

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 1 May 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 1 May 2002

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We give a warm welcome to the Very Rev Monsignor Henry Docherty, the general secretary of the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland, who will lead our time for reflection this afternoon.

Very Rev Monsignor Henry Docherty (General Secretary of the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland): Prescinding, with respect and reflection, from the serious and onerous deliberations of the Scottish Parliament, I cannot help recalling two events of no small significance that have taken place in this historic chamber across the span of 70 years. The first was the World Missionary Conference of 1910, which has long been recognised as marking the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement for the fullness of Christian unity. Happily, we have come a long way since then, and there are wider relationships through interfaith dialogue in our pluralist society of today.

The second event, not unrelated in the long term, was the historic visit here on 31 May 1982 of Pope John Paul II. It so happens that during the 1980s, I was privileged to serve as an official in a major Vatican congregation, or department, and acted as an adviser on the Pope's visits to Canterbury and Scotland. