagnosis waiting times for endometriosis. Will the cabinet secretary commit to working with Endometriosis UK and NHS Ayrshire and Arran to explore whether Ayrshire could become a fully accredited endometriosis centre, so that care and support will be readily available to those women in my Cunninghame South constituency, and across Ayrshire, who suffer from endometriosis?

Angela Constance: The minister and I would, of course, be willing to engage with Endometriosis UK. In my capacity as a constituency member, I engage regularly with organisations local to West Lothian and I give a shout out to endo warriors West Lothian. The member's proposition sounds interesting and it would be good to hear more about it.

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): Given the lengthy waits for gynaecology treatment, has the Scottish Government considered making greater use of available private sector capacity to reduce waiting times and ensure that women receive diagnosis and treatment as quickly as possible?

Angela Constance: I refer the member to the answer that I gave to Mr Green, in which I said that we are making progress right across Scotland, notwithstanding the challenges at NHS Highland. From July 2025 to 2026, long waits for out-patient appointments went down by 70 per cent and in-patient day case long waits went down by 47 per cent.

We are making progress. From the weekly statistics that I delve deeply into week by week, specialty by specialty, I can see that boards in half the country are tackling out-patient waits effectively. However, the other half of the country is doing better with in-patient day case care.

Therefore, we need to maximise our capacity across the country to reduce that inequity. I am sure that inequity of access or a postcode lottery is not acceptable to any member.

Temporary Migrant Workers (Exploitation)

4. **Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of reported concerns raised by third sector organisations, including Edinburgh-based Project Esperanza, what support it can provide to temporary migrant workers in Scotland, sponsored under the certificate of sponsorship visa system, who may be vulnerable to exploitation, including fraudulent job offers, debt bondage and wage theft. (S7O-00282)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government is clear that the exploitation of any worker is unacceptable. Although immigration policy and employment rights enforcement are reserved to the United Kingdom Government, we fund support services that help migrant workers to understand and exercise their rights. For example, constituents who have concerns about migrant worker exploitation in agriculture or social care can contact the Worker Support Centre for advice and support. We also work closely with enforcement bodies, regulators and third sector partners to address labour exploitation in any sector. Through our fair work agenda, we remain committed to fair treatment of all workers in Scotland.

Kate Campbell: I met with people from Project Esperanza who told me that they believe that there are thousands of people in Edinburgh alone who are recruited under the COS scheme. They pay sponsors tens of thousands of pounds and often sell their homes, leaving them with nothing in their home countries. Is the minister aware of the people in that position, who are often forced to work for their sponsors with terrible working conditions, poverty wages and erratic hours? They are afraid to report mistreatment as they face the threat of the sponsorship being withdrawn, which would leave them destitute.

Will the minister meet Project Esperanza and investigate what steps the Scottish Government could take to ensure that resources and processes are in place to end that practice and protect extremely vulnerable people?

Tom Arthur: I thank Kate Campbell for raising that extremely important issue. I am more than happy to join her in meeting Project Esperanza. I recently met people from the Worker Support Centre to learn more about their work and the experiences of migrant workers in Scotland. I reiterate that the responsibility for enforcement and regulation of such matters is reserved, but we have a collective responsibility, and the Government has a responsibility, to ensure that we work with partners to do all that we can to support fair work for everyone in Scotland, while recognising the particular risks that migrant workers face.

I am happy to engage with Project Esperanza and Kate Campbell. I thank her again for raising this important matter.

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): I thank my colleague Kate Campbell for her important question. Migrant workers who experience exploitation are understandably reluctant to come forward for fear of losing their visa status. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that they can safely report all forms of exploitation without fear of further harm? What steps is the Government taking to help migrant workers understand and access their rights?

Tom Arthur: I mentioned the Worker Support Centre, which delivers outreach, advice and support to migrant workers who might be at risk of exploitation. It also helps workers to understand and exercise their rights.

The Scottish Government provides support through funding. For example, in 2026-27, Migrant Help and TARA—the trafficking awareness-raising alliance—will share more than £3.5 million to provide support and assistance to adult victims of trafficking and exploitation.

I am looking forward to having further engagement on what is an incredibly important issue, and if there are particular organisations that Kate Nevens—or, for that matter, any other member—wishes me to meet or engage with, I will be more than happy to do so.

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): For the youth of Scotland, things are tough. Many young people are finding it harder to get a start in the workplace, yet, increasingly, attention and resources appear to be being directed towards supporting migrants who have been brought into Scotland from overseas. Does the minister agree that the Government's priority should be getting young Scots into jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities before expanding support for temporary migrant workers?

Tom Arthur: I do not think that the two matters that the member raises should be considered as mutually exclusive, binary or in opposition. Migrants make an immense contribution to Scotland, and not just with regard to our workforce and our economy. They enrich us as a country. None of us in this place has to look too far back in their family history to come across relatives who were migrants and were subject to the kind of abusive and divisive language that emanates from

Reform, but who strengthened our country. Indeed, in many cases, those relatives—this is the case in my family—who came to this country fought, risked their lives and, in some cases, died for this country and its values. I suggest that the member reflect on that.

With regard to the member's points about youth employment and youth employability, the Scottish Government is fully engaged on that matter. I am working very closely with my colleague Alyn Smith on such issues, and we are engaging closely with the United Kingdom Government and the work that has been undertaken as part of the Milburn review.

However, the two matters that the member raises should not be presented as being in opposition to each other. We face a demographic challenge in this country. It is true that addressing economic inactivity and youth employment is a priority, but so is attracting more people to come to, live and work in, and contribute to Scotland, and the Scottish Government is proud to support that.

Violence and Abuse Against Retail Workers and Shoplifting

5. **Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it and Police Scotland are taking to reduce violence and abuse against retail workers and shoplifting. (S7O-00283)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Kirsten Oswald): I fully recognise the particular challenges that the retail sector faces and the significant impact that retail crime has on businesses, workers and communities. That includes the wholly unacceptable abuse, threats and violence that far too many shop workers continue to experience while carrying out their jobs.

That is why the Scottish Government is investing £10 million over three years to support the work of the retail crime task force, which has a wide remit across retail crime. Its focus on prevention, enforcement, protection and preparedness allows it to deliver tangible results—more than 6,400 charges were recorded in the first year, including 648 for offences against retail workers, and detection rates increased to almost 51 per cent—which helps to make retailers, staff and communities safer.

Alex Kerr: I thank the minister for her answer and her update on the work that is being done.

We know that prevention is the best possible cure. Will the minister tell me what work the Government is doing with our young people, both in schools and in the community, to help to reduce the chance of future antisocial behaviour in our communities?

Kirsten Oswald: Over the past three years, we have invested more than £8 million to support implementation of the violence prevention framework, which has supported action across communities and schools to divert people away from harm.

We continue to deliver lessons to youths on the consequences of violence, including knife carrying, as well as providing youth navigator programmes to help young people to lead healthier lives. YouthLink Scotland's no knives, better lives programme provides training, resources and support to young people and local partners on understanding and addressing the drivers of violence, and Police Scotland youth volunteers work with young people to help to break down barriers and develop relationships through volunteering in their communities.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When it comes to dealing with the rising tide of violence and abuse that shop workers face, all the evidence tells us that there are just not enough police officers. Will the minister give a straightforward commitment that she and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will work to ensure that, in the next budget, more resource will be available to enable more police officers to be put back on the front line?

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to Stephen Kerr for his focus on the importance of police officers and of tackling crime in our retail sector. I would say to him, however, that we have more officers in Scotland than in England and Wales per head of population. Our officers receive the best basic pay in the United Kingdom at the minimum and maximum of each rank, and our record investment allows Police Scotland to recruit new officers, with 160-plus new recruits in July and further recruitment planned.

Brain Tumour Diagnostics and Treatment (Research)

6. **Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will increase support for research into brain tumour diagnostics and treatment. (S7O-00284)

The Minister for Community Care (Alison Thewliss): The Scottish Government wants people in Scotland with brain cancer to be able to access the best possible care and support. We are committed to supporting high-quality cancer research, including research into the diagnosis and treatment of brain tumours. That is being done through the chief scientist office's open competitive grant and fellowship schemes, access to National Institute for Health and Care Research programmes, investment in NHS Research Scotland to support clinical studies and trials, and

work with charities to support research to improve outcomes for people affected by brain tumours.

Finlay Carson: Brain tumours account for around a quarter of cancers diagnosed in children and young people, and they remain one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths in that age group. Sadly, there has been little change in the survival rates of children and young people diagnosed with brain cancer over the past decade. In light of the Scottish Government's new cancer strategy for children and young people, what specific actions will ministers take to improve access to earlier diagnosis, support greater research into brain tumours and deliver better outcomes for young patients and their families?

Alison Thewliss: I can certainly relate to the member's comments about young people and brain cancer. It is important to note that we are working very closely with the clinical research community and the national health service to support research. We certainly have more to do to ensure that early diagnoses are made and more lives are saved.

Police Provision (Glasgow City Centre)

7. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to ensure that Glasgow city centre has an enhanced police provision. (S7O-00285)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): The allocation and deployment of police resources are operational matters for the chief constable, with oversight provided by the Scottish Police Authority. For our part, the Scottish Government is investing record funding of more than £1.7 billion in policing in 2026-27, which is an increase of £81.5 million compared with last year. That investment ensures that Police Scotland has the resources that it needs to support front-line policing across Scotland, including in our city centres.

Police Scotland continues to maintain a strong recruitment pipeline, with 169 recruits having joined in July and with further intakes planned throughout the year. Police Scotland deploys a dedicated community policing team to Glasgow city centre, particularly at the weekends, which helps to provide visible reassurance and tackle antisocial behaviour.

Pauline McNeill: Glasgow city centre has been the focus of a recent BBC "Disclosure" documentary, which has proved controversial—and many people have contacted me since its screening. It filmed open drug dealing on the streets and antisocial behaviour, which intensified when there was no police presence. According to the Glasgow city local policing plan, overall recorded violent crime increased by 17.4 per cent compared with the previous year. The situation has not been helped by the lack of full closed-circuit television coverage.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is time to provide specific funding, and to bring back community safety funding, to enhance police numbers in Glasgow city centre, ensuring that there is higher visibility and police patrols in hotspot areas to reduce crime there?

Neil Gray: As Ms McNeill will be aware, the allocation of resources is a matter for the chief constable. As of 30 June, there were 2,424 full-time-equivalent officers in G division, which encompasses Glasgow city centre. I welcome the action that Police Scotland and Glasgow City Council are taking to address the concerns that Ms McNeill has raised, particularly those relating to the city centre. That includes enhancing CCTV coverage, dedicated community policing resources and, where appropriate, the use of dispersal powers.

I am due to meet the chief constable again, I think next week, and I will raise the concerns that Ms McNeill has highlighted.

Proposed Railway Station (Newburgh)

8. **Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will support the proposal to reopen a railway station at Newburgh, Fife. (S7O-00286)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): My officials have completed a review of the detailed options appraisal, and I would expect advice to come to me in due course as a result of that work being completed. I will endeavour to ensure that Mr Rennie and the Parliament are kept up to date accordingly.

Willie Rennie: June 2022, November 2023, March 2025 and September 2025: members have asked for a positive answer—any answer—about Newburgh until they are blue in the face, but yet again the minister is considering the advice. That is exactly what we have heard before. Six years on from the "SEStran Regional Transport Strategy: Case for Change" report and four years on from the Scottish transport appraisal guidance process, will he break with the past and his predecessors and make a positive decision on Newburgh railway station?

Stephen Flynn: For context, as I understand it, the railway station in Newburgh closed in 1955. I know that Mr Rennie has been a long-standing campaigner—although perhaps not since then—and he is right to do so as the local member. I understand his passion and that of the local campaigners who have been fighting to secure a new station at Newburgh.

I do not think that Mr Rennie picked me up correctly. I have advice coming to me, at which point I will review that advice. When I am able to make a decision, I will inform both him and Parliament accordingly.

The Presiding Officer: Katherine Sangster's question 9 was not lodged, but an explanation has been given.

Face Coverings (Ban in Public Places)

10. **Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider a ban on all face coverings in public places, including balaclavas and the burqa. (S7O-00288)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): Police Scotland already has powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to require the removal of face coverings where there are reasonable grounds to believe that they are being used to conceal identity in connection with criminality or disorder. Police Scotland considers that those powers are sufficient at the present time.

Thomas Kerr: Reform and I have been abundantly clear that we want a full ban: no exemptions, no double standards, just pure common sense. Scotland should follow fellow European nations in putting public safety first.

This Government claims to stand up for women's safety and for choice, but it is blind to what is going on in many Muslim households across the country, where women are forced to wear this medieval piece of clothing due to pressure from inside their communities and many male family members.

Will the cabinet secretary commit to a full ban on all face coverings, including the burqa, in public places?

Neil Gray: As I have already said, these are operational matters for Police Scotland, from which we take advice on those operational concerns.

As Mr Kerr may be aware, we have little evidence of religious dress being used to perpetrate criminality. However, what there is plenty of evidence of is the narrative and language that Reform UK uses in this place and the support for the groups that Thomas Kerr supports inciting increased violence against those who wear that religious dress. That is something for Mr Kerr to consider.

The Presiding Officer: In view of the fact that no one has expressed a wish to ask a supplementary on this particular question, we will have a short suspension.

13:57

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

First Minister's Question Time

Party Leaders

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is First Minister's question time for party leaders. I welcome Michael Marra to his post as the new Scottish Labour leader.

Drug Deaths

1. **Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** My intention had already been to ask today about the shocking statistics that demand continued attention from Government and Parliament. However, yesterday, the deaths of 1,133 Scots as a result of drugs were reported to Parliament. Their loss, overwhelmingly for the grave sin of being poor, requires answers for grieving families and demands a change of course from the Government. The response yesterday from the Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs was a complacent disgrace. It does not feel like the Government is treating this as an emergency. Does the First Minister still agree that the worst drug deaths record in the world is a public health emergency?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I agree that we face a public health emergency on drug deaths. I express my deepest sympathies to everybody who has been affected by drug deaths in Scotland. Those deaths are unacceptable and intolerable, and the Government is focused on addressing the issues.

Mr Marra asks about the significance of the Government's action and the strategy that we are pursuing. On 26 February this year, I was briefed about an expected rise in suspected drug deaths. I therefore asked for a review of the Government's drug and alcohol interventions, which was considered at a summit on 19 June involving the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care, myself, the minister with responsibility for drugs, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. There, in front of a variety of individuals and representatives of organisations—including, crucially, families whose loved ones had lost their lives to drugs—we tested the scale and the measure of the Government's actions and the approach that we are taking with our local authority and community partners. Those are the actions that the Government is taking, focused on ensuring that we address the severity of the drug deaths position that we face in Scotland.

Michael Marra: Yesterday, the minister cited the scourge of nitazenes and synthetic opioids as the cause of a huge part of the surge. However, this is not a new issue. People buy these pills by the handful. In 2013, prescriptions for Valium were withdrawn under this Government, and I was leading the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science a decade ago when we saw the consequences of that. We clearly defined that polydrug use and synthetics were at the heart of the huge surge in deaths after 2014, but no minister has ever answered for that policy. Pandora's box was opened, and drug deaths in Scotland skyrocketed to more than two and a half times the rate in England, which had the same drug laws. That is the First Minister's record. It is indefensible. Does he agree?

The First Minister: Two elements fundamentally drive the drug deaths position in Scotland. One is the effect of intergenerational poverty and trauma. We can see in the data that there is a much greater likelihood of individuals experiencing drugs and of drug deaths resulting because of the prevalence of poverty—hence the Government's policy agenda to eradicate child poverty in Scotland.

The second element is the upsurge in grossly harmful synthetics. That is a factor that we can see, and I was alerted to it in the briefings that took place earlier this year. It is one of the factors that is driving the significant increase in drug deaths that we are experiencing. There has been public commentary from experts in the field who believe that, without that upsurge in grossly harmful synthetics, there would have been a reduction in drug deaths this year. The upsurge is a factor that we are wrestling with in this community in Scotland, and the Government's focus on actions to break up the criminality that spreads that practice in our country is at the heart of the Government's response.

Michael Marra: The First Minister would do well to remember that the original surge was 12 years ago. "Indefensible" is not only my word to describe the record; it is the word that, six years ago in the chamber, the then First Minister chose. If it was indefensible then, what on earth is it now? More than 7,000 people have lost their lives since the Scottish Government declared a public health emergency. We cannot go on like this.

Scots are 15 times more likely to die from drugs if they are poor than if they are rich. If this were a middle-class epidemic, we would have locked down, legislated, found the money, educated widely and reformed indiscriminately. Nothing near that scale has happened. We cannot go on like this.

This is one of the most serious issues that Scotland is facing. If the First Minister is prepared to change course and bring a new plan to

Parliament, Scottish Labour will work with him on it. Will he do it?

The First Minister: The issues that Mr Marra has raised are of the utmost seriousness. I hope that the explanation that I have given about the engagement that I have had on the early data on the upsurge in drug deaths earlier this year assures him that the issue is central to my thinking about the response that is required.

The issue also delves deep into my political thinking. That is why, when I became First Minister, I committed that the central mission of my Government would be to eradicate child poverty, because we must interrupt the circumstances that are feeding and refeeding this crisis in our society.

I welcome Mr Marra's willingness to engage with the Government on the issue. I will ensure that that engagement is taken forward and that dialogue takes place. Mr Marra and I had a telephone conversation on Saturday in which I made it clear that I do not command a majority in the Parliament, so I am willing to work with others to seek common ground to improve the lives of people in Scotland. There can be no more important issue than improving the lives of people who are affected by drugs.

In its strategy, the Government has done several things, including increasing rehabilitation services, strengthening support for community organisations and interventions to take forward harm reduction measures and, crucially, listening to the experience of families—that aspect was central to the summit that we had in June.

The Government's strategy, supported and co-authored by our local authority partners, has been developed through extensive engagement across a whole variety of opinions. Mr Marra wishes to engage, and some of his party colleagues in COSLA will be part of that, too. If he is inviting me to have further detailed dialogue on the issue, I will do so, because I want to ensure that the Parliament uses its combined resources and intellect to improve the lives of people in Scotland. I will take up Mr Marra's invitation.

Child Poverty

2. **Malcolm Offord (West Scotland) (Reform):** Under this Scottish National Party Government, one in five children grows up in poverty and, today, 10,715 children are living in temporary accommodation. That is John Swinney's Scotland in 2026. Is the First Minister ashamed?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am proud of Scotland, I love Scotland, and I am in office to do my best to improve the lives of people in Scotland. However, I have to deal with the country as I find it, and the country that I lead is in no way impervious to the effects of years and years of austerity, of which Mr Offord was one of the authors. What my Government has done is use its powers to address that situation. Child poverty is lower in this country than in the rest of the United Kingdom because of the decisions that my Government has taken, and we are proud of those actions.

Malcolm Offord: I will take that as a no, then. Under this Scottish National Party Government, councils have turned away 21,800 applications from people looking for a home in the past year. Rough sleeping is up 20 per cent. Meanwhile, homelessness applications from asylum seekers are up 40 per cent—a huge two-and-a-half-times increase since 2021, when the local connection rule was last in place.

This is John Swinney's Scotland in 2026. Is the First Minister ashamed?

The First Minister: Let me, once again, correct Malcolm Offord, on his point about local connection, because the local connection rules that he cites as being a problem, which have changed in recent years, would have no effect on the issue that he raises about asylum seekers. The provisions about housing allocations in Scotland were set out in the homelessness legislation more than 20 years ago and they are applied to make sure that we have a civilised, human rights-based approach to tackling homelessness in our country. My party supported that legislation when it was introduced by the Labour Party and the Liberals, and it is the right thing to do.

We are investing in housing infrastructure in Scotland in order to build more homes. We have built more affordable homes per head of population in Scotland than has been the case in any other part of the United Kingdom. We have redeployed funds to bring empty properties back into use, so that families can have good-quality accommodation. More than 2,000 properties have been brought into use because of the Government's intervention to enable that to happen.

We intend to do more to ensure that families are properly supported with accommodation that meets their needs.

Malcolm Offord: Once again, there is no remorse. We just heard from Mr Marra that Scotland has, once again, hit the world's headlines for having the worst rate of drug deaths in Europe. As he mentioned, last year, 1,133 of our fellow citizens needlessly lost their lives to drugs. That is up 11 per cent in a single year, and it is a tragedy for each and every family.

John Swinney demonstrated his priorities this week by wasting three hours debating his vanity project of independence. Meanwhile, yesterday,

the Parliament was given only 30 minutes in which to absorb the sheer horror of these shocking figures and John Swinney did not even show up. Let's face it: his national mission on drugs has collapsed and the blame lies squarely with the SNP, but this Government cannot bring itself to question the system that it has built.

This is John Swinney's Scotland in 2026—a homelessness crisis, endemic child poverty, plummeting education standards and the drug deaths capital of Europe. However, he does not care, because he is shameless Swinney. For the third and final time, is the First Minister ever ashamed?

The First Minister: I ask people around the country to make their own judgment about me. I serve in office to improve the lives of people in Scotland—that is what I get up every morning to try to do. I have to face the realities of the country that I lead.

On homelessness, we do have challenges, because we have a rising need in our society, and we are trying to allocate as many resources as we can to address that need.

In relation to education, the programme for international student assessment—PISA—statistics are difficult, but the exam results in August were very encouraging. The achievement of curriculum for excellence levels and information on literacy and numeracy are very encouraging with regard to the strength of Scottish education. Record numbers of young people are leaving school and going on to positive destinations as a consequence of their education, and that is very encouraging.

Mr Offord said that I cannot bring myself to question the approach that we are taking on drugs, but that is precisely what we did when I convened a drugs discussion on 19 June with Public Health Scotland, COSLA and various partners, to test whether we are doing the right things to tackle the drugs crisis in our society.

Mr Marra has suggested having a dialogue in order to advance on the issue. Mr Offord just comes here with a depressing weekly critique. I am prepared to take the action that is necessary to improve the lives of the people of Scotland. That is what this Government was elected to do, and that is exactly what this Government will do.

Middle East (Boycott)

3. **Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green):** Last week, the Parliament backed a Green motion declaring that

"a company's involvement in illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian Territories constitutes grave professional misconduct and should … automatically disqualify that company"

and

"any parent company or subsidiary"

from public contracts or Scottish Government support.

Just four days later, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen—ASLEF—union revealed that CAF, which has been named by the United Nations as a company that is profiting from the exploitation of Palestinians, has been shortlisted for a major contract building trains for ScotRail. Does the First Minister agree that CAF should be blocked from the contract, and will he stand with the rail workers who have refused to drive trains produced by a company that, as they say, profits from apartheid?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am aware of the issue, and I understand that Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd, which oversees the procurement by ScotRail, is seeking further advice. I expect it to provide an update to ministers when that advice has been received.

Gillian Mackay: I appreciate the First Minister's answer. If that update could eventually be shared with members, that would be welcome. However, this is not an isolated case. Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, Stephen Flynn, said that the Government was using

"every lever at its disposal to stand up against the inhumanity"—[*Official Report*, 16 September 2026; c 86.]

that is being inflicted on Gaza and the West Bank. Yet, in the days since then, *The National* has revealed that a firm whose parent company has also been listed by the UN holds a Scottish national health service contract worth tens of millions of pounds. If a company has profited from apartheid and genocide, it should not be profiting from public money in Scotland. Will the First Minister commit to ending that contract as soon as possible? Will his Government urgently review every public sector contract, including parent companies and subsidiaries, to ensure that Scottish public money is not going to companies that are complicit in human rights abuses?

The First Minister: In giving my answer, I have to make it clear that, at all times, the Government must have a legal basis for its actions. The Government is forbidden from acting outwith the law, so we must have a legally sustainable basis for our actions.

The comments that Stephen Flynn made to the Parliament in the debate last week were entirely correct, and I endorse them 100 per cent. Individual organisations within Government must satisfy themselves that the comments made by Mr Flynn, which are an explanation of the

Government's position and which I endorse, are being fully applied in all circumstances.

On the particular case that Gillian Mackay has raised, NHS procurement has asked for further advice. I expect Public Services Delivery Scotland's national procurement directorate to satisfy itself of compliance with all requirements. Ministers will consider any further advice that is received.

Gillian Mackay: I appreciate that the First Minister is trying to adhere to last week's vote and to do those good things, but it is difficult to take that position seriously when ministers have named Barclays as a partner in their upcoming bond scheme. Research by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign says that Barclays holds more than £2 billion in shares in, and provides more than £6.1 billion in loans and underwriting to, nine companies whose weapons and technology are being used by the Israeli military against Palestinians. If a company is so directly linked to the financing of arms companies that supply the Israeli military, it surely should be covered by any boycott that is worthy of the name. Is Barclays really the kind of partner that the First Minister wants for his Scottish Government?

The First Minister: Gillian Mackay said it herself: the Government, under my leadership, is trying to do all that it can to address the issue. I am at one with the Green Party on the horror of what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank. The Government's position could not be clearer on that. However, I have to have a legal basis for acting. That is the issue that the Government must always confront.

I understand the deep anxiety that is expressed by Gillian Mackay, but I have to ask the Parliament and the public to accept that the Government's good intentions and policy direction must be substantiated and founded on a legal basis for action. That will always be the approach that we take in considering these issues and deciding on the steps that we can take to deliver Government policy.

Drug Deaths

4. **Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** What a great shame that the First Minister could not bring himself to back Barclays and the 5,000-plus jobs that it provides for the people of Scotland.

Yet again, Scotland has the worst drug death rate in Europe, with 1,133 lives tragically cut short and 1,133 bereaved families. The Scottish National Party's multimillion-pound drug consumption unit opened in Glasgow at the start of last year. John Swinney says that there is significant evidence that it is saving lives, but the evidence shows that Glasgow drug deaths have actually gone up in that time.

Nearby residents must live with the discarded needles and the drug crime. Despite that, another unit is planned for Edinburgh. Why will John Swinney not listen to and respect the evidence, stop the drug consumption units and, instead, spend that money on rehab?

The First Minister (John Swinney): In relation to Russell Findlay's first point, I welcome the Barclays investment in Scotland and have engaged with Barclays. That kind of antics indicates how trivial the Conservative Party's approach to some of these questions is, when the Government is trying to navigate its way through challenging questions on human rights and on violence in our society.

In relation to drug-related harms, I will not repeat the points that I expressed in my substantive answers to Michael Marra, but Russell Findlay is plain wrong in relation to the Thistle. The staff in the Thistle have responded to 195 medical emergencies in support of individuals. I understand Russell Findlay's concern about the drug death numbers in Glasgow, but they would have been worse if the Thistle had not intervened to support people in relation to their drug use.

In its first year, the Thistle made 612 referrals to wider support services, including housing, accommodation, alcohol, drug recovery and blood-borne virus services, helping people to access treatment, healthcare and recovery support. That is the absolute purpose of the Thistle—to provide person-centred care at the heart of tackling addiction. The Thistle is demonstrating important learning for us, and I am glad that we have been able to take it forward. I am grateful to the former Lord Advocate for the consideration that she gave to the issue to enable us to have another intervention to try to avoid a difficult and serious situation in relation to drug deaths becoming more acute than it would be without the Thistle.

Russell Findlay: Fact check number 1: the First Minister was shamed into backing Barclays. Fact check number 2: Glasgow drug deaths are up. The SNP's failed approach traps addicts in a life of misery, sending thousands to an early grave by peddling the lie that inherently dangerous drugs can be taken safely.

Asked yesterday whether she was doing a good job, the SNP minister for drugs policy said that it was an impossible question to answer, but we know the answer—she is not. Maree Todd blocked our Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill and now, pathetically, blames Westminster for the SNP's fatal culpability. Does John Swinney accept

that the SNP's failed approach and its refusal to back our bill will cost even more lives?

The First Minister: The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs is taking forward a difficult responsibility, and she is doing it with sincerity and grace, as I would expect her to do, and with a focus on taking forward the necessary action. She was at my side when I was briefed in February about the suspected increase in drug death numbers, and she was at my side in June as we wrestled with those issues with partners.

At that event in June were the families of individuals who had been affected by drugs. Unfortunately, one of those individuals could not be there on that occasion, but she was on the "Debate Night" programme last night—a lady called Sandra Holmes, who has been very open about the fact that her family has been affected by drug use. Sandra Holmes made the important point that the debate is more serious than political point scoring and the blaming of various individuals.

I stand here as First Minister, and I accept full responsibility for everything that happens in the name of my Government. It is my duty to do so, and I accept it willingly. I am determined to ensure that my ministers and I take every action to improve the lives of people in Scotland, including those who are affected by drugs, and to ensure that we deliver improvements in their lives and the support that they require.

We have to face the realities. We have new drugs causing absolute havoc in our communities and increasing the severity of addiction, but the Government is determined to confront that, and that is exactly what we will do.

Drug Deaths (Nitazenes)

5. **Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh North Western) (LD):** I congratulate Michael Marra on his election to the leadership of the Scottish Labour Party and, given the subject matter of his first question today, I pay tribute to the tireless work that he has done on drug mortality.

Every year, the Government promises to deal with Scotland's drug death emergency, and every year, more people die. I have listened with some concern today as the First Minister has attempted to explain that with reference to the spike in synthetics, as if it was somehow unexpected.

I first uttered the word "nitazene" in the chamber some three years ago, when Humza Yousaf was First Minister. Back then, these drugs were connected to just nine deaths in Scotland; last year, they took the lives of 247 people. The warning signs were there. I raised the matter 10 times. I wrote to ministers, asked questions of First Ministers and appeared at committee. Experts warned the First Minister's Government that nitazenes were coming and that they were deadly.

That begs a question of the First Minister. If addressing this truly is the Scottish National Party's national mission, why has it failed?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government has taken seriously the upsurge in nitazenes in our society. I heard the warnings that Mr Cole-Hamilton gave—I was in the Parliament, and I saw that the Government responded to that through the actions that we have taken in relation to the increase in rehabilitation services; the improvements in community support organisation activity; the harm reduction measures, such as the opening of the Thistle; and listening to families. All that has been done.

I acknowledge the widespread interest among members in the chamber, including Mr Cole-Hamilton, in these questions. However, I highlight that the Government has also engaged seriously with Police Scotland, which has been pursuing criminals who are responsible for manufacturing these drugs and peddling them in our society. That is one of the reasons why we are now seeing more and more people being convicted of drug offences and serving time in our prisons—that is because of the combined action on harm reduction and the pursuit of criminal behaviour in our society. That lies at the heart of the agenda that the Government will take forward.

On the number of nitazenes that are being produced, there is literally one new drug per week being produced as a consequence of criminal activity. Police Scotland is focused on tackling that issue, and we will focus on providing the support to individuals to reduce the harm of taking drugs.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The first line of defence in the detection of nitazenes and combating their effect is pill checking. The Home Office green-lighted the establishment of a pill-checking facility by the Scottish Government, but it is still not open.

This is a particularly Scottish problem, but we know what works—drug checking works, and we have waited long enough. Safe consumption rooms work, so why is there only one of them? Aberlour Children's Charity's mother and baby units work—that is an intervention that Liberal Democrats insisted was part of the budget. Those facilities are saving lives, and we need more of them.

The Government says that this is an emergency, but it is trapped in the headlights. It has thrown money, statements and ministers at the issue, and yet 100 people are dying every single month because of drugs. If this really is the Government trying its best, what hope is there?

The First Minister: I will address the various issues that Mr Cole-Hamilton has raised. First, on drug testing, the Home Office approved our application for a facility, after many years of waiting, in October 2025, and it is expected to open on 3 October.

Since October 2025, the Government has been working with the University of Dundee to ensure that the necessary clinical infrastructure is in place to ensure that drug testing can be undertaken. That is not a straightforward process, but that sophisticated work has now been undertaken and the drug-testing facility will open in Glasgow in October.

Mr Cole-Hamilton asks why we have only one drug consumption facility. We have only one because the establishment of that consumption facility was argued for and prepared for by Glasgow City Council, and the Lord Advocate gave the necessary legal flexibility to enable it to open.

That requires the Lord Advocate to exercise a judgment that is difficult to exercise because of the provisions of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which is a real impediment to there being more drug consumption rooms in Scotland. If I had my way, I would have more drug consumption rooms in other parts of the country. However, I have to respect the legal process that we undertake. I have been stressing the importance of obeying the law.

Mr Cole-Hamilton mentioned the Aberlour mother and baby unit. I welcome the collaboration with the Liberal Democrats that enabled the budget provision to be put in place for that. That is how this Parliament should work—through engagement across the parties to find ways of working to improve people's lives.

I could not have been clearer to this Parliament since the election that I recognise that I do not command a majority here. If we want to improve the lives of people in our country, we have to work together to do that, and my Government is committed to doing exactly that.

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

14:31

MSP Staff (Employer Pension Contributions)

1. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it considers it equitable that staff employed by MSPs receive lower employer pension contributions than staff it and the Scottish Government directly employ, and what action it is taking to address any such disparity. (S7O-00298)

Pauline McNeill (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The members' staff pension scheme has an employer contribution rate of 10 per cent of pensionable earnings. The SPCB has benchmarked staff pension schemes with similar arrangements that are available to staff employed by members of other United Kingdom legislatures, and the employer contribution for all such pension schemes is consistent with that.

The SPCB is an admitted body of the civil service pension scheme, which is managed by the Cabinet Office. That is a historical arrangement dating from the formation of the Scottish Parliament. Initially, the Parliament was staffed by civil servants who were seconded to the SPCB. In order to protect their pension entitlements when those staff were transferred over to the employment of the SPCB, the SPCB was then admitted to the civil service pension scheme. The contribution rates for the scheme are set by the scheme manager and are not subject to SPCB control.

Colin Beattie: Does the SPCB recognise that MSPs' staff undertake an essential role in supporting constituents and the work of Parliament? If so, how can it justify MSPs' staff receiving an employer pension contribution of only 10 per cent, which is substantially lower than the 28.97 per cent contribution that is available to SPCB staff and more favourable arrangements that are available to Scottish Government employees? Will the SPCB commit to reviewing the current arrangements to ensure that MSPs' staff are treated more equitably and to help to improve recruitment and retention across MSPs' offices?

Pauline McNeill: The SPCB agrees that members' staff play a very important role in serving members and members of the general public. There are no current plans to review the pension scheme for members' staff. However, as Colin Beattie has raised the issue with the corporate body today, I will give him a commitment to take it away for further discussion.

MSP Staff (Job Families and Pay Scales)

2. **Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body how it developed the four job families and pay scales for MSP staff, including the criteria used to weigh different functions within and between families, and when these will next be reviewed. (S7O-00293)

Graham Simpson (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The current job families and pay ranges were developed following a comprehensive review of the members' staff cost provision in 2020. The review considered the range of functions commonly carried out by members' staff, the flexibility needed by individual members who are direct employers, and the need for fair and transparent pay arrangements. The job families were designed to reflect the principal types of work undertaken in members' offices. The associated pay ranges were informed by the levels of responsibility, knowledge, skills, autonomy, complexity and accountability that are normally required for roles at different levels in each family.

The pay ranges were reviewed last year, at which point they were benchmarked against similar roles in other organisations, including Parliaments, in the United Kingdom. The benchmarking confirmed that the pay ranges remain proportionate and competitive. However, the SPCB will continue to keep the arrangements under review and will have regard to forthcoming changes that are planned in other legislatures.

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill: We hear from regional and constituency MSPs alike that, in some offices, levels of correspondence and casework have doubled but the resource and training have not. That leads to caseworkers, who are usually on the front line of offices, burning out. Will the SPCB consider ring fencing, to allow offices to expand casework teams to address that?

Graham Simpson: I am not sure what the member means by ring fencing. However, I will undertake to look at the issue. Perhaps we could have a discussion offline so that I can hear what she wants, and I will then discuss it with the corporate body.

Facial Template Authentication

3. **Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, regarding its proposed facial authentication security access system, when it is due to be introduced and whether MSPs and parliamentary staff will be permitted to opt out of its use. (S7O-00297)

Jackie Dunbar (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The corporate body has approved an upgrade from fingerprint template to facial template authentication on card. That should provide quicker and more reliable access, while retaining two-factor security. A phased roll-out will begin on 7 October and members will be the final group to be enrolled. It is expected that the roll-out will be completed by February 2027.

The corporate body sets the security arrangements for the Parliament as part of its responsibilities under the Scotland Act 1998, which include access control arrangements. All passholders are required to comply with the security arrangements set by the corporate body. However, the corporate body previously agreed that MSPs can opt out of the two-factor authentication arrangements if they so wish. Although we encourage all members to enrol, for those who wish to opt out pedestrian access will be available through the main public entrance.

Kate Nevens: The Parliament has committed to ending public-sector procurement from companies that are complicit in genocide in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. I understand that the corporate body is not aware of any links between the Parliament's security systems contractor and Israel. However, can the corporate body confirm that full human rights due diligence checks have been made on the facial recognition technology firm? Can it offer absolute assurance that the proposed technology has not been developed for use by Israel or by any company that provides support or technology to Israel or the Israeli military?

Jackie Dunbar: The work is being delivered through the corporate body's current security systems contract with Pointer Ltd, which is a United Kingdom company that is incorporated in Scotland. The corporate body is not aware of any links between Pointer Ltd, or any of its subcontractors, and Israel. I will get back to Kate Nevens in writing about the other points that she raised.

MSP Staff (Travel Expenses Scheme)

4. **Kristopher Leask (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will consider reviewing the MSP staff travel expenses scheme to ensure that it takes account of the differences in travel distance and costs between geographically smaller parliamentary regions and larger ones, such as the Highlands and Islands. (S7O-00290)

Maggie Chapman (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): There are no plans to review MSP staff travel expenses within the scheme. In previous schemes, staff travel was limited by a set number of staff journeys per member each year. However, the corporate body recognised that that disproportionately affected members with larger constituencies and regions, and that it limited the

ability to have staff travel for members' staff, who are entitled to claim reimbursement for all constituency, regional and parliamentary travel, based on the actual costs or mileage incurred.

The travel expenses office will support members and their staff to travel around Scotland by booking trains, flights and ferries, meaning that travellers do not need to be out of pocket for high travel costs.

Kristopher Leask: I thank Maggie Chapman for that answer, which provides much-needed clarity given the conflicting advice that I have received previously.

Does the corporate body undertake to review MSP staff accommodation, given the disparity between regions that I have outlined, and given that it also makes sense, when members are travelling greater distances, to maximise the level of local engagement that can be carried out during a full day or two?

Maggie Chapman: If any staff travel and accommodation is to support the member on regional or constituent business, that travel and accommodation will be covered by the scheme, which is uncapped, as I previously outlined.

However, travel to a main workplace for staff is considered commuting travel by His Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and we are required to follow its rules and guidance. The guidance states that commuting travel is considered a personal journey, and that if the cost is reimbursed by an employer through the staff cost provision, it is taxable. The travel and expenses office will work with members and staff to establish working patterns and plans to check against HMRC criteria, should that be helpful.

Alternatively, if the work is done solely to provide constituency support, such costs should be fully reimbursable through the scheme.

MSP Staff Trade Unions (Memorandum of Understanding)

5. **Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will develop a memorandum of understanding with MSP staff trade unions concerning the matters for which it is responsible. (S7O-00250)

Pauline McNeill (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): As my colleague Paul Sweeney will recall, at the end of the previous parliamentary session, the SPCB accepted in full the recommendations of a dignity at work review, which was carried out as part of the inclusive Parliament programme.

That included a commitment to strengthen constructive engagement with MSP staff trade unions to ensure that they offer an important route to enabling the SPCB to understand employment issues that are faced by members' staff, to promote early dialogue and to improve clarity in areas where SPCB decisions can affect members' staff. The SPCB remains fully committed to implementing that recommendation.

Paul Sweeney: The SPCB will surely recognise that, although MSPs remain the legal employers of staff, many issues that affect our staff are outwith members' direct control, whether that is contract terms and conditions, security, facilities or access. If the corporate body recognises that reality, it should put in place mechanisms to engage staff trade unions directly on such matters.

The GMB Westminster branch—I note my entry in the register of members' interests as a member of the GMB—is in the final stages of concluding a memorandum of understanding with the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority at the House of Commons to cover those matters and to formalise engagement for Westminster staff that it represents.

Will the corporate body look at following that example to improve direct engagement with staff trade unions? Will it instruct the senior executive team at the Parliament to engage with the GMB branch and develop a formal mechanism of engagement and negotiation?

Pauline McNeill: I reassure my colleague Paul Sweeney that the SPCB agrees that it is important to have constructive engagement with trade unions; that will be set out more clearly in the coming year.

The SPCB will consider the matter in November, at which time it intends to agree a remit for the next phase of that work, as part of which we have commissioned senior officials to review proposals that were made by the MSP staff trade unions during the dignity at work review. We have informal engagement at the moment, but it is important to set out clearly how that engagement should be constructed. As Paul Sweeney said, MSPs are the legal employer, but the staff are affected by decisions that are made in the Scottish Parliament by the corporate body and therefore, such engagement is only right. I hope that Paul Sweeney is reassured by that answer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I appeal for succinct questions and answers.

MSP Employer Pledge (Consultation)

6. **Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it consulted MSP staff trade unions on the contents of the employer pledge that MSPs were asked to sign up to. (S7O-00300)

Pauline McNeill (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The dignity at work review formed part of the inclusive Parliament programme and was endorsed by the SPCB and party leaders in March this year, following evidence gathering and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including MSP staff trade unions.

One recommendation from the review, which the SPCB accepted, was the introduction of a Parliament-wide employer pledge. All employers based at the Parliament have been invited to sign that pledge, with the aim of ensuring that they join together in a shared commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment. MSP staff trade unions were listened to and their input shaped the recommendations, including that pledge.

Katherine Sangster: Will the corporate body confirm that there are no mechanisms for enforcing the principles contained in the employer pledge and would the corporate body look favourably on the idea of engaging with the trade unions to co-design a revised employer pledge given the need for action due to the pledge not being enforceable?

Pauline McNeill: It is, of course, a pledge, but we are trying to achieve a wider consensus that we should be the best employers that we can be. I can give a commitment that there will be further engagement to ensure that the pledge is meaningful. To date, 43 MSPs have signed the pledge and we encourage more to sign it and to join in further discussion about what more can be done.

MSP Constituency Offices (Technical Standards)

7. **Lorna Slater (Edinburgh Central) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether, with respect to the standards applied by the Parliament's allowances office for MSP constituency offices, it will establish technical standards for fire detection, ventilation, heating, lighting and other safety and wellbeing factors that are recognised by surveyors and solicitors across the Scottish property sector. (S7O-00295)

Maggie Chapman (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The corporate body agreed to changes to the members' expenses scheme from the beginning of this session, following its sessional review of the scheme. Those changes included the introduction of minimum standards for members' offices, with those being explicitly stated in the scheme to ensure that all members understand their responsibilities under health and safety legislation and so that they could be supported to secure suitable offices.

Information about the relevant health and safety legislation and guidelines is available to members on the Parliament's health and safety guidance for members intranet pages, where members will find short summaries of the main points they must address. For example, on workplace temperatures, the minimum temperature for working indoors should normally be at least 16 degrees and there is also guidance on ventilation, fresh air supply rates and a number of other matters.

The different sizes and styles of offices, along with their layout and the proposed number of people using them, will have an influence, but all the information is available on the intranet for members to view.

Lorna Slater: I am grateful for that clarification, because what was provided to my office by the corporate body and the allowances team was a set of nine vague bullet points that failed to specify minimal or technical requirements for ventilation, fire safety equipment, heating, space or adequate lighting, which meant that they were impossible to comply with, therefore creating a stooshie with allowances.

Does the SPCB recognise that any guidance it provides must be communicated clearly so that we can all have proper minimum standards for the safety and wellbeing of our staff?

Maggie Chapman: The corporate body has had exactly those conversations about the issue. This is the first time that we have been through the process in that way and I guarantee the member that we will look to ensure that information is provided clearly and succinctly for all members in future.

First Minister's Question Time (School Visits)

8. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what assessment it has undertaken of the impact on school visits to the Scottish Parliament of the changes to the timing of First Minister's Questions. (S7O-00291)

Stephen Kerr (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): Without stating the obvious, most schools can now watch FMQs live in the chamber because there are more question sessions to watch.

Our schools programme restarted in September and early data shows that not only are more schools seeing FMQs, more are also staying to watch portfolio question time in its new Wednesday timeslot. The good news is that more pupils are learning about accountability by seeing more business in the chamber, which means that more are seeing the work of their Parliament at first hand and how that relates to their lives. We will

continue tracking that closely by using evaluations and monitoring data.

Clare Haughey: To quote Mr Kerr back at himself, stating the obvious, that did not answer my question.

Like many others throughout the country, schools in my constituency are unable to attend the new sessions of First Minister's questions and still be able to travel back in time for the end of the school day. That hugely disadvantages pupils who were previously able to attend and engage with that important scrutiny of the First Minister. How will the SPCB monitor and evaluate equity of access, particularly during sitting days on which FMQs takes place and what will it do to address that geographical inequality, which is exacerbated by changes to the Parliament's timetable that were made without consultation?

Stephen Kerr: The Presiding Officer has made it clear that the changes to the parliamentary week are necessary, from his point of view, to make the Parliament more topical and effective and to make the Scottish Government more accountable to the Parliament. Temporary arrangements have been put in place to enable that change. The Parliamentary Bureau has invited the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to consider those arrangements with a view to making recommendations on whether any permanent amendments to standing orders should be made. As part of the process, the member—indeed, all members who wish to do so—can feed into the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee any views on how the changes to FMQs impact on school visits and other considerations that they may have to offer.

MSP Staff Pay (Data Collection)

9. **Laura Moodie (South Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it collects data on MSP staff pay including data on the gender pay gap. (S7O-00294)

Graham Simpson (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The SPCB holds data on MSP staff pay solely for the purpose of providing a payroll service in accordance with the provisions of the members expenses scheme. As the SPCB is not the employer of MSP staff, it is not required to gather and publish gender pay gap data.

Laura Moodie: That leaves rather a hole in data. Is it possible that that could be addressed to pursue the aim of reducing the pay gap?

Graham Simpson: It is clear that each MSP is an employer in their own right, so it is not a matter for the corporate body. However, the member could conduct her own research and I encourage individual parties, if they so wish, to conduct surveys of staff in their own groups. The member might feel that that is useful, but it is not a matter for the corporate body.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): That concludes SPCB questions. I apologise to members who were not able to get their questions heard in the chamber. I am sure that they will write quickly to the corporate body for a response.

Creative Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Our next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy. Members who wish to speak should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

14:53

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): I am pleased to open this debate on growing Scotland's creative economy and recognise the extraordinary contribution that our culture and creative sectors make to Scotland and to our international reputation.

Our creative economy is among our greatest national strengths. It is found in our theatres and concert halls, in our museums, galleries and libraries, in our festivals, screen sector, music industry, games developers, publishers, designers and creative technology businesses and in the work of thousands of artists and entrepreneurs across the country. It is also found in our community centres, our green spaces and—for anyone whose family is like mine and whose family gatherings inevitably turn into everybody being encouraged to do a song or a wee turn—our homes.

In total, the creative industries contribute £5.4 billion to the Scottish economy, support 7,000 to 8,000 jobs and generate £4.3 billion in exports. Culture and the sectors that underpin it create jobs, attract investment, develop skills, support innovation and project Scotland's talent and our values to the world. That is why I welcome the opportunity for Parliament to consider the importance of culture and creativity, and how we can harness those strengths to support sustainable economic growth and opportunity in our country.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I noticed that, in the long list that the cabinet secretary has just gone through, she did not mention the national companies, which do tremendous good work on behalf of Scotland and are ambassadors. She will know that the companies were very concerned that the funding settlement that they received from her predecessor did not reflect the overall uplift in the culture budget. Will she rectify that?

Màiri McAllan: Murdo Fraser is absolutely right to highlight the importance of our national performing companies, which do a wonderful job across Scotland and in touring. I will be glad to engage with them as part of the budget negotiations that the Government will undertake shortly. I will also be glad to speak to Murdo Fraser about that.

With companies such as our national performing companies, our culture sector has a strong economic foundation. When we talk about economic growth, we often talk about infrastructure, technology, manufacturing, financial services and more. That is absolutely right, but I believe that culture and creativity belong at the heart of that conversation. The creative industries are increasingly recognised as drivers of productivity and innovation, and it is worth noting that they have grown at four times the pace of the rest of the economy in recent years.

We are so well placed to seize the opportunity that that presents. We have world-class institutions: national museums and libraries; the national performing companies, which Murdo Fraser mentioned; and venues and organisations up and down our country. We have globally recognised festivals, a thriving screen sector and a globally respected reputation for artistic excellence. We have creative businesses that are exporting Scottish talent and ideas right across the world. Most importantly, we have talent in every corner of our country.

However, that success cannot be taken for granted. Creative careers continue to be characterised by insecurity for too many people. Organisations face pressures. Freelancers and artists often find it difficult to begin and to sustain a long-term career. Opportunities remain unevenly distributed, particularly for people from backgrounds that remain underrepresented in the sector. If we are serious about growth, which the Government and the Parliament are, we must ensure that creative opportunity is open to everyone.

That is why we are taking action. Last year, Creative Scotland announced more than £200 million in multiyear funding and, in doing so, provided an increase in funding and greater stability. We have made the choice to increase support because we recognise that investment in culture is not just expenditure but an investment in people, jobs and skills, and businesses and communities. Indeed, I believe that it is investment in what makes us human—in human connection—which is so needed now in a world that is digitised and disputatious.

Our strong cultural sector is attracting visitors and investment in talent, supporting regeneration and strengthening the economy. One of the first areas that I want to highlight in that regard is screen. Over recent years, Scotland has established itself as a highly attractive location for film and television production. Scottish stories, talent, locations and voice are reaching global

audiences on an unprecedented scale, but we know that there is more potential to unlock. That is why our programme for government commits to setting up an independent Screen Scotland that is strong, focused and ambitious—a national screen body that can attract investment and support domestic production.

Connected to screen, our public service broadcasters play a key role in the sector, and it is crucial that they fulfil their obligations to audiences in Scotland. However, Scotland is currently being shortchanged. BBC expenditure in Scotland is equivalent to only 88 per cent of what is raised from licence fee payers in Scotland. I believe that it is vital that, as a public broadcaster that is paid for by the people of Scotland, the BBC should invest back into our communities and should be seen to do so, ensuring that, when people turn on their screens or their radio, they can see and hear their lives, in all their diversity, excellence and challenge, reflected back at them.

We must reflect on the coverage of moments of national interest such as Glasgow's Commonwealth games, which were held in July but were not widely covered on the BBC. We have to question whether that is acceptable.

In every conversation that I have, I am advocating for creative professionals up and down the country to have their programming produced and represented by our national broadcaster.

I wish to draw attention to the importance of broadcasting in Gaelic and Scots, and point out a disparity. This year, MG Alba received £25 million—£15 million from the Scottish Government and £10 million from BBC Scotland. By way of comparison, Welsh-language broadcasting received £98 million from the United Kingdom Government allocation of the licence fee and a further £22 million from the BBC. That disparity is totally unacceptable. As the Parliament of Scotland, we should raise our voices in calling for change.

Our festivals are absolutely outstanding, and they are another of our nation's most significant assets. Alongside a global reputation for programming on stage, festivals provide hundreds of millions of pounds to the Scottish and local economies, supporting a pipeline of jobs and businesses. Festivals across Scotland have received significant increases through multiyear funding, and a third of all funding recipients run a festival. Beyond the core funding, the expanded festivals fund, which we are now making permanent, is supporting the ambitions of 55 festivals across Scotland, supporting the sector's growth and its breadth and strength.

We must be equally determined to support the individuals whose work sits at the heart of our creative economy. Artists and creative practitioners are central to our cultural life and our international reputation, yet too many of them face financial insecurity and barriers to accessing the profession. That is why we are taking forward a minimum income pilot for artists, reflecting our determination to support artists to begin and sustain their careers and to pursue artistic excellence in Scotland's name.

Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The cabinet secretary has talked about a range of sectors that will benefit from very welcome Scottish Government support. Has she considered the booming and very successful writing and publishing scene in Ireland, which is a direct result of the cultural support that is given to writers there? Would the cabinet secretary like to see whether Scotland can emulate some of that?

Màiri McAllan: Patricia Gibson is absolutely right—both to highlight writing and publishing and to speak to the experience of Ireland. In a moment, I will talk a little bit about having been with the Irish President at the weekend. As we are designing our minimum income pilot for artists, we are looking to Ireland to see how the Irish ran their programme. That is an important connection to highlight.

It is important to support those working in the sector; so, too, is supporting young people to access it. I put on record our intention to develop a youth culture pass. That will allow young people to engage in culture and it will support them while also supporting artists and venues.

Everything that I have already talked about in relation to culture is very much linked to my responsibilities in education, as well as in Gaelic, Scots and British Sign Language. In my view, those are mutually reinforcing. Engagement with culture enriches learning. Creative activity helps to develop confidence, communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving. I believe that art seeks the truth and seeks to hold it up to power. Our Scottish languages are how we engage in our culture and our education, and they are how we represent our heritage and our future.

If I can have a wee bit of time back, I will take an intervention from Paul Sweeney.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The cabinet secretary highlights the importance of access to culture through education and tuition. Sometimes it is important that that happens through the curriculum and in school settings, but community settings and charitable organisations are also important, particularly for working-class kids, who can often find formal educational settings intimidating. Will the cabinet secretary consider the example of Beatroute Arts, in the north of Glasgow, of which I am a trustee, and its excellent, innovative work to break down barriers, allowing

working-class kids to access creative expression and music tuition?

Màiri McAllan: Creative expression and engagement in the arts are for everybody. I should be very glad to meet Paul Sweeney and the organisation that he mentions to understand more about what it is doing and how we can make such opportunities available to more people in the country.

Speaking of education, I would like to highlight our film and screen curriculum, which is a ground-breaking and shining example of the work to intertwine education and culture; we are taking all of that forward.

I have been talking about Gaelic, and Patricia Gibson mentioned Ireland. I want to take a little longer to focus on Gaelic within Scotland's national identity, our culture and, of course, our creative economy. I mentioned that I had the pleasure of welcoming the President of Ireland to the Isle of Skye and to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig at the weekend. In her lecture, which I was privileged to respond to, the President spoke of the many connections between Éire and Alba. We spoke about great Scottish and Irish cultural figures such as Seamus Heaney, Sorley MacLean and Màiri Mhòr nan Òran, or Great Mary of the Songs. Those were great literary figures who spoke of the connection between people, language and the land. I was proud to hear students at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig replay that connection and talk about the enthusiasm that they had for their language and their home areas. It meant so much to me to stand on the site where Sorley MacLean was among the first of a few individuals to set up Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. I want to take the opportunity to put some of his words on the record. This is from "The Cry of Europe", translated by Iain Crichton Smith:

> "What is each ringlet of your golden hair
> when weighed against that poverty and fear
> which Europe's people bear, and still must bear
> from the first slave-ship to slavery entire?"

That is a reminder of the power of carefully crafted words and considered communication, of our responsibility as parliamentarians to use our voices and to raise them for those who cannot raise their own, and of the indispensable nature of culture and art in our society, not least—in fact, especially—when it comes to political thought.

I look forward to hearing other members' contributions. I am pleased to accept my Green colleague's amendment and that of the Liberal Democrats. I should flag to the Liberal Democrats that, although I am not entirely clear that an innovation hub is the approach that we should take, I agree with them on the enormous potential of games, and I would like to work with them on how we harness that.

I will close by saying an enormous thanks to everybody at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig for a wonderful visit with the President of Ireland, and to every artistic individual whom I have had the privilege of meeting since becoming culture secretary.

I move,

> "That the Parliament recognises the significant contribution that Scotland's culture and creative sectors make to the nation's economy, communities and international reputation; notes that these sectors support employment, innovation and skills development across all parts of Scotland; celebrates the success of Scotland's artists, creative businesses, festivals, cultural organisations and screen sector in showcasing Scottish creativity at home and abroad; welcomes the commitment to establish Screen Scotland as a distinct public body, in light of the sector's potential for growth and the benefits of inward investment and domestic production to the Scottish economy; notes the value of the public service broadcasting ecosystem to the wider screen sector and the importance of broadcasters fulfilling their obligations to Scottish audiences and creative industries; acknowledges the importance of ensuring that creative career pathways are accessible and sustainable for people from all backgrounds; recognises the role that culture and creativity play in strengthening community cohesion and improving wellbeing; welcomes the Scottish Government's ongoing efforts and increased investment to support growth within the creative economy and to develop opportunities for creative workers and businesses; recognises also the unique and welcome contribution that Gaelic and Scots language and culture make to enriching Scotland's society and economy, and supports continued collaboration across all of society to realise the full economic, cultural and social potential of Scotland's creative industries."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Katherine Sangster to speak to and move amendment S7M-01304.3.

15:07

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): I will have to be careful with my time today because, given that we are discussing Scotland's creative economy, I could use all my time talking about the endless quality and value of the cultural organisations across Edinburgh and Lothians East—from the grass-roots clubs and schools that bring professional artists into local communities to give kids equal opportunities, right up to our world-leading Edinburgh International Festival.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the team behind the Edinburgh International Festival on another outstanding year. It is not just an occasion to show Scotland to the world, but an occasion when the world comes to Scotland, and it is a privilege to represent the city where it all happens. I remind members that the festival was founded in 1947 to heal the deep divisions after world war two.

I am grateful for the cabinet secretary's opening speech and for her motion. I am glad that she

spoke about how we grow the creative economy, but there is a challenge in taking that approach, so we need to continue to take an active role in growing the economy, while also listening to the industry when it advises us on the limitations of the approach.

We need a joined-up approach that recognises the unique position that our industries find themselves in, between the public and private sectors. We need a strategy that works across business, trade and the creative sectors. The approach until now has often treated the creative industries as either one thing or the other: a purely private commercial venture or a sector that is core to national ambitions and deserving of grant funding. We need to move away from that binary view, and we have seen that with the success of Screen Scotland. The truth is that, unsurprisingly, the sector is a bit of both.

Our creative industries are a key part of our national story. They are an integral part of brand Scotland, and they are a key means of upskilling young people and providing opportunities to realise and express creative ambitions. They tell a story, as the cabinet secretary said, of who and what Scotland is, and the Government should take an active role in helping to realise that. The creative industries also deliver commercial value: they attract millions of visitors to Scotland each year; they attract the brightest and the best to work and perform in Scotland; and they are, as the cabinet secretary rightly said, the fastest-growing part of our economy.

The public aspects of our creative industries are tied to the private aspects. They need consumers, advertising, software, publishers and more. The commercial aspects of our creative industries support the public aspects too, so we should not seek to separate them. It is important that the Government recognises the complex relationship. Good support might also mean looking at the private enterprises that support the creative industry, not just the public.

We need to have a strong pipeline that will inspire young people and guide them towards opportunities to upskill and into careers that will not only improve their lives but become part of our rich cultural tapestry and traditions.

At the beginning of my speech, I mentioned the talent that Edinburgh and Lothians East holds, from the grass roots all the way up to our international performers. That is not a coincidence: the two support one another. Organisations in my constituency, such as Lyra, help to bring the magic of the international festival to young people by giving them the opportunity to see some of the world's best performances. Those organisations offer working-class kids opportunities to express themselves through art and light, and to be inspired by where that will take them.

We need to consider every stage of the journey. Support needs to run across every level so that that relationship can continue. We agree that young people should have early access to music and art in schools, but, when the number of music and art teachers in primary schools has fallen by more than 70 per cent since 2008, we must consider how we can confidently say that every child has the opportunity to be inspired.

We understand that the creative industries are about not just artists but technicians, costume designers, advertisers, jewellers and many others. We know that colleges are integral to teaching those skills, but how can they do so successfully when Audit Scotland has warned about the financial pressures that Scottish colleges are under? We want the creative industries to be accessible to all, but our present care systems are not flexible enough to allow those with caring responsibilities to participate confidently and consistently.

The Government needs to join the dots if our creative industries are to succeed. In doing so, it must consider why Scotland's creative industries are growing more slowly than those in the other constituent parts of the UK. Acknowledging that fact does not diminish Scotland's success; rather, it sets a challenge for us all to strive further. Scottish Labour is up for that challenge.

I move amendment S7M-01304.3, to insert at end:

"recognises that, despite Scotland's wealth of talent, the creative industries in Scotland have grown at a slower rate than the UK average; believes that a strong creative sector needs a strong skills pipeline and effective business support, and calls on the Scottish Government to take action to ensure that Scotland's skills system meets the needs of modern creative businesses and that Scotland's enterprise agencies have the expertise and resources to support the growth of the creative industries."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call David Kirkwood to speak to and move amendment S7M-01304.1.

15:12

David Kirkwood (South Scotland) (Reform): The culture secretary's motion quite rightly celebrates the creativity of this wonderful wee country and the contribution that it makes to every aspect of our lives—nationally and internationally, culturally and financially.

Two of the industries in Scotland that are mentioned in the motion, film and television, have a huge advantage over their competitors in the rest of the world simply by virtue of being located here. To make a TV ratings success, just point a camera

at our scenery. If someone can wrap a good story in the Scottish aura that is so well appreciated around the world, the world will be their crustacean of choice. That is why “Outlander” was such an enormous global hit, bringing hugely consequential benefits to us by promoting tourism and being a televisual ambassador for our country.

Being able to make content in English as our native language also eases our way into a huge number of markets. We have a surprisingly high number of high-quality TV and film production studios, including Wardpark Studios, where “Outlander” was created. I am not sure that I welcome the commitment to spin out Screen Scotland into a separate entity, as I do not think that the quango constellation really needs another star.

We have a long history of visual art in Scotland, ranging all the way back to rock carvings near Biggar from about 12,000 BC. In recent centuries, those arts have developed mainly into painting of various types, and we have produced many fine artists in watercolours, oils and other media. One of the more famous schools was the Scottish colourists; at the moment, Kirkcudbright galleries are holding a major exhibition of the paintings of Samuel Peploe.

One recently announced Scottish Government initiative has been the Scottish artists minimum income plan, which intends to provide salaries for Government-approved artists. It may sound like a great idea, but unfortunately, the nearest parallel for the scheme that I can think of was the art fund of the USSR, which supported artists in the Soviet Union. It guaranteed a living wage for artists, but only as long as the art satisfied the commissars. When combined with the Government’s intended food price cap, it looks like a move towards the sovietisation of Scottish society.

Màiri McAllan: Will Mr Kirkwood take an intervention?

David Kirkwood: Would the cabinet secretary take one of mine?

Màiri McAllan: I do not think that the member made one.

David Kirkwood: No, but would she, in general? The reason why I am asking the question, Presiding Officer, is that the other parties have a history of not taking interventions from our party. [*Interruption*.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Could we move on with the debate, please?

David Kirkwood: I will take the intervention.

Màiri McAllan: Mr Kirkwood talked about the minimum income pilot. Instead of looking to history and very far afield, I point him to Ireland, which has successfully piloted that work; I will be influenced by what it is doing.

David Kirkwood: I do not know of any analysis of the success of that scheme, so I will wait until we can see that. [*Interruption*.] I will wait until I get a third-party analysis of that.

Genuine artists will create art regardless of circumstances. My favourite artist is a 20th century abstract painter who lived nearly all of his productive life in comparative poverty and ended his days in a camper van in France, scrimping and saving but producing inspiring watercolour paintings to the very end. Instead of subsidising apparatchiks to spend their lives producing pictures that will be acceptable to the culture secretary, why could we not strive to create an economy wealthy enough to allow artists to commit their own time and money to express themselves without constraint?

The motion concentrates on what most people think of as the creative industries: visual arts, music festivals, films and TV—all the fun stuff. However, there is a lot more to creativity than that, and it cuts across all fields of human activity. Members will probably know that I want to expand the STEM acronym—which stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—to STEAM, to incorporate an appreciation of the arts and technical people. During the summer recess, I visited a graduate show at a university that is generally known for its textile and graphics teaching. The show was a delightful riot of imaginative colour and shapes, all designed and created by students from several parts of the world, and included work relating to production control, architectural design and the preparation of raw materials.

I called in again recently to discuss the university’s metamorphosis from a textile specialist into a leading-edge general design institution. As part of our conversation, I offered to introduce it to a company in Dumfries called Vaso Build. Vaso Build is about to open a factory that will turn recycled scrap glass into very high-performance structural panels. The panels will then be assembled into buildings of various sizes that are extremely environmentally responsible, highly energy efficient, fast to build and cheap to produce. An organisation that only a few years ago was concentrating on creating new designs of tweed will, I hope, soon be asking its students to imagine new ways of using a groundbreaking Scottish product to produce economical and versatile social housing. That is creativity. To grow our creative economy, let us just let our general economy grow, and the creative industries as we know them will follow.

I move amendment S7M-01304.1, to leave out from first "welcomes" to end and insert:

"notes that creativity is not limited to the performing or visual arts, but is inherent in every activity and every person; recognises that creativity is a synonym for innovation, and believes that Scotland has been the most innovative country on Earth since at least the mid-seventeenth century; recognises that innovation is most often the product of a society that values freedom of thought and is rich in trust and knowledge; insists that innovation cannot be directed by government, but flourishes when innovators are free of societal constraints, and celebrates that Scotland is, in its view, probably the most marketable country on the planet, with an enormous depth of international goodwill, as was demonstrated by the magnificent Tartan Army earlier this year, and by the very many instantly recognisable Scottish icons."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Q Manivannan to speak to and move amendment S7M-01304.2.

15:18

Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I have spent far more of my life struggling as a writer and an artist—in the very same ways that Mr Kirkwood has said that we do not—than as a politician on the other side, so it is a genuine privilege. I welcome the Government's motion and the engagement that the cabinet secretary has had with the wider art sector as well as with the Greens.

In June, I convened a round-table meeting with Culture Counts and the basic income for artists Scotland group, which brought together the leads and representatives of organisations across Scotland and the arts sector, from the Federation of Scottish Theatre, the Scottish Music Industry Association and Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland to the collecting companies, the galleries, the performing companies, the unions and more. What struck us was how differently we each answered the question of where culture resides, what culture means or how we measure it. For some, it resides in a rehearsal room or a gig space; for others, it resides in a building, a landscape or a castle; and for others, it is an intangible heritage that resides in a ceilidh, a song passed from one generation to another or a skill that is taught by hand. My colleagues Patrick Harvie and Kate Nevens joined that discussion and each returned, albeit from different angles, to the same point: culture cannot simply be built from the top down by institutions, nor solely from the bottom up by individual artists; it needs both approaches together, and it needs the Government to recognise what is actually happening and where, not only where it is easiest to count.

This morning, before I came to the chamber, I was at the National Library of Scotland, where I was shown archives of working-class Scottish writers and artists. Those pages reminded me of an old economic adage: there is no measure of assessment that is not time bound or bound by geography. It is not just that culture's value cannot be measured in a spreadsheet but that our existing methods of measuring it are simply incredibly flawed. That measurement does not always reflect culture's value long after it is made, or when culture does not reside where we expect it to.

Walter Scott's influence over the world took decades to be realised and truly registered. Agnes Owen wrote for years while working ordinary jobs in Scotland before being recognised as one of our most important working-class voices. That recognition came far too late, and no contemporary economic survey back then would have predicted it.

Edwin Morgan's significance, including as a translator, internationalist, one of our makars and someone whose words opened this very Parliament building, deepened for decades after the work was written, much as it was shaped by places and languages far beyond Scotland.

I do not just say this to romanticise the past but to make a hard, practical economic point: when we measure culture simply by the year's gross value added figures, we are using a measurement method that is structurally blind to how culture creates value, often years and generations later and often in a form that official statistics cannot, or were never built to, see.

That is the case not just in theory but in practice. In 2023, I was privileged enough to win the Kavya prize for new writers, established by the late Scottish writer Leela Soma. Winning it opened doors for me that would otherwise never have opened. The prize and the writers who it supported will not show up in any economic data set for years, if ever. Its value is very real, but it is currently invisible from the frameworks that we inhabit.

The Scottish Parliament information centre research confirms that the basic comparisons that we have between Scotland's cultural spend and that of Nordic countries is distorted by how, for instance, broadcasting spend is classified, since the BBC is treated as non-identifiable expenditure and stripped out of national comparisons altogether. On economic impact, more broadly, SPICe notes that most assessments of economic impact must be treated with some degree of caution, because they rarely account properly for displacement, which is money that would have been spent elsewhere anyway, or deadweight, which is activity which would have happened regardless.

However, this demand for quantification—for measuring a cultural sector by its industry and by its impact—will always exist. I know that every organisation is working their hardest to publish reports and to justify themselves through footfall, support for local economies, jobs created and more. Those are serious efforts by serious sectors. Every one of them is struggling with the same problem: the numbers that we have were never designed to capture what culture actually does, or to capture those who are missing.

As the cabinet secretary rightly noted, there are many for whom access is not equal. The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre shows that overall engagement with culture in Scotland is high, but there is a 22-point gap in cultural attendance between disabled and non-disabled people. People in our most deprived areas are 25 per cent less likely to have gone to the cinema than those in the wealthiest, and gaps of a similar scale exist for galleries, classical music, live music, and more. Just 11 per cent of people from a minoritised ethnic background report attending the theatre, compared with 31 per cent of everyone else.

Those statistics matter not because Scotland's culture resides, as many would like to believe, in the central belt but because the geographic spread is immense. The Outer Hebrides has one of the highest concentrations of artists anywhere in Scotland. Our rural and highland communities carry that burden and that share of our culture workforce that urban-centred policy often overlooks.

That is why I am delighted to move the amendment in my name, because fair work matters now more than ever. It matters across the breadth of our cultural life and our geography, and in the temporality with which we assess it. Musicians, traditional artists, screen and costume crews, textile makers, games developers and craftspeople are all overwhelmingly freelance or self-employed, with a much higher percentage in Scotland than in other parts of the UK. That is exactly why the culture fair work task force recommendations must be implemented—from stronger safeguards against artificial intelligence systems scraping and reproducing creative work without consent or payment to the need for a dedicated fair work fund. My amendment calls on the Government to provide an update on implementation, including on welcome efforts such as the basic income for artists pilot. That applies just as much to a session musician in Dundee or a textile maker in the Borders as it does to a novelist in Edinburgh.

At the end of the day, culture is not found only in our national institutions, vital though they are; it is found in the pub session, the cafe or the open mic. I respectfully disagree with Mr Kirkwood—although artists do not need the Government to direct them in their art, they do need its support.

We are in a housing crisis, as I think that Ms Sangster very likely mentioned. We are in climate and an environmental crisis climate in which costs are going up, which is no fault of artists themselves. However, every conversation that I have with members of the art sector involves them asking how they can contribute to the economy, the health sector, the justice sector or the education of our young people, instead of talking about what they require from the Government and the Parliament.

For that reason alone, but also because of the wonderful artistic spaces that I come from and the people who wish to contribute more than they would ever ask for, I commend the amendment in my name and am delighted to support the Government's motion and that of my colleagues in the Lib Dems, which recognises the games sector.

I move amendment S7M-01304.2, to insert at end:

"; recognises that fair work, including fair pay, secure contracts and safe working conditions, remains a significant challenge across parts of the creative sector, particularly for freelance and self-employed workers, who make up the majority of the workforce; calls on the Scottish Government to publish an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force, which was published in December 2025; welcomes the Scottish Government's engagement with consultations for a proposed Culture and Arts Bill and believes that this Bill, developed through meaningful consultation with artists and the culture sector, would provide a lasting legislative foundation for supporting Scotland's creative industries, and calls for the Bill to be ambitious and inclusive of grassroots organisations and individuals."

15:25

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I declare an interest as a published author who is in receipt of what are usually very small sums in royalties. They were not always small sums, but the book has been out of print for a number of years—you can still buy it as an e-book on Amazon, so I would encourage members to look it up.

I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic to her brief. I think that this is the first debate that she has led on culture in that new role. We should also take a moment to reflect on the work that was done by her predecessor, Angus Robertson, who is no longer with us in the chamber. He had a strong personal interest in the arts, and the sector welcomed some of the successes that he was able to achieve, not least securing additional funding for the arts and, perhaps even more importantly, securing the multiyear funding settlement that many in the

sector had called for over many years and thought was absolutely essential.

That said, there were two significant failures on his part. The first, which I mentioned in my intervention on the cabinet secretary earlier, is the continued uncertainty around the funding for the national companies: Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the National Theatre of Scotland.

I have nothing but admiration for the work that is done by the national companies. They are genuine world leaders and tremendous ambassadors for Scotland, and the economic benefit that they bring to the country far outweighs the investment that goes into them in public funds. However, they seemed to be ignored by the previous cabinet secretary and not given the support that was required, and the funding that they received did not reflect the overall increases in the budget. I hope that, in her new role, the cabinet secretary will look seriously at the funding for the national companies.

I am sure that, over the summer, the cabinet secretary will have seen mention in the media of Scottish Ballet saying that it can no longer afford to take performances to Edinburgh, because the cost of the visitor levy that has been imposed by the City of Edinburgh Council means that it cannot accommodate its necessarily large company in Edinburgh to put on performances. That should be a serious worry for the cabinet secretary, because, if we cannot see our national company in Scotland's capital, that raises serious questions about the future of our cultural offer.

The other thing that we saw under the direction of the previous cabinet secretary was a crisis in the two Government agencies that fell under his remit—Creative Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland—with the crisis in HES continuing to this day. Barely a day goes by without yet more damaging revelations appearing in newspapers about failures in leadership and governance in HES. That is having a huge impact on the reputation of that organisation, on staff morale and on the ability of HES to deliver on its objectives. As for Creative Scotland, there were a number of well-publicised failures and weaknesses that the previous cabinet secretary failed to get a grip of, and those now need to be addressed.

I endorse much of what the cabinet secretary has said about the value of the culture and creative sectors to our economy. We only have to look at what happens in Edinburgh in the summer and at the world-leading reputation of the Edinburgh festivals to see an illustration of that. At the same time, it should concern us when we see the TV festival taking a decision to move away from Edinburgh, again because of the high costs of running activities in Scotland's capital. There is a danger that we become victims of our own success.

Màiri McAllan: In respect of Mr Fraser's comment on the TV festival, I hope that he will acknowledge that a great deal of work was done by the Government and other stakeholders to retain it. Moreover, I hope that he can welcome the fact that we were very fast in filling the space and confirming that there will be a replacement festival from next year.

Murdo Fraser: Indeed—I recognise that the Government tried hard, but we still need to reflect on the fact that we lost the TV festival in the first place because of the costs of maintaining it here in Edinburgh.

It is not only Edinburgh that benefits from festivals and events; we such benefits right across the country and throughout the year. In fact, the need to spread cultural success out from the central belt to all different parts of Scotland, including rural areas, throughout the year is important. We need employment to be supported in theatres, concert halls and music venues.

As David Kirkwood said, Scotland is increasingly becoming a location for film and television production, which is welcome, but it is curious, as we are talking about public service reform and rationalisation, that the Scottish Government has decided to make Screen Scotland a stand-alone agency, which seems to fly in the face of everything else that it is trying to do on reducing the number of quangos.

We recognise, as stated in our amendment and in the Government motion, the importance of the Gaelic and Scots languages and the relevance of public support in those areas. Scotland has a rich Gaelic culture, which is predominantly in but not restricted to the Highlands and Islands, and it is essential that that part of our heritage and culture is not lost.

I want to mention two important points that we make in our amendment. First, we must absolutely support the principle of the distribution of public funds being done at arm's length and not directly by Government. However, that needs to come with an absolute guarantee that there can be no political bias in the allocation of funding and that there can be no suggestion that public funding is being given to those whose political sympathies lie with the current Government.

Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: If have time, I will happily give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): We are tight for time, I am afraid, but on this occasion, okay.

Jamie Langan: Does Murdo Fraser share my concern that the proposed artists minimum income scheme could well be a taxpayer-funded nationalist agitprop fund?

Murdo Fraser: I thank Jamie Langan for that intervention. There is an old saying that he who pays the piper calls the tune, so perhaps we do need to be careful about those issues.

The other point I was going to make was about free speech. There was an extremely unfortunate incident last year, where a venue in Edinburgh, the Summerhall arts centre, issued an apology to artists for what it described as an oversight in booking the then Deputy First Minister, Kate Forbes, to speak at the venue. That is a perfect illustration of cancel culture in operation.

Kate Forbes is clearly not from my party, but nevertheless, she was a very senior figure in this Parliament—indeed, the second most senior figure in the Scottish Government. It is absolutely disgraceful for a venue that is in receipt of large sums of public funds to seek to restrict freedom of speech in that manner.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Is it really the case that, in defence of freedom of speech, Murdo Fraser is trying to tell independent culture venues who they should and should not book? Are they not free to make that decision for themselves?

Murdo Fraser: I say to Mr Harvie that if they want to stand on their own two feet financially, they can do what they like. If they are in receipt of taxpayer funds, they should stand up for freedom of speech and stop closing down debate.

I do not want public funds to come with many restrictions, but trying to restrict debate and stop free speech, even from people in the Scottish Government, with whom I have many disagreements, should not be permitted. We must protect freedom of speech, and I am sure that that view is widely supported across Scottish society. It is the point made in my amendment, which I am pleased to move.

I move amendment S7M-01304.4, to leave out from second "welcomes" to end and insert:

"believes that public support for culture and the arts should uphold freedom of expression and speech, and that decisions on public funding should be made at arm's length from government and be free from political interference; recognises the contribution that Gaelic and Scots language and culture make to enriching Scotland's society and economy, and supports collaboration across all of society to realise the full economic, cultural and social potential of Scotland's creative industries."

15:33

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): As we have heard this afternoon—I expect that we will hear it more over the course of the debate—Scotland's culture and creative industries deserve recognition. I therefore welcome the opportunity to speak to the cabinet secretary's motion.

I believe that we can find genuine consensus and shared ambition in the motion. The test, which I appreciate the cabinet secretary recognises, is whether the Government can ensure that support and opportunities reach the people and places that make Scotland creative. Our culture and creative industries provide livelihoods, but they are also so much more.

At a recent meeting of the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, I highlighted the submission from Culture Counts on public service reform. Its warning is a serious one: yes, culture can help to achieve better outcomes, but, when seen through the lens of preventative spending in particular, seeking savings in this sector would

"amount to little more than a rounding error against the total efficiencies sought, while inflicting further disproportionate damage for communities across Scotland".

That is an important warning, albeit that I recognise the commitment to spend within the culture brief.

I saw what was at stake during the summer, when I visited An Talla Solais in Ullapool, in my constituency. It works with schools and runs workshops for people with dementia and their carers, and it offers connection and purpose while enhancing wellbeing. The value of that work must be better recognised in the Scottish Government's public service reform agenda.

That question matters in particular in my Highland constituency, where geography can determine whether someone can attend a performance, learn a skill or pursue a creative career. Those challenges are borne out by the statistics. Liberal Democrat analysis of Creative Scotland awards covering April 2025 to March 2028 shows that Edinburgh received 300 times more spending per head than North Lanarkshire, which received just 49p per head. That is not an isolated example of people living outside our biggest cities feeling left behind.

In evidence to the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee most recently, the cabinet secretary stated her belief that

"everyone has an equal opportunity to get involved irrespective of background or where they live."

I welcome that commitment and I share that belief, which is why I press the Government to apply rural proofing to all aspects of Government spending,

including culture spend. I repeat that call today. I see that the Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education, Mr Smith, is in his place. I welcome him to his post and appreciate the constructive nature of our engagements to date, but I hope that he can address the issue of rural proofing in summing up.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP): Although I empathise with the member's overall point, would he agree that his reference to Edinburgh is somewhat out of context, given that Edinburgh hosts the biggest creative festival in the world? We have to protect and treasure that and not take it for granted.

David Green: I recognise that that one example can perhaps be complemented by many more, and I would be happy to put that in my summation, if the member sits in the chamber and waits for it.

I turn to the people at the heart of the debate: the artists, freelancers and small arts organisations themselves. I spoke recently to a small charity that had spent thousands of hours in preparing lengthy funding applications—time that it could have spent on delivering projects itself.

Accountability matters—there should be no disagreement on that—but applications to Creative Scotland should be proportionate. Clearer priorities and simpler processes, and a genuine voice for applicants, would make a difference. To that end, I welcome the Scottish Government's intention to consult on a culture bill during the current session of Parliament. However, I urge the Government to give a cast-iron guarantee that that bill will, at the very least, be print ready by the end of the session.

Turning to the amendment in my name, I believe that we need to bring games directly into the discussion about growing Scotland's creative economy. According to the UK-wide games trade body Ukie, the games industry contributes nearly £200 million annually to the Scottish economy and employs more than 2,000 full-time staff. However, although our games sector has high-profile success stories, the reality on the ground is incredibly challenging. Video game and digital media companies face a steep financial mountain during the initial start-up phase, long before a product is ready for market and, following Brexit in particular, our games businesses are losing access to vital funding streams.

We have seen those pressures reflected most recently in the closure of Axis Studios, resulting in more than 160 job losses, and mass redundancies at companies such as Build A Rocket Boy where more than 300 staff were cut.

Research by the University of Glasgow and the University of Stirling highlights why that is happening. The industry faces a severe deficit in business skills, a lack of dedicated funding and the absence of a central games hub or support body.

Patrick Harvie: I warmly welcome the Liberal Democrat amendment's drawing attention to the games sector. Does the member agree, however, that there is a strong overlap with some of the issues that we are raising around fair work? Even some of the profitable parts of the games sector have a serious hill to climb in providing fair work standards for the people who are producing very profitable content for them.

David Green: I agree with the member's point. That is why my party will support the Green amendment later this afternoon. Mr Harvie is right to say that there are big challenges in the gaming sector. We must celebrate the sector and support it, but that support must go hand in hand with action to address the challenges that Mr Harvie raises—we are on the same page in that regard.

To address all of those challenges, my colleague Neil Alexander has introduced proposals to establish a national games innovation centre alongside regional hubs—I put on record my thanks to him for that. That network would help to develop enterprise, drive research, embed fair work practices and deliver the critically important business skills that I have talked about. Crucially, I hope that, by providing low-cost office space, we can ensure that the growth from that industry can be spread out right across rural Scotland.

Let me be clear: the Liberal Democrats want culture to flourish throughout Scotland. We support the aspirations of the motion, while asking the Government to heed the concerns raised by Culture Counts and others with regard to how we can strengthen our communities and wellbeing alongside them. I know that the cabinet secretary recognises the need for that to happen. That is how we can use welcome words to make a lasting opportunity.

I move amendment S7M-01304.5, to insert at end:

"; notes that the games sector contributes around £200m annually to the Scottish economy, employs over 2,000 people and has produced internationally recognised success stories; considers, however, that there are opportunities to grow the sector further and better compete with other countries around Europe, and calls on the Scottish Government to unlock investment and growth in the games sector by establishing a national games innovation centre alongside regional hubs as a means of developing expertise, research, fair work, business skills and low-cost office space for start-up studios."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): We move to the open debate.

15:40

Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a sitting member of West Lothian Council and a former employee of the National Youth Choir of Scotland.

Culture is who we are. It is how we make sense of the world, and it is the story that we tell about ourselves to others. In Scotland, we are lucky to be part of a culture that is one of the most powerful and distinctive of any small nation.

As was mentioned, our culture is rooted in tradition. It is reinterpreted with each generation and layered with the history of our development as a nation. Some of Scotland's most important industries, from food and drink to tourism and textiles, are deeply woven within it, and people throughout the world cherish their enduring sense of Scottish identity—we have a diaspora of millions.

The tartan army's contribution to this year's world cup exemplifies Scotland's positive international image. It was a masterclass in soft power, which yielded tangible benefits from twinning arrangements with Boston to VisitScotland's projection of an increase of potentially up to £200 million extra in future visitor spending in Scotland.

The depth, diversity and international profile of Scottish culture mean that further investment in our creative economy will offer benefits that are far beyond purely economic ones. If we are serious about growing Scotland's creative economy, we must interpret that as an investment in people, place, wellbeing, fair work practices and international influence. Although the multiplier effects of investment in art and culture are well documented, economic growth is not an end in itself. Growth has a rate, but it also has a direction and we should be seeking to shape that direction.

That is why I welcome today's debate, particularly at the start of this parliamentary session, when we have the opportunity to rewire how we deliver outcomes for Scotland's citizens. As a member of both the Finance and Public Administration Committee and the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, I can see clearly the twin challenges that we face in supporting our creative sectors over the long term—maybe over centuries, as Q Manivannan suggested—while also addressing the immediate fiscal pressures that Scotland faces. However, this is not an either/or situation. That is why I welcome this Government's commitment to increasing investment in culture during the course of this session. It is refreshing to have a Government that recognises that support for culture is not separate from our economic ambitions but central to them.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government is focused on improving access to culture for people throughout Scotland, regardless of where they are from and their ability to pay. Our cities are world-class cultural centres, but we need to make sure that the opportunity to access culture is universal and that young people from all backgrounds can see a path into a sustainable career in the creative industries.

I grew up in West Lothian, 20 miles from Edinburgh and 30 miles from Glasgow. At that point in my life, those cities may as well have been 500 miles away, culturally. Even though I have been fortunate enough to build a career as a freelance musician, my route into music was local. I had a local music teacher and a supportive school music department with free instrumental tuition, there were bands that took me under their wing and a local ladies choir that gave me my first job, and there was a community who loved their music and have produced world-renowned artists such as The Snuts, Susan Boyle and Lewis Capaldi, not to mention world champions such as the Boghall and Bathgate pipe band and Whitburn brass band, one of the country's best brass bands. West Lothian truly punches above its weight.

Through measures such as free instrumental tuition, the rolling out of a national film and screen curriculum for all pupils—the first of its kind in the world—and plans to introduce a youth culture pass and to pilot the artists minimum income, the Scottish Government is truly broadening access to culture and the creative industries for the next generation.

Our grass-roots music venues are also part of developing that essential ecosystem. The excellent work of the Music Venue Trust reminds us that those venues are not only places to perform but vital cultural assets that nurture emerging talent, strengthen local economies and build the foundations for Scotland's wider music industry. There is a fantastic example of that in my constituency: Scotland's oldest rock club, DreadnoughtRock, to which it is well worth a night out—maybe I would suggest it for a Christmas night out.

I will give a local example of just how far £1 invested in our creative industry can travel. In an area of high deprivation in my constituency, the organisation Artlink has worked for many years alongside people who are experiencing enduring mental illness. Together with the community—including local asylum seekers—it has recently designed and built a community garden where people can come and grow, cook and eat together. It is also a place for creativity and expression. Last year, I attended a concert in that garden, organised by Artlink. It was the culmination of a project that brought together a researcher from the

University of Edinburgh and a historical archive of Ethiopian and Eritrean music held by the National Museum of Scotland, in collaboration with Ethiopian-Scottish musicians, which resulted in a performance that celebrated shared culture and heritage. A local small street food business owner cooked the food, which was supplied by a local family butcher. The local community took part in a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony. It was a joyful afternoon and a powerful example of how the arts can break down barriers and strengthen communities while contributing directly to the local economy.

The economist Mariana Mazzucato said:

"Economic frameworks too often struggle to value what matters most—preferring to measure value in terms of GDP, and not on how we live, belong and imagine collective futures".

In Scotland, we are showing that both options are possible.

15:46

Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP): The foundation of the creative economy is ordinary people having a small thought: "Perhaps I could do that." Sometimes, we can trace that thought back to a single moment. Alan Cumming has spoken about the impact on his life trajectory of Dundee Rep coming to Monikie primary school when he was eight years old. He went on from Carnoustie high school to Broadway and Hollywood, and he has now won three Emmy awards. That is what access to culture can do.

That is why I was particularly pleased to see the introduction in the programme for government of the youth culture pass—the cabinet secretary has also mentioned that. I lobbied for the introduction of the pass because young people's access to culture should never depend solely on their class or what their parents can afford. When money is tight, people spend it on the essentials. Trying something new or pursuing a passion can, too often, feel like money that someone cannot afford to spend. The aim of that policy is simple: to give young people the freedom to discover something that, otherwise, they might never encounter. Let them find the music that stops them in their tracks, the story that they cannot put down or the performance that they are still talking about all the way home. The message from this Parliament to young people should be, "Culture is for you, too, so go out and find what moves you."

That freedom to discover is not only good cultural policy; it is good economic policy. Before the theatre's curtain rises, someone has built the set, designed the lighting, rehearsed the music and sold the tickets. I know that it will come as a surprise to everyone in the chamber, but, in a previous life, I worked in theatre. Behind every performance is a whole team of people working to pull it together. For many people, that creativity can become their livelihood. The child who looks at the stage and watches the performance today might build that stage or tread the boards tomorrow. The teenager who goes to the gallery to see a masterpiece might paint the next masterpiece. We need to nurture places where talent can thrive.

At Hospitalfield house in Arbroath, artists have space and time to create in an environment that brims with inspiration. I welcome the fact that it has been awarded multiyear funding from Creative Scotland. For everyone from Patrick Allan Fraser in the 1800s to people who are just picking up a paintbrush today, Hospitalfield is at the centre of Angus's artistic economy and I am proud to represent it in the Parliament.

That brings me to two people who have made the arts and culture such a large part of my life—my grandparents, Alexander Melville, who was a Couper Angus farmhand, and Elizabeth McCarthy, who was a proud daughter of the city of Dundee. They balanced raising our family with professional careers, but creativity was a constant throughout.

In her 40s, Liz took herself off to art college at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design and dedicated much of the rest of her life to her true passion—painting. She spent a lot of time at Hospitalfield, including as an artist-in-residence, and one of her paintings now hangs in my office in Holyrood. I do not think she ever could have imagined that.

Sandy spent his time making things from wood in his garden shed, translating established poems into Scots and composing his own. I have fond memories of me, as a wee boy, sitting and listening to his Scots rendition of "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" and hearing him recite Violet Jacob's "The Wild Geese", vividly picturing that

"lang skein o beatin wings"

flying high above the Angus straths. That influence shaped my appreciation for the arts and my love for Scotland's varied linguistic landscape.

The point is that we can talk about the creative economy in terms of industry, jobs and economic value, but it is driven by ordinary people turning their passions into reality. I see that same spirit every year when I cross the Tay to visit the Pittenweem arts festival. For a week, homes, studios, gardens, garages and halls across the village become places for people to show what they have made and to engage in the arts.

It is a shame that Willie Rennie is not here, because I am sure that he would agree with me that places such as Pittenweem and Angus, whose

festival of makers brings people together around the joy of making, are essential to the grass roots of Scotland's creative economy.

Let me take this opportunity to agree with something that David Green and Murdo Fraser said. If we are to grow our creative economy further, we need to back up-and-coming creatives with the direct funding that enables them to thrive and, indeed, to tilt the funding towards people outside the central belt—particularly those from rural and working-class communities. I hope that we can take that forward.

Sustaining the grass-roots creative economy in the long term will also mean giving young people the chance to pursue the arts, no matter what background they come from. I was glad that the Scottish Government removed school instrumental music tuition fees and that it ended curriculum charges for art materials and required drama trips. Since music tuition fees were abolished, participation has risen by almost 30,000 pupils, which means that more young people now have the chance to pursue their talent at no cost. Surely that is a welcome outcome for all of us. I very much look forward to seeing how the youth culture pass and, indeed, the artists minimum income pilot build on that progress.

Some of the most important Scottish culture of the next 20 years will be made by people whose names none of us know today. They will tell stories that we have not heard, challenge our tastes and make things that we would never have thought to commission. That is good, because a creative country should continually surprise itself.

When a young person encounters something today and thinks, "Maybe I could do that," let us give them the chance to find out.

15:53

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): I welcome this opportunity to debate Scotland's creative economy, and I am pleased that the Government's motion recognises the significant contribution that is made by Scotland's languages—Gaelic, in particular.

Last year, we saw Police Constable Kat Crichton played by the talented Sorcha Grounsell as she took to our screens in "An t-Eilean", which has a gripping storyline, top-class acting and the stunning scenery of the Isle of Harris. If members have not seen it, I suggest that they catch up before season 2 comes out, next year.

That was a watershed moment for Gaelic broadcasting, with "An t-Eilean" billed as the first ever high-end Gaelic language drama, representing a significant investment, with a £1 million budget for each of the four episodes. It brought Gaelic TV to a wider audience, showed what can be achieved creatively and also showcased the language, culture and place to the world.

Since its launch, the BBC Alba channel has gone from strength to strength, with documentaries, dramas and very popular current affairs and news programmes becoming staples. BBC Alba recently secured the rights to broadcast matches from Italy's serie A, and its programmes have continued to win awards, including "Somhairle Spins", which, in 2026, won the Prix CIRCOM award for most innovative and original TV show in European regional television. It is a good example of how MG Alba is embracing the shift to digital content and linking that back with its more traditional output.

Màiri McAllan: I welcome Mr MacKinnon's advocacy for MG Alba and for Gaelic language programming. Does he agree with me that the disparity between the BBC's investment in Welsh-language broadcasting and its investment in Gaelic broadcasting is very much out of kilter, and would he call for those investments to be equalised?

Donald MacKinnon: I agree, and I will come to that later in my speech.

In addition to the success of BBC Alba, Gaelic TV has a great economic story to tell. MG Alba supports 340 full-time equivalent jobs, with half of those in the Highlands and Islands, and it generates an estimated £18.2 million in gross value added to the economy. A report by Ernst & Young found that MG Alba would amplify the value of any investment by 137 per cent.

However, the sector is not without its challenges. When BBC Alba launched, in 2008, original programming sat at 40 per cent of its output, but that figure is now as low as 22 per cent. The MG Alba annual report welcomes Scottish Government support, which provided greater certainty for the year ahead, but it notes that long-term funding is essential if Gaelic media are to continue investing in new content, talent development and digital innovation.

That ask is one not only for the Scottish Government. As the cabinet secretary pointed out, there is a strong case to be made for the BBC providing additional funding to MG Alba, and she is also right to raise the issue of Welsh TV receiving additional funding. I encourage the cabinet secretary to continue making that case to the UK Government as it considers the renewal of the BBC's charter. I fully support her aims and would be happy to work with her on that.

The economic opportunity that Gaelic represents goes well beyond television. There are

opportunities for Gaelic in the wider creative sector, the arts and the growing traditional music sector. One example of that is the Hebridean Celtic Festival in my constituency, which last year provided a £4.4 million boost to the local economy. Festivals such as HebCelt and EDF, in Benbecula, are grounded in the Gaelic language and culture and are tremendous assets to our islands and to Scotland. In addition, next month, the Royal National Mòd, which is a fantastic showcase of Gaelic culture, will return to Glasgow.

If we want to keep seeing Gaelic delivering all those economic benefits to the creative sector, we must invest in it as a community language and ensure that it continues to be spoken. That means ensuring that opportunities for Gaelic-medium education are widely available and that community groups, particularly in the heartlands, are supported to continue their amazing work to keep the language thriving. That will remain key to realising the economic potential of Gaelic.

Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD): Will the member accept an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member has concluded his speech and will, unfortunately, not be able to take an intervention.

15:58

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): This summer, I attended the Edinburgh deaf festival at Deaf Action, and that is a useful place for me to start my speech about growing Scotland's creative economy. The festival had art, comedy, theatre, film, exhibitions, workshops and storytelling, with around 2,000 people visiting over a few days. I specifically mention that because the Government motion talks about artists, festivals, creative careers, community cohesion, wellbeing and the contribution that our languages make to Scottish culture, and the deaf festival has all those things.

We have a habit of putting BSL into a slightly different box. We talk about it mainly in terms of access, asking whether a deaf person can access a performance or whether there will be an interpreter. Those things do matter enormously, but BSL is not just the means by which a deaf person accesses someone else's culture. BSL has a culture of its own, and I have probably always understood that because, as members know, my dad is deaf and BSL has been part of my life from childhood.

My dad is a historian and has contributed to a book recording deaf history in the north-east of Scotland, so the deaf history archive at Deaf Action particularly interested me because Deaf Action itself has quite a history. Walter Geikie was a deaf Edinburgh artist whose artwork recorded simple everyday life in the city in the early 1800s. He was also an important figure in the deaf community and helped to found the organisation that eventually became Deaf Action. Nearly 200 years later, deaf artists are still coming together through that organisation to tell stories, make people laugh, make films, perform and create. That thread matters, because identity and language carry history, humour, expression and stories through time.

Our BSL national plan recognises that BSL and deaf culture are intertwined and that BSL users should be able to enjoy and contribute to culture as participants, audience members and professionals. There is also a cultural rights dimension that we do not recognise enough. Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture, and the opportunity to develop creative and artistic potential for the enrichment of society. Cultural rights are not just about access; they are about being able to create, contribute and have your own culture recognised.

That takes us straight back to the creative economy. In Banff, in my constituency, we have Sandra Duguid, a deaf filmmaker. Her award-winning film—I will not start a fight between the north-easters—"Rowies v Butteries SAGA!" used BSL as its primary language with captions in English and Doric. I will not give my opinion on rowies versus butteries for fear of dividing my constituency. I love that example because it shows that we do not have to put Scotland's languages into separate boxes. Just as the motion rightly recognises Gaelic and Scots language and culture, Sandra's work shows BSL, Doric, film and deaf identity sitting together in something rooted in the north-east.

Now, that is a creative product. It is also somebody's work. We talk about growing the creative economy, but the people creating that work have to be able to build sustainable careers from it. Scotland's creative industries already contribute more than £5.7 billion a year and employ more than 90,000 people. I am glad that the programme for government includes a Scottish artists minimum income pilot alongside increased cultural investment and work on creative career pathways.

The pounds matter, but they are not the only return on investment that we should recognise. At the deaf festival, people were laughing together, learning together and sharing a language and culture. For communities where isolation can be very real, that means everything—it means living a life.

The Scottish household survey found that almost half of adults said culture and the arts made a positive difference to their lives. Among them, 39 per cent cited improved mental health and wellbeing so, when we talk about a wellbeing economy, there is a legitimate question about whether we measure all of the value that culture creates. A person being less isolated and finding somewhere that they belong matters deeply to a healthy economy. Those things are harder to attach a pound sign to, but they still produce a real return for society. Therefore, I am heartened that the motion mentions not only the economic potential of Scotland's creative industries but their economic, cultural and social potential.

When we think about BSL within that, I would like us to get beyond asking only whether deaf people can access what everyone else is doing. We should also ask whether deaf creative artists have the same opportunities to create, lead, earn, tell their own stories and pass their culture on. BSL and deaf culture are not at the edges of Scotland's creative life; they are already part of it. Recognising that is exactly what realising the full economic, cultural and social potential of Scotland's creative industries should mean.

16:04

Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in support of the Scottish Government motion, which rightly recognises the significant contribution that Scotland's culture and creative sectors make to our nation's economy, our communities and our international reputation. Those sectors do far more than provide entertainment. They support employment across every part of Scotland. They drive innovation, develop skills and help to build the confidence and identity of all our people, new Scots and old. They showcase Scottish creativity at home and abroad and they form an essential part of who we are as a nation.

In my constituency of East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs, we see that contribution with particular clarity through two outstanding festivals: Fringe by the Sea in North Berwick and the Lammermuir festival.

Fringe by the Sea has grown into one of Scotland's most successful multi-arts festivals. Each summer, it transforms our beautiful coastal town of North Berwick into a vibrant hub of music, comedy, conversation, film and, of course, family entertainment. Held at the same time as the Edinburgh festival, it has, in recent years, attracted well over 100,000 visitors and delivered economic impacts for the local economy, which have risen from around £11 million, initially, to a record £12.7 million. It supports tourism-related jobs; fills our cafes, restaurants, galleries and shops; and encourages people to explore our beaches, harbours and museums. Many of those visitors are new to East Lothian, and a high proportion say that they will return.

Fringe by the Sea demonstrates how a well-supported festival can generate substantial economic value while enriching community life and raising the profile of our area.

Although different in character, the Lammermuir festival offers something equally special. For nearly two weeks each September, it brings world-class classical musicians to East Lothian's historic churches, halls and landscapes, from Haddington and Dunbar to Whitekirk and beyond. Beautiful music is matched with beautiful places, creating performances that feel both intimate and ambitious. The festival attracts audiences from across Scotland and further afield, while giving local people the opportunity to experience outstanding music making on their doorstep. It also strengthens community pride, supports local venues and businesses, and showcases the unique cultural and architectural heritage of our county.

Fringe by the Sea and the Lammermuir festival illustrate many of the points that are made in the motion.

Scotland's artists, creative businesses, cultural organisations and screen sector continually punch above their weight. The public investment that is provided through Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government's expanded festivals funding makes a tangible difference on the ground in East Lothian.

The commitment to establish Screen Scotland as a distinct public body is particularly welcome. It recognises the sector's clear potential for growth and the significant benefits that inward investment and strong domestic production bring to the Scottish economy.

As has been touched on, we must also recognise the value of the public service broadcasting ecosystem to the wider screen sector. Broadcasters have important obligations to Scottish audiences and to our creative industries. Meeting those obligations helps to sustain the talent pipeline, supports production and ensures that Scottish stories continue to be told on screen, as Donald MacKinnon mentioned.

Equally important is ensuring that creative career pathways are accessible and sustainable for people from all backgrounds. Talent exists in every community, from our coastal towns and rural villages to our urban centres. We must continue to break down barriers so that opportunity is not limited by background, geography or circumstance.

Culture and creativity also play a vital role in strengthening community cohesion and improving wellbeing. Festivals such as Fringe by the Sea and the Lammermuir festival do not simply fill venues. They bring people together, create shared experiences, foster a sense of place and help to make our communities more vibrant and connected. In an often-challenging world, that social value is every bit as important as the economic return.

I welcome the Scottish Government's ongoing efforts and increased investment in supporting growth in the creative economy and developing opportunities for creative workers and businesses. I also recognise the unique and welcome contribution that Gaelic and Scots language and culture make to enriching Scotland's society and economy. Continued support for them is essential to the diversity and depth of our national culture.

Scotland's creative industries possess enormous economic, cultural and social potential. Fully realising that potential requires sustained collaboration across Government, public bodies, broadcasters, local authorities, communities and the sector itself.

In East Lothian, we are proud of Fringe by the Sea and the Lammermuir festival. They show what is possible when creativity is properly nurtured and supported. Let us all continue to celebrate and invest in Scotland's culture and creative sectors so that they can thrive for the benefit of all our people and for the reputation of Scotland on the world stage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We have some time in hand. I call Ben Macpherson, who will be the final speaker in the open debate.

16:09

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP): Expressing ourselves is central to the human spirit, as many members have said. It is also how we make our shared connections. It has been, and will continue to be, central to our progress. It is nourishing both to the individual and to our wider society.

The importance of our creative industries could not be clearer to me, as the son of a designer and the sibling of an artist, and as the proud constituency MSP for an area that is pivotal to our cultural success and story. It is great to have this opportunity to discuss that in the chamber.

We know the social value of the creative industries and cultural expression. For example, in Leith, we currently have on display the knife angel statue, made by Alfie Bradley. The sculpture, made from hundreds of knives, is helping our community to think collectively about the risks and consequences of violence—it is having that effect. Indeed, the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice visited it today.

The way that the Proclaimers' "Sunshine on Leith" echoes around Easter Road stadium could surely move even the most ardent Hearts supporter. In parts of my constituency, we are now seeing the phenomenon of shanty creating and singing by groups of all sorts of individuals coming together to express their admiration for the bridges on the Forth. The cabinet secretary and I gathered with hundreds of Leithers, including new Leithers, to recognise the cultural contribution of "Trainspotting" in the magnificent Leith theatre during its journey to full restoration. Cabinet secretary, we would love to welcome you back to Leith theatre at some point—I hope that it will be sooner rather than later.

Small businesses in my constituency—such as the Out of the Blue drill hall, Custom Lane and St Margaret's house, which is not too far from me—and initiatives such as Abbeyhill colonies residents opening up their houses to the colony of artists festival, which took place at the weekend, feature among the individual events and aspects of what happens in my constituency that surely make Leith the standout candidate for the UK town of culture designation.

The nourishment that all of that brings to our communities—and we could say the same for so many other parts of Scotland, as other members have expressed—is underlined by the economic value of our cultural industries, which is what we are talking about today.

It is good to hear that the importance of the film and TV sector has been emphasised. We have FirstStage Studios in Leith. In recognising the importance of public broadcasting, as the motion articulates, let us not underestimate the impact of attracting the big streaming companies to our country, which we have seen happening with "Outlander" and "Dept Q", the second series of which is being filmed here in our capital city. Because of all that, I welcome the Government's move to make Screen Scotland a distinct public body. That is an important aspect of public sector reform, not just because of what it does but because it creates an opportunity to make Creative Scotland even more impactful and beneficial. At the moment, many organisations sit between the grant-making power of Creative Scotland and the economic support of Scottish Enterprise and the other enterprise agencies. We have an opportunity to fix that.

Adam Harley: The member speaks powerfully about the importance of engaging some of the big streaming platforms and bringing them to

Scotland. Creative Scotland has an important role in welcoming and encouraging home-grown artists. At the minute, the process to get funding from Creative Scotland is very arduous and, at times, it is unduly bureaucratic. Does the member agree that something needs to be done to make it easier for people, especially smaller home-grown artists, to apply for funding?

Ben Macpherson: Others have spoken in the debate about the progress made by the previous cabinet secretary towards multiyear funding and increased funding, but public sector reform and the changes with Screen Scotland provide an impactful opportunity to build on the good work of those who have been working at Creative Scotland up to this point, and to change the organisation to make it even more effective in supporting artists and continuing to grow our creative economy. We need to be able to help our creative industries to be even more commercially successful, while taking account of considerations about grant making.

Talking about economic impact, this summer we experienced the world cup—a massive event. Every year in this capital city, we have nearly the equivalent of that in the form of the Edinburgh festivals—they are the golden goose that we cannot take for granted. As we move into their 80th year, let us think about the fact that, in exchange for around £12 million of public investment, as reported by Brian Ferguson in *The Herald*,

"economic impact research … found the annual showpieces were worth £852m for the national economy."

Yes, we need to spread the investment, and, yes, there are issues about participation and accessibility, but we cannot take the Edinburgh festivals—or, indeed, Edinburgh's Hogmanay—for granted.

Murdo Fraser: I absolutely agree with what Ben Macpherson said about the value of the Edinburgh festivals, but I wonder whether he shares my concern about the announcement from Scottish Ballet that it can no longer afford to take performances to Edinburgh because of the associated costs.

Ben Macpherson: Whether it concerns our Edinburgh summer festivals, Edinburgh's Hogmanay or considerations around the city's growing attraction of tourists, we can see that we are at an important juncture. We have had the introduction of the visitor levy legislation, which I strongly supported, and the changes in short-term letting.

However, there are questions about affordability for those who are coming to perform, so we need to ensure that, during our tenure, we are careful of national bodies being able to perform in our capital city and, crucially, at our festivals. I am grateful for help in teeing up this ask—or suggestion—for the Government. I think that this period of autumn, between the summer and winter festivals, would be a really apt time to bring the Edinburgh festivals and key stakeholders together to consider the challenges and possible solutions. I ask the Government to take that request, and perhaps the minister could respond to that in his summing up.

People do not have to come here from all over the world. They spend a lot of money to be here to perform—thousands of pounds, in many instances—and it is not a given that visitors will come. We have had the Edinburgh international festival since Rudolf Bing created it in 1947; it is special and it allows the flowing of the human spirit, so let us treasure it and make sure that we look after it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We move to closing speeches. We have time in hand, so front-bench members can be generous in taking interventions.

16:17

David Green: There has been a lot of consensus in the course of this afternoon's debate, which I certainly welcome. There was also some helpful and constructive advice, which I will touch on as I summate this evening.

Katherine Sangster made a strong case for college funding. I recognise that, if we compare the level of such funding in 2024 with where it was in 2007, it was 5 per cent lower in real terms. We feel that particularly within the culture brief that we are discussing this afternoon, but also across the board. That was a point well made.

I welcome the Greens' amendment, particularly the expertise that Q Manivannan has brought to the debate and the wider context ahead of it. I recognise the work that they did on the round-table meeting.

Murdo Fraser managed to find a good deal of consensus, particularly on multiyear funding, which I also welcome. However, he was right to highlight some of the challenges, particularly with Historic Environment Scotland. That is a long journey that we need to learn from and continue to make progress on.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I refer David Green to a comment in his opening speech when he spoke of expenditure in Edinburgh being around 300 times the level that it is in North Lanarkshire, with North Lanarkshire getting 39p per head. The level of expenditure in Clackmannanshire is zero—nothing—from Creative Scotland. That cannot be a healthy situation.

I entirely agree with what has been said about the Edinburgh festival. I am from Edinburgh and have been going to it all my life. I went there this year. I have sung “Sunshine on Leith” in Leith on many occasions, and once at Hampden, as Murdo Fraser will remember. I am very supportive of the festival—it is a true gem—but other parts of Scotland also have a human spirit and deserve support, too.

David Green: That was a point well put. I said to Ben Macpherson that, if he were to stay in the chamber until my summation, I was sure that I would find him some more statistics. I also put on record my recognition of his time in ministerial office. It is great to hear him speak again, if now from the back benches, and I look forward to working with him.

Glasgow gets 110 times more spend than West Lothian. I am sure that Lloyd Melville would disagree that Dundee has more cultural value than Angus, yet there is a disparity between those areas as well. It is a well-made point, but of course there will be a skew when it comes to the context of Edinburgh.

I welcome the contribution of Karen Adam, who spoke powerfully about BSL. I also welcome her underpinning of the issue of wellbeing, which is fundamentally important to the wider contribution that the culture sector can make for us.

Deputy Presiding Officer, I recognise that you are giving us a bit of time back, but I will come to a close by making a couple more points.

The first is on the BBC and Gaelic. I welcome the cabinet secretary’s remarks in that regard. Nonetheless, I think that there is still more that she can do across her wider brief, on revamping teacher bursaries to encourage more teachers into that space. I also want to put on the record that I am quite concerned about the potential cuts to the BBC. I am fearful that they might look similar to the cuts that we saw to STV North, on which Jack Middleton spoke powerfully in one of his first contributions in the Parliament. Any loss of local news gathering across the BBC will be to the detriment of the Parliament’s accountability and the opportunities for journalists to experience and grow in that field. We need to be keenly aware of that.

I recognise that there is a lot of consensus on these issues, which I welcome. I appreciate members’ support for my amendment, and I look forward to working with the Government.

16:21

Murdo Fraser: This has been a really good debate, with a high degree of consensus across the chamber. I would like to reflect on a number of the contributions that we have heard and to look at the various amendments.

Katherine Sangster talked about the importance of the cultural sector to the economy. The Labour amendment refers to that and to the relatively slow growth in the creative sector in Scotland compared with other parts of the UK. That is an important message that we need to listen to. That amendment also addresses the crucial issue of skills, which ties very much into a broader agenda of support for colleges and apprenticeships, and it addresses how we ensure that funding comes through to support the sectors of the economy that will have the greatest value for the future. We will support the Labour amendment.

David Kirkwood, for Reform UK, gave us a history lesson covering different aspects of Scottish history going back to the 17th century. He was right to make some good points about Scotland as a location for film and TV production, which is one of our great strengths.

In an unusual development, I found myself in agreement with Q Manivannan and with his amendment. He also made important points in that respect. Both Q Manivannan and I have expressed support for a culture bill, which I hope the Scottish Government will consider.

I believe that one of the most useful things that could be done for the culture sector is to provide security around multiyear funding. That kind of funding has now been established by the Scottish Government, but we would like to see it put on a statutory basis. It is not just the arts that need multiyear funding—various other sectors, including the third sector, would like it too—but perhaps if there were a culture bill, we could start discussing multiyear funding for the arts at least.

David Green made a good speech on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, and we will also support his amendment. It highlights the games sector, which is such an important part of the Scottish economy. Scotland is a world leader in the games sector. It has a hugely important economic and employment footprint; we can see that by looking across the road from Parliament at Rockstar North, which employs hundreds of people in Edinburgh. That footprint is found across the country, in Dundee, Glasgow and elsewhere. The notion of a dedicated games hub is a very interesting concept that I would like to hear more about. We are happy to support the amendment that the Liberal Democrats have lodged.

The cabinet secretary and others talked quite a bit about public sector broadcasting. I agree with what the cabinet secretary said about the BBC’s spend in Scotland; she made a very fair point. The BBC is currently facing the prospect of charter renewal. It knows that that is coming down the

track, so it has to make the case for why charter renewal should be supported.

The BBC is unique in being funded by a licence fee that we must all pay, unlike a subscription model where we have a choice and go to different channels. If, being funded in that unique way, the BBC wants to justify its future existence, it needs to make that case. Therefore, I think that the Government is absolutely right to press the BBC very hard on the investment in Scotland.

I also agree completely with the cabinet secretary's point about the broadcasting of the Commonwealth games. At home, we watched a lot of the games, because we have Premier Sports—whose coverage was not as good as it might have been, I have to say. It is incredibly disappointing that the games did not feature on the BBC; by comparison, it covers big sports events and is an exemplar in its coverage of the Olympics, with the BBC Olympics programmes.

We really enjoyed watching the Commonwealth games in our house—religiously, pretty much every night over the summer when they were on. However, people in large parts of Scotland were oblivious to their taking place, unless those people were going to the events or living in and around Glasgow, because the games did not feature on live broadcasts in the way that other sporting events such as the Olympic games or the football world cup might have. That is a significant point. Events such as the Commonwealth games should be on terrestrial TV, and the BBC should be pressured to ensure that it is not being outbid by commercial broadcasters in that respect.

Donald MacKinnon made very good points about Gaelic broadcasting on BBC Alba. I was watching BBC Alba on Saturday because my nephew, who is a much better shinty player than I ever was, was playing for Newtonmore in the Camanachd cup final. BBC Alba does great work bringing events such as that to the world—so, well done, BBC Alba.

Although I rarely watch the BBC Scotland channel, I looked at some of the viewing figures for it and wondered how much it can be justified, given the amount of money that it is spending relative to the return. However, we could continue to have those discussions.

Lloyd Melville made a thoughtful and personal speech, which I thought was excellent, in which he reflected on several issues in relation to his family experience. He and other members raised the issue of a minimum income for artists. I have been trying to get more detailed information on the matter, and all that I can find—the cabinet secretary is welcome to intervene if she can give more detail—is that the Scottish Government has said that there will be a pilot scheme, not by the end of this parliamentary term but by the end of this Parliament. That sounds to me a bit like a headline waiting for a policy instead of anything that is being worked out in any detail.

I have looked a bit at the Irish scheme. It provides 2,000 professional artists with €325 per week for three years, and recipients are selected through an anonymised, random process. If the Scottish Government is to go down that route, we need to understand a bit better how exactly the scheme will operate, who will be classed as an artist and whether there will be a quality threshold with regard to who comes forward. Although I do not necessarily share David Kirkwood's view that that will make us like the USSR, I am a bit concerned about what it will mean for artistic freedom if artists are paid for by the state. If we are to go down that route, more detail around the scheme would be welcome.

I will make one more point, Presiding Officer, if I have time. We need to ensure that the infrastructure is there to support creativity and culture across Scotland. Recently, several music venues across the country have been threatened with closure because of very large increases in business rates. Clubs, music venues and hospitality businesses are all hit by the same collective burden—the costs of staff, national insurance and energy, as well as business rates, are going up. Too many venues are closing. If we are going to have a vibrant culture sector, we will have to preserve the facilities and the infrastructure.

We agree on much, and if we perhaps get a culture bill, as some of us would like to have happen, we could get the sector on a stronger and more secure footing for the future.

16:29

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): There should be a lot of common ground in this debate. Members have celebrated the creativity of the diverse communities that we all represent. Across political parties, there is support for the rising trajectory in culture spending and for the return to multiyear funding, and a recognition that Scotland has a great story to tell and huge potential for more success in culture and creativity in our communities.

The motion frames a lot of the issue in economic terms, and that is important, but access to culture in our communities is about far more than that. It is critical for our health and wellbeing; for resilient, cohesive communities; for ensuring that the values of equality and diversity are advanced in our society for the benefit of everyone; for addressing the challenges of our age, including the climate emergency or the legacy of colonialism; and for

opposing the rise of modern forms of exploitation and inequality. All those aspects are benefited by a vibrant and healthy culture sector.

We have a lot of sympathy with some of what is in the Labour amendment, particularly around skills. I am not sure that I support the narrow approach to measuring economic value, and I am not sure that that would have the support of many in our culture community. The emphasis on the enterprise agencies instead of Creative Scotland seems like an odd choice to me. We will abstain on the Labour amendment.

The Conservative amendment, perhaps predictably, was a disappointing attempt to turn a debate about the culture economy into a debate about the culture war. I think that most of us would recognise that, when it comes to political interference, it is the right that is the most significant threat, seeking to further marginalise minority voices and routinely attacking the values of equality, diversity and inclusion, including in the culture sector—people who pretend to stand for freedom of speech then back book-ban campaigns because they are horrified that queer young people might see books in their libraries that are relevant to their lives.

I very much welcome the Lib Dem amendment, as I said earlier in an intervention. I am convinced, as I think David Green is, that there is much more that the Government and our national culture agency can do to achieve even more success in the games sector. I am pleased that there seems to be cross-party support for that as well, and I am glad that the Government will be accepting that amendment.

As we have also seen, there are significant problems in relation to fair work, even at the high end of the games industry. A business that was mentioned in this debate and that is just across the road from the Parliament, which is producing what is expected to be the most expensive entertainment product in all of human history, is subject to very serious allegations by former employees. If we are not seeing fair work principles being confidently achieved in one of the most profitable parts of the culture economy, we must acknowledge how far we have to go until they are achieved throughout the rest of the sector.

Fair work is the core part of the Green amendment. The Scottish Government and Creative Scotland have recognised that challenge and how far we have to go. That is why the independent culture fair work task force was brought together. It reported with its recommendations nearly 10 months ago. Even with an election having taken place this year, that should be more than enough time for a clear implementation plan and for momentum to be brought to that challenge, both by the Government and by Creative Scotland. I hope that we will hear something in the minister's closing speech about a timeline for implementation and when we will hear an update.

This is about a fair and just approach to culture, and about making sure that we all have access to culture and to opportunities in the creative economy, which should not be available only to those who come from wealthier backgrounds. It is also about achieving the ecosystem that we need for a thriving culture scene in every community. The Musicians Union briefing tells us that the first UK-wide census of musicians, involving almost 6,000 people, showed that 43 per cent were earning less than £14,000 from music. An average annual income from music work is only just a little over £20,000.

I am certain that similar experiences would be found across the creative industries. Although the corporate owners of highly profitable creative intellectual property might well be raking it in, the creative workers are not. The success of Scotland's creative economy tomorrow depends on the band that is trying to get its first gig today, the game design and coding that are being done at home and the writing that someone is doing on their phone in snatched moments between shifts on a minimum-wage retail job. It depends on a hundred different skills, trades and professions for which work is precarious, short term, insecure and unpredictable, and for which first career opportunities are hard to come by. A huge amount of work is needed to achieve fair work in the creative economy, and the Government must come forward with an update.

As a Glasgow member, I cannot finish my speech without acknowledging that, as well as fair working conditions, our creative economy and creative communities need spaces for their work. Those spaces have been vulnerable in recent years. Some have been lost already and others remain under imminent threat. I am sure that that is true right across the country and in constituencies that we all represent, but it is certainly true in Glasgow.

The extraordinary campaigning that took place to save Trongate 103 was inspiring, but it should not have been necessary, and the people who are now campaigning to prevent the loss of the former Centre for Contemporary Arts building at 350 Sauchiehall Street should not be having to take that action, either. I am old enough to remember the CCA as the Third Eye Centre and, when the Scottish Arts Council decided to acquire that building and make it an asset for our communities for half a century, that showed ambition and foresight.

If Creative Scotland no longer has the ambition to be a provider of such cultural spaces, I regret that, but I can accept it as long as the building remains in public hands. I ask that Creative Scotland and the cabinet secretary acknowledge that there will be great anger if the process that is under way results in the privatisation of that public asset, and I ask them, again, to rule that out.

16:36

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): I say to Patrick Harvie that I am not into banning books—not even Murdo Fraser's book.

We have reached quite a good level of consensus across the chamber in talking about Scotland's creative economy. We have one of the most remarkable collections of talent anywhere in the world, which includes the artists whose work fills our galleries; the playwrights and performers who make Scottish theatre a force far beyond our borders; the designers and architects whose ideas shape how we live; the fashion houses whose textiles and craftsmanship are recognised around the world; the musicians who define our cultural identity; the film-makers, whom members have talked about; and the animators, digital creators and games companies who carry Scotland's stories on to global platforms. Creativity in Scotland is not a niche interest; it is a national inheritance, and we have all agreed how important it is to our creative economy.

Despite having all that brilliance, we must still build a system that is truly an economic engine and not a system that treats creativity as a sideshow. It would be a fundamental problem if it were waiting politely for permission to grow. Scotland produces world-class creative work across every discipline, but the governance around it does not always work as it could, and we see uneven consequences.

We have successes in Screen Scotland and in the gross value added that we get from festivals and TV shows such as "The Traitors". On the other hand, some cultural and heritage sites face ongoing funding crises, which disrupt the lives of staff and visitors and even local economies. In addition, some grass-roots spaces and local cultural centres are experiencing death by cuts. It is clear that a reliance on handouts rather than true investment and a hand up is causing opportunities to slip away for many. We need infrastructure, confidence and an investment model across an even surface.

We do not want the sector to contract. We recognise its economic value. We do not want jobs to be lost, and we do not want Scotland's global brand to fade.

One area where stagnation has originated is the labyrinth of processes for artists and organisations trying to access funding. Take Creative Scotland—whatever its intentions, it has become a symbol of a system that is slow, opaque and structurally incapable of supporting a modern creative economy. We have seen funding rounds paused without warning, organisations left in limbo for months, decisions that make no commercial sense and a model that rewards survival rather than ambition. It is not malicious, but it is miles behind where Scotland needs it to be.

Creative Scotland operates a charity-style approach that keeps creators dependent, venues fragile and organisations trapped in cycles of short-term grants. That is not how to grow an economy. The creative economy could be an engine of growth if we invested strategically, not with a scattergun grant system. With targeted, commercially literate investment, we could generate an even greater return.

Innovation is often seen as a sideline—it is seen as being over there on a spreadsheet—but countries such as Finland weave creativity into innovation, education, manufacturing, exports and digital technology. They create creativity as part of their national operating system. They build ecosystems, not application portals. They protect copyright and intellectual property rather than giving it away. JM Barrie gave the "Peter Pan" IP rights to Great Ormond Street hospital, which generated great success in terms of royalties. We could look at that as a possible model.

We need to see creators as entrepreneurs, not applicants. The result would be a creative economy that could scale even further, driving exports and fuelling national confidence. Other countries such as South Korea have models that have built a global cultural powerhouse by treating creativity as a strategic export. In Denmark, design thinking is integrated into manufacturing and technology. Canada invests in creative tech clusters that generate billions. Those nations understand that creativity is not ornamental; it is industrial. Scotland could do the same with a transparent, predictable and commercially literate governance model.

We need a structure of investment bodies that understand growth and not just grant distribution. We need to support creators not only as artists, but as entrepreneurs and people who can build a business, perhaps not in the traditional sense but in a new, creative way, while retaining equity in the ideas that they produce. We need innovation clusters, public-private partnerships and creative tech hubs, and we need a system that encourages risk, experimentation and ambition.

We know, as we have heard in the debate, that creativity touches everything. It can drive tourism, strengthen manufacturing through design and

textiles and fuel digital innovation through gaming, animation and immersive technology. It can also enhance wellbeing and community cohesion, as we have heard. We must build a Scotland that has a strong international brand, based on a strong, creative economy.

16:43

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to sum up the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour. It has been a consensual debate. I was struck by what Patrick Harvie said in his closing speech about how we find the balance between the creative economy and the economy, because culture is so much more than just GVA.

A lot of today's debate has been in that liminal space between the two. The debate has recognised the huge economic benefit that events such as the Edinburgh festivals and many other cultural events bring to our economy, but culture is much more than that. It has been wonderful to hear from many speakers in the debate about that. My colleague Katherine Sangster touched on it when she said that the creative sector does not fall neatly into the public sector or the private sector; it sits between and across the two.

David Kirkwood had us back in the USSR, with talk of apparatchiks, although I do not quite see the cabinet secretary brandishing her hammer and sickle just yet. Q Manivannan spoke well about the value of culture and recognising the value of something far past the time when it was made. Years ago, I visited the home of Paul Cézanne in the south of France. He spent much of his life in obscurity, painting in the Provence countryside, and his work had only begun to be recognised when he died of pneumonia in 1906. Stories like that speak to the fact that the value of culture goes far beyond the time in which it is made.

Speaking of struggling artists, erstwhile author Murdo Fraser rightly raised the significant challenges that exist in Creative Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland. Addressing some of those administrative and often bureaucratic challenges is important so that those public bodies can channel and support cultural activity in the best way possible.

Like any good Liberal Democrat, David Green made sure to get a mention for his local patch, and he raised the serious issue of ensuring that culture is accessible and supported in every part of the country—I certainly support that.

Pauline Stafford spoke powerfully about the impact of West Lothian's investment in music and in its young people, which is something from which I, too, benefited as a young person. It is important to hear about how our local authorities and local communities are supporting and growing the next generation of musicians and artists of all sorts.

Lloyd Melville spoke really well about his grandparents, and I thank him for sharing their story in this place. It is a helpful reminder of the cultural heritage that we have not only as a nation, but within our own families.

I thank Donald MacKinnon for his contribution on BBC Alba and Gaelic broadcasting. That is a very important area of policy that we on the Labour benches support—and, for that matter, have long supported.

We have heard many contributions about the cultural assets and events in many of our local communities, and I certainly will not miss the opportunity to add my home town of Linlithgow to that list. There is quite an interesting combination in Linlithgow. The huge popularity of the "Outlander" series has brought even more tourists and visitors from all over the world to visit Linlithgow palace and the surrounding area. There is therefore an interesting mix in how new culture in the screen sector—which, as other members have said, is booming—has contributed to yet more support for cultural assets such as Linlithgow palace.

I also want to put on the record my recognition of Linlithgow Arts Guild, which, every year, puts on a very impressive schedule of concerts and performances across the town, which are always well supported. Over the summer, I was delighted to see party at the palace return to the peel in the grounds of the iconic Linlithgow palace. Every year, that festival draws on an impressive range of world-class acts, including, in previous years, Nile Rodgers and Deacon Blue—

David Green: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Jenny Young: Speaking of which, here is David Green.

David Green: I thank the member for taking my intervention. Given that there have been so many mentions of her own patch in her speech, she would be very welcome on the Liberal Democrat benches.

Jenny Young: I am far too proud a trade unionist for that, but I thank the member for the invitation.

Festival-goers from across the country and beyond flock to Linlithgow every year, spending money in our town's impressive range of cafes, bars and restaurants. That is a prime example of the economic benefits that our communities can derive from the creative and cultural sectors.

Other members have highlighted the screen sector, which is a huge area of our creative economy. As a member of the Europe, External

Affairs and Culture Committee, I, too, have reflected on the evidence session with Screen Scotland. It is important that the Parliament, and our committee in particular, has a focus on Screen Scotland being set up as a separate organisation in a way that best supports and optimises all the good work that is going on in many parts of our country. In terms of such programmes, Leith has had many a mention, thanks to Ben Macpherson, and so has Harris.

I wanted to touch on the skills shortages that exist and the need to marry up the screen sector and the tertiary education sector, through our colleges, which my colleague Katherine Sangster mentioned. However, I am conscious that time is short.

I will close on the need to recognise that the many local arts and cultural events that we have highlighted, which we have rightly celebrated, rely on physical spaces to host them. Those local venues are the backbone of our sector, and my region boasts fantastic venues such as the historic Bo'ness Hippodrome cinema and the Howden Park centre in Livingston. However, we must remember that many of those venues rely on local authority funding. In the current context, therefore, as we look ahead to potential local government reform, it is important that we remember and support those cultural venues in our communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call on the minister to respond to the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government.

16:50

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith): I am glad to sum up the debate, because it has been very good natured. There is a lot of cross-party consensus in the chamber. I should start by declaring a couple of interests. I am a former chair of Creative Stirling, which chairs the Forth Valley creative economy network—I resigned from that post when I became a minister, as was appropriate. I was also a director of Radical Weavers in Stirling, which is a youth involvement charity based on weaving and tartan. It is a fantastic creative organisation that makes our high streets more interesting and our society more dynamic.

Those interests demonstrate that the subject of today's debate is close to my heart. It has been inspiring to hear some of the speeches from all points of the compass. We have a lot of good news. As the cabinet secretary said, investment in this sector is on the up. There is a commitment from the Scottish Government to increase it by £100 million by 2028-29. Our investment in this sector is growing.

I was struck by a number of comments to the effect that culture cannot be measured on a spreadsheet. Indeed, it often cannot be defined, as it is so subjective. However, we know that it enriches our lives. We also know that it provides real jobs in the real world and that it makes our society more vibrant. Further, in a loneliness epidemic, I would hope that it also helps social inclusion: you cannot automate or use AI to host an open-mic night at Nicky-Tams in Stirling—I can get my constituency in as well, and all members are very welcome to come along to that.

We have much to celebrate, and there have been a lot of good speeches from across the chamber. I will pick up on some substantive points, and there were a couple of requests that I will respond to.

Katherine Sangster made a strong speech that recognised that culture is not a public or a private thing. I am very much in favour of blurring those lines and seeing private sector involvement in the sector, with public sector guardrails and support. She also made a point about colleges funding. As colleges minister, it is appropriate that I respond to that. I am alive to the issue that she mentions, and accept that there is a challenge facing our colleges. As I have said before, I believe that colleges are absolutely fundamental to our skills agenda.

Q Manivannan: On that, does the minister share my concern about the situation in my region in relation to the loss of courses at the Edinburgh College of Art, including courses in textiles and performance costume design? Craft Scotland, a chief curator of the Smithsonian Institution, Visual Arts Scotland, and other organisations, as well as 180 alumni of the Edinburgh College of Art who I am personally in touch with are mortified at the loss of those courses and are concerned about the effect it will have on the future of the sector. Does the minister share that concern, and, while acknowledging that the University of Edinburgh is autonomous, will he work with us to see if a solution can be found?

Alyn Smith: I am not going to pretend to micromanage any individual institution or their offering. There is a degree of rationalisation under way across Scotland as a whole, and I am in favour of centres of excellence.

The point on colleges' funding is really important. The Auditor General's report identified a £5.6 million shortfall out of a £740 million budget, and we are alive to that. There is a challenge—I fully acknowledge that—but I have faith in Scotland's colleges to work through that by engaging in more innovative partnerships with the private sector and developing a greater degree of specialisation. I think that we can get through it.

David Kirkwood started on a high with a mention of “Outlander”. Representing “Outlander” territory, I am always keen to hear about that. He also made some genuinely interesting points about the distinction between creative and innovative sectors. As the minister for innovation, I am very alive to that. I liked his idea about STEM becoming STEAM—I think that there is something to that, and it is certainly something that I am alive to. However, he then slightly blotted his copybook with references to the USSR and commissars—frankly, I wish we were that organised.

On the concerns that he raised about the pilot scheme for the artists minimum income, I will be happy to send him some information on the Irish scheme, because it is working well there. To reassure Murdo Fraser as well, I say that our scheme is a pilot and a work in progress, and it is not coming forward tomorrow. There are things that we need to address in relation to it, but we think that it is very much worth taking forward.

Q Manivannan said that we cannot measure culture. I fully respect that. He also asked for an update on the pilot on basic income, which we are keen to take forward.

Murdo Fraser revealed himself to be the J R Hartley of the chamber—that reference might date me, but I see that he got it, at least—and made a very gracious reference to Angus Robertson, which I think was fully justified. He also referred to multiannual funding being a benefit. I am very well aware that it is. I have to say, though, that he is in favour of multiannual funding for everybody except the Scottish Government. We have a budgetary challenge that we need to deal with, and we are conscious of that, but I am very much in favour of his points.

Murdo Fraser also made good comments about the renewal of the BBC charter. I was glad about his support of the Government’s position on that. His points about non-domestic rates, hospitality and cultural venues were well made and are precisely why we are looking at those issues.

David Green made a grand speech and was, I think, the only member to talk about the role of arts organisations in social inclusion and social care. He talked about the challenges of rurality and of representing the big scale of rural Scotland. I am in favour of what he said and a strong ally to him on that point.

David Green also mentioned the proposed culture bill. To be clear, the commitment to consult on that is in order to focus minds. The answer does not necessarily involve legislation—we already have a lot of powers over that stuff—but we will use the consultation as an exercise to bring people into the discussion.

Pauline Stafford made the important point that the benefits go far beyond just the economic ones and the sector is much more significant than that. She talked about grass-roots music venues and offered a night at the Dreadnought, which I would be strongly in favour of having. Lloyd Melville talked about the youth culture pass. He can be very content with his own role in the commitment to introduce that; it is a significant step forward.

Donald MacKinnon made an excellent speech on Gaelic and other languages. I was glad to hear his comments on the BBC and the need for greater support for Gaelic and for parity of esteem with the Welsh language. Karen Adam spoke about how deaf culture is itself a mainstream culture. She is braver than I am because she opened up the butteries versus rowies debate—let us see whether anybody can sort that one out.

Paul McLennan mentioned the Fringe by the Sea in North Berwick and the Lammermuir Festival, which highlights the range of culture across Scotland. Ben Macpherson spoke thoughtfully about culture in Leith and about Trainspotting. He also had a specific ask about the Edinburgh festivals: he referred to the £12 million of public investment that was spun into £852 million of wider benefits, and asked for a meeting about the challenges of the festivals. I would be happy to have such a meeting in due course.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister respond to the call for an update on the implementation of the fair work task force’s recommendations? They were published 10 months ago; we need to hear about where that implementation will be going and to have some momentum on it.

Alyn Smith: Patrick Harvie is psychic—his name is written right here in my notes next to exactly that point. [*Laughter*.] That work is in progress. On the point that he makes about it having been 10 months, there has been an election in the intervening time. However, we are doing that work at pace. It butts up against the fact that employment law is reserved to Westminster—we do not hold all the cards on the subject. However, we are working on it and there will be an update in due course.

It is clear that the creative economy is close to the hearts of a lot of members across the chamber, including mine. It cannot, and should not, be measured only in economic terms. It makes our high streets more diverse and our society more interesting, and it puts Scotland on the global map. It has a huge role to play in solving the loneliness epidemic, and a huge role not only in our economy but in our society. It is obvious that there is a lot of consensus about it in the Parliament. It is a priority for the Government: we have a lot to do; let us get on with it.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): That concludes the debate on growing Scotland's creative economy.

Point of Order

16:58

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Presiding Officer, I ask you for some clarity on procedures in relation to rule 13.6A.3 of standing orders. I understand that our standing orders guidance sets out clearly a proper system for members to enter questions each week and what happens when a member's name has been drawn. Your own change to standing orders, rule 13.6A.3—which I welcome—gives members whose names have been drawn useful flexibility to swap places with other selected members.

I am sure that you agree, Presiding Officer, that the system must be clear, consistent and applied equally. I seek clarity as to whether the proper procedures were followed on the occasion that I wish to describe. On Monday 31 August, Malcolm Offord's name was drawn at number 3 of eight for general questions on Tuesday 8 September. As we all know, party leaders do not normally enter question draws—it is more of a convention than a rule, but it is the convention.

We have all been there. We have all put our names into draws and realised that we cannot make the question session or that we have managed to mess up lodging the question. The usual result is that the question is marked down as not lodged. It is a reasonable badge of shame—almost a rite of passage—and a useful deterrent for some members that reminds us to get our acts together the next time we are drawn.

I was confused, therefore, when I read the published list later in the week and saw only seven general questions listed for Tuesday 8 September. Malcolm Offord's name had been completely removed. There was no lodged question, no not-lodged badge and no explanation; it was just gone. I had never seen that before, and it raised an obvious question, which I think might also have been raised with you, Presiding Officer, about consistency of treatment. Therefore, Presiding Officer, can you clarify whether the proper procedures were followed in this case? If they were, perhaps the Presiding Officer will enlighten all of us as to how, in the future, one might be afforded similar treatment to that which Malcolm Offord appears to have received.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): I assure Mr Kerr that there is a convention that party leaders do not go into the draw. My understanding is that Mr Offord wanted to follow that convention, and he did not intend for his name to be in the draw at all. That was therefore drawn to the attention of the chamber desk, and we had some discussions about it. It was decided that, as there was no

intention of him being in the draw, his name was removed.

It was not the same as a situation in which someone puts their name in for the draw and then does not get their question in on time, for example, or when there is some other reason why a question is not lodged. He had no intention of having his name in the draw because he feels that it is not appropriate for a party leader to have their name in the general draw, as it might deprive another member of an opportunity. It was therefore agreed that his name would be withdrawn and that the name would not be published.

I hope that that clarifies the matter.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): We move to decision time. There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business.

I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of David Kirkwood is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S7M-01304.3, in the name of Katherine Sangster, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy, 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.

17:02

Meeting suspended.

17:04

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S7M-01304.3, in the name of Katherine Sangster, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app seems to be having a bit of a tantrum, but I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is recorded.

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I cannot log on, but my vote would have been no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you; your vote has been recorded.

For

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)

Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Abstentions

Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01304.3, in the name of Katherine Sangster, is: For 46, Against 53, Abstentions 15.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-01304.1, in the name of David Kirkwood, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Gillian Martin: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I still cannot log on but I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you; your vote has been recorded.

For

Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Abstentions

Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01304.1, in the name of David Kirkwood, is: For 15, Against 93, Abstentions 7.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-01304.2, in the name of Q Manivannan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Gillian Martin: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you; your vote has been recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)

Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-01304.2, in the name of Q Manivannan, is: For 99, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01304.4, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Gillian Martin: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote has been recorded.

For

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01304.4, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 40, Against 65, Abstentions 7.

Amendment S7M-01304.4 disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01304.5, in the name of David Green, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy, be agreed to.

Amendment S7M-01304.5 agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S7M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Gillian Martin: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote has been recorded.

Craig Hoy: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I intended to vote no, but I am not sure whether it has been recorded.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote has been recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Abstentions

Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S7M-01304, in the name of Màiri McAllan, on growing Scotland's creative economy, as amended, is: For 89, Against 22, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the significant contribution that Scotland's culture and creative sectors make to the nation's economy, communities and international reputation; notes that these sectors support employment, innovation and skills development across all parts of Scotland; celebrates the success of Scotland's artists, creative businesses, festivals, cultural organisations and screen sector in showcasing Scottish creativity at home and abroad; welcomes the commitment to establish Screen Scotland as a distinct public body, in light of the sector's potential for growth and the benefits of inward investment and domestic production to the Scottish economy; notes the value of the public service broadcasting ecosystem to the wider screen sector and the importance of broadcasters fulfilling their obligations to Scottish audiences and creative industries; acknowledges the importance of ensuring that creative career pathways are accessible and sustainable for people from all backgrounds; recognises the role that culture and creativity play in strengthening community cohesion and improving wellbeing; welcomes the Scottish Government's ongoing efforts and increased investment to support growth within the creative economy and to develop opportunities for creative workers and businesses; recognises also the unique and welcome contribution that Gaelic and Scots language and culture make to enriching Scotland's society and economy; supports continued collaboration across all of society to realise the full economic, cultural and social potential of Scotland's creative industries; recognises that fair work, including fair pay, secure contracts and safe working conditions, remains a significant challenge across parts of the creative sector, particularly for freelance and self-employed workers, who make up the majority of the workforce; calls on the Scottish Government to publish an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Culture Fair Work Task Force, which was published in December 2025; welcomes the Scottish Government's engagement with consultations for a proposed Culture and Arts Bill and believes that this Bill, developed through meaningful consultation with artists and the culture sector, would provide a lasting legislative foundation for supporting Scotland's creative industries; calls for the Bill to be ambitious and inclusive of grassroots organisations and individuals; notes that the games sector contributes around £200m annually to the Scottish economy, employs over 2,000 people and has produced internationally recognised success stories; considers, however, that there are opportunities to grow the sector further and better compete with other countries around Europe, and calls on the Scottish Government to unlock investment and growth in the games sector by establishing a national games innovation centre alongside regional hubs as a means of developing expertise, research, fair work, business skills and low-cost office space for start-up studios.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I ask members who are not staying for members' business to leave the chamber quietly.

Inquiry into White Working Class Educational Outcomes

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Our final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S7M-00947, in the name of Thomas Kerr, on results of the independent Inquiry into White Working Class Educational Outcomes. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it considers to be the crucial issues raised by the independent Inquiry into White Working Class Educational Outcomes; notes the belief that the statistics it highlighted are valid within Scotland, including in the Glasgow parliamentary region, as *analysis of UCAS annual reports, Scottish Government school leaver destination data and Scottish Funding Council Widening Access reports,* reportedly indicates that for more than a decade, in both the UK and Scotland, white working class boys are the group least likely to go to university; recognises what it sees as the importance of ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background, and notes the calls for the Scottish Government to urgently undertake an assessment of the extent to which white working-class boys and young men experience educational or socio-economic disadvantage and to explore targeted measures to address this where such disadvantage is identified.

17:14

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): I welcome the opportunity to speak about the educational outcomes of white working-class children and the implications of the inquiry that was co-chaired by Sir Hamid Patel and Baroness Estelle Morris. I thank Stephen Kerr for signing the motion and ensuring that we had enough cross-party support for this important debate to be heard in Scotland's national Parliament.

Why do we need this debate? We need it because the report raises an important question: are we genuinely providing every child with the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or family circumstances? For too many working-class families, the answer remains no. Education should be one of the greatest instruments of social mobility. It should allow a child from a disadvantaged background to pursue their ambitions, develop their talents and build a better future. That is what it did for me, as someone from a working-class background, the son of two drug addicts, who grew up in the east end of Glasgow. If my story had been written on paper, it should not have ended with me being in this building. Instead, I should have been just another statistic. If I am honest, I almost became

just that, but, thankfully, through education and by being pointed in the right direction by my grandparents, I was saved.

However, my story is still an exception, not the norm. Poverty and disadvantage continue to shape educational outcomes. The inquiry highlights the significant challenges that are faced by white working-class pupils in England, including in relation to attainment, literacy and access to opportunity. Although the findings relate to England, the issues that they raise are directly relevant here in Scotland. We must be prepared to examine those issues, but when I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic over the summer to ask whether she would instruct a similar inquiry in Scotland, she refused. That was disappointing. In fact, she did not even mention white working-class boys in her response, which I think was disrespectful.

Scotland has a proud educational tradition. We have long believed that education should provide a route to a better life. We once had the best education system in the world, but, under the Scottish National Party Government, that is no more. Across Glasgow and the west of Scotland, families work hard, make sacrifices and do everything that they can to give their children a better future. We must ensure that their children are not held back by circumstances beyond their control.

A child who arrives at school struggling with literacy, living in overcrowded housing or facing financial hardship does not necessarily begin from the same position as a child who has enjoyed every advantage. That is a reflection not of their ability, but of the barriers that they face. It is our responsibility to address those barriers.

One of the most important issues that the inquiry raised is that of literacy. Reading is the foundation of education. A child who struggles to read confidently will find it increasingly difficult to access other subjects, participate in lessons and develop confidence in their abilities. That is why early intervention matters. We need to identify difficulties in literacy and numeracy as early as possible, to provide teachers with the resources that they need and to support families in helping their children to learn. We should strengthen links between schools, parents and local libraries and ensure that children have access to books and learning resources regardless of their household income. We must not wait until a child has fallen significantly behind before offering meaningful help, and we must ensure that support that makes a measurable difference is provided.

Another important issue is how we value vocational education. For too long, there has been a tendency to treat university as the ultimate measure of educational success. That does a disservice to many young people whose ambitions lie elsewhere. Scotland needs skilled tradespeople, engineers, electricians, joiners, mechanics and technicians just as much as it needs graduates. A young person who chooses an apprenticeship should never feel that they have been failed. We need stronger links between schools, colleges and employers, as well as better careers advice and accessible routes into skilled employment.

Apprenticeships must be respected, properly supported and available to young people in communities across Scotland, because they can provide a route to financial independence, meaningful work and a better future. That is particularly important in communities where traditional industries have declined and where young people need to be able to see a clear path into employment. We must ensure that where someone is born does not determine the opportunities that are available to them.

What should Scotland do? First, we need to have a clearer understanding of the educational outcomes that are experienced by disadvantaged white working-class pupils in Scotland, including on attainment, attendance, literacy and progression into further education and employment. It is vital that we have an inquiry here in Scotland to look at those issues to ensure that we get that right. Secondly, we must strengthen early intervention, particularly on literacy and numeracy, so that difficulties are addressed before they become entrenched. Thirdly, we must properly support schools that serve disadvantaged communities and recognise the pressures that teachers face and the wider needs of their pupils.

Fourthly, we should strengthen vocational education and apprenticeships, ensuring that young people have access to meaningful careers and a range of respected pathways.

Finally, we must measure whether our policies are actually improving outcomes. It is not good enough to publish strategies or announce initiatives; we need to know whether our children are reading more confidently, whether attainment gaps are narrowing and whether young people are progressing into education, training and secure employment. That is how we should judge whether our education system is delivering on its promise.

I will finish by speaking about the young people at the heart of this debate. A working-class background should never be a barrier to ambition. A family's income should never determine a child's potential, and a young person's postcode should never decide how far they can go in life. Those are principles that we should all be able to agree on, but principles mean very little unless they are

backed by action. The inquiry that was chaired by Sir Hamid Patel provides an opportunity for Scotland to reflect on the challenges facing working-class pupils and to consider what more can be done.

We should learn from the evidence, examine our own education system honestly and develop practical solutions that meet the needs of Scottish communities. When a child is denied the opportunity to fulfil their potential, Scotland loses out, too. We lose future skills, future talent and future contributions to our communities. When we give that child the support and opportunity that they need, the benefits extend far beyond the individual. That benefits their family, their community and their country. That is why this issue matters, and it is why Scotland must be prepared to act.

17:21

Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I will start by saying something quite simple: I have no difficulty recognising that some white working-class boys and young men are struggling in our education system. If young people in our communities are being left behind, we should want to know why and we should want to do something about it. However, I have a problem with the way in which Thomas Kerr and Reform UK try to explain those disadvantages. There is a difference between identifying a section of our society as struggling and proving why they are struggling.

I grew up in deepest, darkest Lanarkshire, and those are the communities that I represent in the chamber today. My constituency is full of people who work hard and raise families, and who want their children to have opportunities that they might not have had themselves. There is no shortage of ambition. The challenge is to ensure that that ambition has somewhere to go.

I left Cardinal Newman high school in Bellshill with no more than a few standard grades. My prospects were really not great—just as Mr Kerr tried to outline. My ambition was there but, to match that ambition, I felt that I had to do something—something that would get right under Mr Kerr's skin. Colleagues, I left this country at 17 years of age, and I went to another country looking for work. I was an economic migrant. I mention that because white working-class men and boys have faced challenges in education for many years, none of them for the reasons that Reform UK likes to portray in its rhetoric.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Quite a few of us in the chamber have something in common: that we come from a working-class background. I recognise what Steven Bonnar is saying, but I am going to do something impossible here: I will try to build a bridge between the SNP member and Reform. Did Thomas Kerr's speech not say exactly what Steven Bonnar is saying? I think that it did. I do not think that anyone is categorising the problem that we are discussing as one of ethnicity; it is a problem of opportunity. Surely, on that, all of us in the chamber can agree that having more equality of opportunity is something that we should all aspire to in this country.

Steven Bonnar: I absolutely agree with the points that Mr Kerr has raised, but the title of the debate is about "White Working Class" men, as if they are somehow at a disadvantage—not "working-class people". I will extol the virtues of working-class people and—

Thomas Kerr: Will the member give way?

Steven Bonnar: Of course I will, Mr Kerr.

Thomas Kerr: I genuinely thank Steven Bonnar for taking this intervention.

The reason the debate is titled that is because it is titled after a report on white working-class boys. It is not titled like that to try and stir up anything, other than to acknowledge the fact that a report was done in England looking at working-class attainment, particularly among white people. That is the fact of what we are looking at. All that we are asking is for the Scottish Government to do a similar inquiry to the one that has been done in England. What part of my speech could Steven Bonnar disagree with?

Steven Bonnar: Mr Kerr has made that speech today. He has been in the chamber since May, and I have listened to his rhetoric time and again. Today, on Twitter, he was talking about "strangers invading our country." He should not come here and be sanctimonious and try to blur the lines about what his message actually is.

The report before us is substantial and I do not dismiss the research, but it is research into the English education system, commissioned and funded by the Christopher and Henry Oldfield Trust, and its purpose was not simply to identify a problem but to recommend reforms. Let us be clear about what it states: it identifies serious disadvantage among white working class children in England, and nobody is disputing that. What I do dispute is Reform taking that evidence and making the political leap that white working-class children in Scotland have somehow been overlooked simply due to their ethnicity. Where is the evidence for that? The report points to poverty, economic decline, loss of local industries, poor transport, disengagement, additional needs, weak careers advice and limited access to vocational opportunities.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Steven Bonnar: I will make some progress.

Those are all serious problems, but they do not evidence a conspiracy against white working-class children. Thomas Kerr will not improve the lives of white working-class people by telling them that another disadvantaged child somewhere else has somehow come in and taken their place.

Thomas Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I am afraid that we will need to move on with the debate and with Mr Bonnar's speech.

Steven Bonnar: Thomas Kerr's motion calls on the Scottish Government to assess disadvantage and consider targeted action. That is fine, but he has already asked the Government that question and he got an answer. Work is already happening through the Scottish attainment challenge, and £200 million has been invested to support children and young people who are affected by poverty—like him and me.

Reform is not uncovering a new problem that everybody else has simply ignored. The issue is whether we are targeting our support effectively enough, and that brings me back to the young people I represent. If a young person in Uddingston or Bellshill is struggling because they are growing up in poverty, then we want to tackle that poverty. If they have additional needs, I will fight tooth and nail to get them the right support, and if they have disengaged from school, we need to understand why. If they cannot see a route into an apprenticeship, a college or a decent job or university, it is incumbent on us to create those routes. If there is a particular barrier affecting white working-class boys in Scotland, then yes, let us identify it and act on it. Let us do that on the basis of sound Scottish evidence, not Reform rhetoric or soundbite slogans.

Amanda Lindsay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): You must come to a conclusion, Mr Bonnar.

Steven Bonnar: With your indulgence, Presiding Officer, I am just finishing up.

Thomas Kerr is the self-appointed voice of the working classes, but he offers nothing of substance on these real issues and he does not own the voice of the working-class communities. He may have grown up in the east end of Glasgow, but being born in a stable does not make someone a horse. He certainly does not get to tell those communities that the answer to their problem is to blame somebody else or disadvantaged children from other communities. The young people I represent do not need to be told which box they belong in—they need us to remove the barriers that are standing in their way. That is what serious politics should be about, and that is what every working-class child in Scotland deserves, regardless of their ethnicity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I remind members that open debate speeches should be no longer than four minutes. I will give some leeway for interventions but, if we continue with overruns, we will have to extend the debate.

17:27

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): Each of us in the chamber understands the importance of a good education for getting the best start in life. Mr Bonnar, Mr Kerr and I are the same in having grown up in working-class homes, and I am a proud product of a Scottish state education. We should all be very proud of the fact that three of us are able to stand up in the chamber and say that.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Ms Sangster said that she was the third person that can say that; I also come from a working-class background, and I am very proud of that. Earlier, Mr Bonnar said that Reform members do not understand going and working abroad, but I have also worked abroad. I believe that we need to bring the debate back to general education. My understanding is that my colleague had asked for information, which brought us to this debate. Would Ms Sangster agree that we are all here because some information has been requested? We are interested in the education of all children, but this was a particular request. Would she agree that it is a reasonable request to make?

Katherine Sangster: Obviously, I am not a Government spokesperson, so perhaps the member can ask Alyn Smith, who is sitting on the Government bench. Steven Bonnar rightly pointed out that that report is to do with England, not Scotland. Julie MacDougall will probably have heard my previous questions in the chamber and should know that I believe that we absolutely need to get more data and information on what is happening with our working-class children.

Something that white working-class children and working-class children of colour have in common is that they are likely to be living in poverty or in households that are blighted by insecure work or low pay. That is where the attainment gap is the largest. There are around 156,000 white children in relative poverty in Scotland, so they make up the majority of children in poverty. Therefore, if we

tackle child poverty, we will be able to close the attainment gap for all children, regardless of their ethnic background.

I hosted the Save the Children and Joseph Rowntree Foundation breakfast briefing—I think that it was just yesterday, but one can lose a sense of time in this place. I was pleased to see colleagues from the Greens, the SNP, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats attending. I apologise if I missed any Reform members who attended, but I do not think that any did. That briefing discussed the way in which we talk about poverty. We must talk about poverty in a way that chimes with the people who are living in it, but also speaks to people in the broader population, so that we can start making positive changes.

That is why I am proud to support the rollout of breakfast clubs. I am also pleased that the Labour UK Government scrapped the two-child cap, and I note that Reform did not support that move. There are real, positive ways that we can make change for people and put more money in the pockets of struggling families.

It is vital that every child and young person in Scotland has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background. That is the foundation of the Labour Party. Nobody should have circumstances that limit their educational attainment or block opportunities. Our education system must be equipped to address the impacts of poverty and disadvantage and to ensure that every child can achieve the outcomes that they deserve.

The attainment gap remains one of the greatest challenges that Scottish education faces. Around one in four children is living in poverty, and schools cannot be expected to tackle the challenge alone. Teachers and schools work tirelessly to support young people, but they are not always able to have the resources that are needed to address the issues that children bring into the classroom. If we are serious about closing the attainment gap and about improving outcomes for white working-class boys, that is what we need to look at: we must tackle poverty at its source.

Scotland's poorest pupils are more than three years behind their wealthy counterparts, according to the programme for international student assessment, or PISA, study that came out a couple of weeks ago. That should concern us all. Improving educational outcomes starts with having robust data and evidence—I absolutely agree with that point. We have to understand what progress is being made and what further action is needed. Just as importantly, we must ensure that a child's postcode, family income or background does not determine their future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Can the member conclude?

Katherine Sangster: Sorry. I will speak to one more point and then conclude.

I am glad that Thomas Kerr supports a UK Labour policy, because we have just launched vocational GCSEs. I have run out of time, but I will mention Alan Milburn's report on young people who are out of work and not in positive destinations. We can discuss that and work together on that issue.

17:33

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): At the heart of the report is something uncomfortable—I think that we have felt that tone. It is something urgent that we can no longer ignore. We need to understand whether the findings in the report are the same here, or not. That is an important point.

The report tells us that, in England, white working-class children are consistently among the lowest-attaining groups and they face the sharpest literacy gaps. They are the least likely to progress to positive destinations, and their outcomes are more closely tied to social class than any other factor. It tells us that disadvantage does not look one way, speak one way or neatly fit into the categories that we have become used to discussing—and I will join the club: I am from a working-class background.

It also tells us something else. If inclusion is meant to mean anything at all, it must mean everyone. A level playing field is not a slogan; it is a commitment. That commitment only matters if it is applied to every child in every community.

As we heard from Thomas Kerr, the highlights in the report include, first, that literacy must remain the single biggest predictor of life chances and that too many children—particularly white working-class children—are leaving school without the reading skills that they need to thrive; secondly, that aspiration is shaped early and that children disengage long before the exam season when they do not feel that pathways are open to them; thirdly, that our system has become siloed and that while some routes are celebrated, others are quietly neglected and too many young children and pupils fall between the cracks.

We cannot call ours an inclusive education system while those gaps persist; we cannot talk about equity while ignoring a group that the evidence from England tells us is falling further behind. We need to appreciate what is happening in Scotland and whether it is of equal concern. We cannot keep repeating the same approaches and expecting different outcomes.

We could do many things to move forward. We could learn the lessons in the report and look at the situation in Scotland; as we do in life, we could recognise that disadvantage is complex, layered and often invisible; we could accept that social class matters if the findings of reports are showing that; and we could commit to building a system that does not leave any child behind because of their postcode, background or family circumstances.

We need to ensure that we invest early in literacy by using approaches that work—structured phonics, targeted support, and evidence-based practice. We could build coherent pathways through education whereby vocational routes, apprenticeships, and technical learning are not second-class options but respected, resourced and understood. We could bring industry, community and opportunity into the classroom so that all young people can see the world that they are preparing to enter.

We need to be mindful of an evidence-led approach. It is important that, if those findings in England are reflected here, we do something to ensure that inclusion is for all.

17:37

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It is well known that I quite like having clear lines of debate, but sometimes we must be careful that we are not violently agreeing with each other. That was the point of my intervention earlier. The fact is that I think that we are in the same place on this issue, because I do not think that any member of the Parliament would not like to see greater equality of opportunity in our country.

As I said earlier, my background is that my dad worked as a butcher for the co-op, my mum worked in a shop as a shop assistant and I grew up on a council estate. Those parents of mine gave me that aspiration—something that Thomas Kerr said that he did not get from his parents but from his grandparents. We need such figures to help us to transform our lives, to give us some degree of ambition for ourselves and for what our lives will consist of. Again, the debate is about opportunity.

I welcome the minister to his place—this is the first time that I have had the opportunity to speak in a debate where Alyn Smith is on the front bench. I congratulate him, my long-time political opponent in Stirling, on his ministerial appointment, and I hope that he will use his skills to bring the debate together and not create more artificial lines between us on this important issue, which should be a central purpose of public policy.

As a Conservative, I do not think that we should promise equal outcomes or lower expectations but that we should ensure that talent, effort and ambition are not defeated by the circumstances that are beyond a child's control. The inquiry was an independent inquiry in England—I do not think that anyone is pretending that its data is based in Scotland. That is, in a sense, the whole point of the debate. The inquiry does not prove anything about white working-class boys being Scotland's single most disadvantaged group—I will not pretend that it does. However, a question deserves to be answered. As long ago as 2016, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service said that poor white boys were the most disadvantaged group in entry to higher education.

I accept that there is not one single track out of school or education that is for everyone. We ought to be trying to dismantle the disparity of esteem between these different tracks from school into the next stage of a person's life. Surely there is enough discussion in this space, not just in relation to the study from England but on a broader basis, for the Scottish Government to ask the question. That is what I am asking the Government to do today. Ten years later, we still do not have a proper answer to this issue as it pertains to our country.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): My point is similar to what Steven Bonnar said earlier. The tone of the debate has more to do with the fact that there is a social-class element. The Scottish Government is addressing that through the £200 million Scottish attainment challenge funding. There is a social-class and a working-class element to the debate, but that is what the Government is doing in this area.

The dog-whistle politics part of all this is when we start referring to white working-class people. We have all agreed that there is an issue for those who come from poorer backgrounds, and I say that as someone who comes from Ferguslie Park in Paisley. I would not be here in the Parliament, like others who have made a similar point today, if it were not for some of the role models I had in the past.

Is it not the case that the issue is more about social class and working-class people? The Government is addressing that with the Scottish attainment challenge funding.

Stephen Kerr: We can have a debate another time about the Scottish attainment challenge, because although £200 million a year is being put into that area, there are huge questions about how effectively that money has been used and what it has been used for. I am not casting a slight on any of the people involved in the administration of that fund; that is the reality.

I hope that George Adam knows me well enough to know that, if I heard dog-whistle politics in relation to ethnicity, I would call it out. Frankly, I did not hear Thomas Kerr do that once in his speech tonight. I know that we are taking other

contributions and trying to mash them together, but I just do not accept that on this occasion. It is absolutely fine for us to discuss the demographics of the parts of our population that we recognise are not succeeding, for a variety of reasons, and discuss what we should do to address that. That is the whole point of my contribution tonight.

I have much more to say, so I wonder whether I can have a bit longer, because I took a long intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): You have had extra time, but if you are quick, Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: Yes, 50 seconds, which I am grateful for.

We need action, so I will ask the minister some very specific questions. Will the minister commission a Scottish assessment of outcomes experienced by working-class boys and young men? There is enough evidence to suggest that we should look more closely at that. Will he look at publishing joined-up evidence? We need more data. Will the minister return to the Parliament with a programme of action and a timetable for delivering that vital evidence? We should be led by evidence—that is what we are asking for. We think that we have enough to suggest that the issue deserves proper scrutiny.

Opportunity cannot simply be promised; it must be visible in whether children attend school, learn the basics, gain meaningful qualifications and leave education with a credible route into skilled, well-paid work. No child's future should be limited by the circumstances in which they were born.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Mr Kerr, you must conclude.

Stephen Kerr: That is the test, and I am afraid that the Government is failing it.

17:43

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): It seems that the one thing that we all agree on is that we want equal opportunity for everyone in our society and that we want every child to achieve their best outcome.

I will start with a comment from the report, which states:

"The white working class disadvantage gap is … not a new or temporary issue".

Why is that the case? The reality is that that is partly to do with the historical class system and the fact that those with privilege always were able to control things and get on. The fact that everybody so far has stood up and said that they come from the working class illustrates that historical class system.

The gap between the richest and the poorest is bigger now than ever before. That is where I come to the wider context. It seems ironic to me that Thomas Kerr, while defending the working class and talking about opportunities for working-class educational attainment, does so under the banner of Reform UK, which is an organisation run by the elite, or the wannabe elite, for the sole purpose of enriching themselves and their cronies.

Does Thomas Kerr believe that Farage received his undeclared £5 million donation so that he would go into politics to improve outcomes for the working class? Why have two crypto billionaires donated a further £72 million to get Reform UK into power? It is certainly not for the benefit of the working class.

Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform): You have a bit of a cheek, have you no? It is not us that march about with movie stars fae around the world, waving our flags in our kilts. Take a look at yourselves before you start criticising somebody else. They are not in this chamber. We are here to talk about white working-class boys.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Members should speak through the chair at all times. I note that we have a motion in front of us that everybody should be speaking to.

Alan Brown: I do not know whether Senga Beresford is condemning the entire tartan army being in Boston in their kilts. I really do not understand that point.

Does Farage, with his private education and privileged upbringing, understand real-life struggles?

Stephen Kerr: I know that Alan Brown is a combative politician, and I think that I am in the same category. However, this is an important issue, so I am hoping that we will not just stand up and slag other parties. A members' business debate should probably rise above that, especially when we are discussing an issue such as this. I hope that he will move on with his speech and address the substantive issue in the motion, because it deserves serious contemplation and consideration.

Alan Brown: Yes, these are serious points. Actually, I agree with much of what Thomas Kerr has said, but there is still a context. It has been set in isolation, which is why I am showing the bigger context: if Reform UK gets into power, there will be a cut in taxes for the rich, there will be less money in the system and there will be poorer outcomes for the working class. That is the reality. I do not think that, through a single speech, we can disassociate ourselves from the bigger,

overarching umbrella. That is where I am coming from.

As my colleague Steven Bonnar said, too often, much of what is wrong in society is being blamed on immigrants, but it is not them who are the root cause of the historical inequalities that I have talked about. We know that Farage favours private healthcare, but that type of system leads to poorer health outcomes for the working class.

I come to the inquiry report. The recommendations are based on the education system in England, but some of them allow us to consider what the Scottish Government is doing, right now, that is in line with the report. One recommendation is free access to public transport for under-21s, which is a policy that the Scottish Government is already delivering on. Ironically, Thomas Kerr spoke out against that policy, saying that people should have

"more money in their pocket",

rather than subsidising public transport for others, yet here we have this report recommending free public transport for under-21s to increase social mobility.

The report recommends

"Reducing the financial risks associated with further and higher study."

Free tuition is a flagship policy for the Scottish Government, and we have just seen record numbers of students, including record numbers of those from a deprived background, being accepted into university. Meanwhile, in England—this is a problem—students graduate with more than £50,000-worth of debt, never to be paid off in their working lifetime. Thomas Kerr acknowledged that free tuition allowed him to get to university.

Thomas Kerr: I want to clarify that it did not, because I never went to university—I went to college. I was never interested in going to university. That is the point of the speech that I just gave.

On Alan Brown's point, does he accept that, because of free university tuition, universities are now capping the number of Scottish students who can attend university because of their underfunding? That is having a significant impact on working-class kids from backgrounds such as mine and that of other members who have spoken, and it is preventing them from going to university.

Alan Brown: Given that I have just pointed out that a record number of Scotland-based students are going to university, with record numbers from deprived backgrounds, the stats belie what Thomas Kerr has said. I appreciate what he said about going to college, but that is another thing: for long enough, the Scottish Government has allowed colleges to make decisions and work with employers to create the vocational pathways that he keeps talking about, which is another recommendation in the report.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Will you please conclude, Mr Brown?

Alan Brown: Yes. I would like to have said more, as there is a serious debate to be had, and it needs to be led by serious people. We cannot discount all the recommendations of the report.

17:49

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): This has been an interesting debate, although it has the capacity to be hijacked to grab headlines to suit a variety of narratives. It is nonetheless a debate that this Parliament should have, because it will be critical to inform our decisions across a number of areas.

As the co-chairs of the inquiry state,

"Education has long been one of this country's greatest sources of hope and opportunity. At its best, it changes lives, strengthens communities and opens doors that might otherwise remain closed."

We could all agree with that, but my contribution today is to look not just at the difference between one group and the rest of the population but at the range of attainment and outcomes between different groups of the population who we are here to represent, regardless of their social background or ethnicity. I also want to focus on the issues that affect attainment more generally, particularly in rural Scotland and in areas such as my Dumfriesshire constituency, where there is a multiplicity of other issues that impact the achievements of our young people.

Let us take those young people with additional support needs, which is topical in Dumfriesshire. A recent inspection report found that Dumfries and Galloway Council's secondary inclusion support service for young people with additional support needs is "weak" in all categories. What does that mean? On a positive note, the report found that relationships have been built by staff and that

"Senior leaders are beginning to understand better the strengths and areas for improvement"

that are required. However, one critical area of concern was a lack of planned and co-ordinated support between the mainstream schools that send pupils and the SIS service. The report said that that was

"limiting almost all young people's capacity to build skills and gain knowledge across the curriculum"

at a particularly important point in their lives. The report went on:

"Too often the majority of young people supported by

Secondary Inclusion Support have no or very little other quality education provision available to them. These young people face inequality as a result of their ASN."

That is a cause for concern locally, which I will raise with the council's chief executive next week.

Nationally and locally, the data should also be a cause for concern about achievement. We know that across Scotland, in 2024-25, boys were less likely than girls to achieve the expected curriculum for excellence levels, and boys were slightly less likely than girls to enter positive destinations after leaving school. Boys achieved lower higher exam grades than girls in 2025 and lower national 5 exam grades than girls, so it is clear that there is a gender issue that we need to look at.

There is also an issue in relation to rurality in different parts of the country. In Dumfries and Galloway, more school leavers are leaving with fewer than the national average of five qualifications. That is a cause for concern for me personally.

Dumfries and Galloway has also fallen further behind on the number of pupils attaining five qualifications at higher level or above, and fewer school leavers in Dumfries and Galloway are entering higher education than the Scottish average.

All that matters because it impacts young people living in a region where there are issues in relation to access to skilled employment and housing, poor public transport and a lack of college and higher education options.

Before I close, and on a positive note, I recently had the pleasure of attending Dumfries and Galloway College, where I saw first hand how young men and women were preparing and gathering the skills for their future careers. I met school leavers, and some who were still at school, taking part in pre-apprenticeship bricklaying, giving them the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are needed to progress towards becoming an apprentice bricklayer—a skill that is needed across Scotland.

Its practical focus was refreshing; its focus on giving young people a meaningful trade was encouraging, and the enthusiasm that I saw from those young people was clear to see. However, we need more of that if we are to give young people the pathways that they require and the best possible start in life.

I will close with the words of the report on which the debate centres:

"Every child in this country deserves to feel that education is for them, that their future matters, and that success is achievable regardless of where they come from."

Sadly, at present, that is not the case, but from the efforts that I saw in Dumfries and Galloway College, it is clear that it can be achieved, but only if the commitment is matched with the financial resources and the political will to deliver it.

I hope that the minister will be attuned to that when he wraps up the debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Given the number of members who still wish to speak, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Thomas Kerr to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

17:54

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Like many members in this place, I have spent a lifetime fighting inequality, and it drives me in the work that I do here. I am always mindful, whenever I speak about inequalities, whether in health, housing or communities, that we must strive to have a fair society. My colleague put it well: what we are talking about here is people growing up in poverty.

I turn to the motion for debate. The inquiry that it mentions focuses on England, but it is important that we talk about working-class communities in this place, too. We know that our education and skills system in Scotland currently does not allow every young person the chance to succeed, and there is no doubt that our more deprived working-class communities suffer in that regard.

I ask the minister to reflect on the results that we got from PISA, because in order to get change to happen, we have to acknowledge what is currently happening. The results reveal that the poorest pupils in Scotland are three and a half years behind their more affluent peers in maths and science; the most deprived pupils are also two and a half years behind the richest when it comes to reading. I hope to hear from the minister just what his Government is doing in those areas, and perhaps whether there is anything useful in the report that he could be using to see if we can get some changes there.

We also need to think, and talk, about working across parties and across briefs—I mention that a lot in the chamber—to look at the evidence around early years in particular, as we know that that is such an important time in which to change the trajectory for young people.

The inquiry that the motion highlights finds that white working-class educational underachievement is a persistent structural

problem rather than a consequence of low aspiration. Educational outcomes are highly influenced by wider economic conditions, including deindustrialisation and loss of secure local employment; reduced youth services and community infrastructure; and limited local opportunities and poor transport connectivity.

I grew up in a coalfield community, and in my view, austerity has been a key driver. Our communities have suffered for 40 years since the rapid closure of the mining industries, and we need to be honest about where that comes into play. In my region of South Scotland, declining public services and rural inequalities limit access. I hope that the Government can take a view of the whole picture and see that educational outcomes are about other things that are happening in our communities, too. In East Ayrshire, where I grew up, there are limited jobs and limited ways to get to jobs, so I can only imagine that that can be very difficult for young people who are thinking about what their opportunities might be.

In thinking about working-class communities, we must seek to close the poverty gap, the health inequality gap and the attainment gap—all those things must come together.

In closing, I think that the report gives us good things to look at. The Scottish Government has strategies in place around children and young people in particular, and there are the specific payments that we have in Scotland. We need to be honest with each other about how we build on that work, and work together to ensure that we get the best results for everybody, including our working-class communities.

17:58

Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform): I am a mother of four children, two of them being white boys. We need to look at boundaries and consequences in school. I have two children still in school, and I speak to a lot of teachers—I have spoken to even more since I got involved in politics. Just a couple of weeks ago, a teacher told me that a child was sitting on their phone, on Snapchat, so she confiscated it. She went into the other classroom and confiscated the phone from the other boy; they were messaging. Within 10 minutes, she was called into the office and made to give those phones back. To me, that has already taken the authority away from the teacher.

In one of my daughters' classrooms, every day, six boys were creating hell in the classroom, so she hardly got any work done. I would go to speak to the teacher, and they would say, "I cannot do anything. We are not allowed to." That is where we need to start: with education. There must be boundaries and consequences, and we need children to sit and listen and learn.

I listened to what Craig Hoy said about his visit to Dumfries and Galloway College. I visited the same college and left thinking, "This is wonderful." However, somebody who works there contacted me to tell me something completely different. He told me that most of the kids he gets straight from school can barely read or write—the level is that poor. He asked me whether I had asked how many kids actually complete their courses. On the visit, I saw the numbers that showed how many were doing this or that, and I thought, "This is great. Rather than university, which is not for everyone, they are learning a trade." So, it was really disappointing to hear what I heard outside the visit to college.

Last night, we attended a police event in Parliament. It was about white working-class boys. That really angers me. I have two boys—they are fantastic boys and they have fantastic friends. The event was not just about boys, or just working-class boys; it was white working-class boys. Why pick on them? Even if we had a study in that regard, if we keep putting kids down, that will not take them anywhere in life. We have to build them up, fill them with confidence, find out what they are good at and really push that.

I know about the free bus pass scheme, but that is not a great thing in my area. I live in the countryside. I feel that kids need to get into sport. It is the best thing that I did with each of my kids. However, it is expensive to get involved in sport. Therefore, why do we not invest in sport instead, and get kids involved as young as possible? We have a curling rink in Dumfries, and we have produced Olympic medallists. However, the schools use it for one week in the whole of a child's primary education. We should be using such facilities more. It would keep kids off devices if they were busy with sport. I never allowed my kids mobile phones at primary school.

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Does the member therefore welcome the Scottish Government's £12 million investment in the summer of sport that was announced a few months ago?

Senga Beresford: I do, and I hope that it reaches every area. My kids are really sporty, and I know that getting involved in sport is really expensive. I put on the record that I am one of seven children who grew up in a deprived area. Everything I have got, I have worked really hard for.

Nobody gave us anything, and I am quite proud of that. However, I got my kids into sport as soon as they could walk. Whatever they wanted to try, they did. I think that we should do that with all our

kids. It would be far more beneficial than anything else.

18:02

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith): There is an issue with the attainment gap in Scotland. I am glad to hear agreement across the chamber that poverty—ingrained, generational poverty and poverty of aspiration—is the root cause of the attainment gap.

If I accept that the attainment gap is an issue, I hope that we will all accept that—as we have heard from some members in this debate—this report tells us nothing about the situation in Scotland. To refresh the chamber's memory, the report was published in June 2026. It was commissioned by Star Academies, a multi-academy trust that operates 36 free schools and academies in England and is funded by the Christopher and Henry Oldfield Trust. The report focuses on outcomes for English school pupils and young people. There is no Scottish data in the report.

I will take good ideas from anywhere. I accept that there is an issue with the attainment gap in Scotland, but it is not as if we are not aware of it. To answer directly Stephen Kerr's point about whether we need a similar report here, I say that we have considered that and decided that we have ample data on the issue, which is precisely why we are focused on closing that attainment gap.

We have lots of things to do, but we are doing lots of things in this space. I invite colleagues to unite around the efforts that we are making. We have invested £1.75 billion in the Scottish attainment challenge over the past decade—that includes £1 billion of pupil equity funding to empower headteachers to improve outcomes for children impacted by poverty. We are investing a further £200 million this year as well. We also have the tackling child poverty delivery plan, which is keeping 100,000 or so children out of relative poverty this year. We have the provision of free school meals, the school clothing grant and the Scottish child payment.

Our First Minister, John Swinney, has made eradicating child poverty a pivotal mission of this Government, and I am very proud to be part of those efforts.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Alyn Smith: I need to make progress.

We have had some success: 95.7 per cent of Scottish children who were school leavers in 2024-25 were in a positive destination three months after leaving school.

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

Alyn Smith: Forgive me—I need to make progress.

If I accept that there is an issue with the attainment gap, I hope that we can all unite on efforts to get past that gap. There are many things that we need to do but a number of measures are under way to achieve it.

I would push back—and I am glad that there is some degree of unity on doing so—on the idea that there is only one measure of success, which is that you get a bucket of highers and go to university. There are lots of other measures of success. I am the skills minister and I want to see all Scotland's children and young people—all its people—living their best lives, being their best selves and making the best contribution to our society that they can.

Colleagues have mentioned apprenticeships. They will get used to hearing a lot from me about apprenticeships, because I think that they are fundamental to the world of work in the future; and to the upskilling, reskilling and augmenting of skills that we need to see. This morning, I announced a 10 per cent uplift in the funding for apprenticeships—that is £8.8 million of new money. I have been tasked with delivering 150,000 apprenticeships by the end of this parliamentary session and I want that to happen.

There is no one route to success. To hell with the idea that someone must choose a vocational route or an academic route—that is not how the economy works.

Angela Ross: Will the minister give way?

Alyn Smith: I need to move on.

That is not how the economy works now and it is not how it will work in the future. I want to see everyone do well, live their best lives and be the best version of themselves so, although I will take ideas from anywhere—by which I mean any country with any best practice—the solutions to Scotland's problems lie in Scotland's experience. We will take examples from elsewhere.

Craig Hoy: Will the minister take an intervention?

Alyn Smith: I have more time than I had budgeted for so I will take Craig Hoy's intervention.

Craig Hoy: I beg the minister's indulgence and bring to his attention an issue that relates to my constituency, which could impede the access of young men and women to skills. The minister will be aware that, in the past, there has been industrial unrest at the Scottish Rural College's Barony campus in my constituency due to pay. That has affected access to education. Presently,

there is a live issue. If I were to write to the minister, will he undertake to look closely at the issue and to make representations to the Scottish Funding Council, so that it does not develop into an industrial dispute that could affect the young people in my constituency who attend the college in Barony?

Alyn Smith: I would be happy to hear representations from any member about any constituency issue. There is a wider systemic issue about college funding, which was raised in the previous debate and which I am alive to. Institutions such as SRUC, which I know well, are fundamental to upskilling and to making sure that young people—and others who are reskilling for future changes to their careers—have those opportunities.

I am keen to make progress on those matters.

Stephen Kerr: Will the minister give way?

Alyn Smith: I see that Stephen Kerr wants in.

Stephen Kerr: Will the minister please elaborate on the ideas that he brings to his portfolio about how we tackle the disparity in esteem between those different routes from school? That is the real issue. There is a disparity in the allocation of resources and public funds, which lends credence to the idea that there is a gold path, a silver path and a bronze path. I do not think that the minister believes that that is the case. However, the way that funding is currently allocated leads people to that conclusion. What ideas does he bring to the portfolio that will change that?

Alyn Smith: That is a helpful invitation. Colleagues will be familiar with the Withers review, which I commend to members and which makes reference to the idea—actually, I am quoting him—that a bucket of highers and a university route is not the only way to success. I acknowledge that the Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland have incentives, and I am actively looking at those. I firmly believe that we need to change several of the incentives in the system because there is not only one route. However, Stephen Kerr and I agree that there might be an impression that there is a "best" route.

For young people in particular, we need to make that point. The other day, I was at Fife College, speaking to apprentices and college students. Fife College has done a lot of good work to reach out to local schools—primary as well as secondary—to make sure that the transition to college life is not scary. That work of Fife College is a really good example for the rest of the sector. However, I take the point about the incentives in the funding mechanisms for those institutions.

This is another phrase that members will hear a lot from me. I am less hung up on the institutional structure of the colleges and universities sector, or even of schools. I want to get back to the purpose and the incentives. I believe that the structures will follow that. There is a job to be done, and I would be grateful for support from the chamber with those efforts.

Back to the attainment gap, I acknowledge that there are issues in England.

Angela Ross: On the attainment gap, we are not seeing an increase in the numbers for those from the most deprived areas. Does the minister agree that we need to understand the problem fully in order to address it fully?

Alyn Smith: Yes, of course, which is why there has been a great deal of research and analysis into that area. SDS has huge amounts of data on 16 to 19-year-olds. We know there is an issue, particularly with the hardest-to-reach people, and that is why I want to see a change in the discussion around this, because I want to see all Scotland's people, from all backgrounds, live their best lives.

On the attainment gap, we have invested considerable amounts of taxpayers' money on precisely that. There is more to be done, but we have had much success—95.7 per cent of school students go on to positive destinations. That is success. We need to be going further, but forgive me, I am out of time. Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): That concludes our business today.

Meeting closed at 18:11.

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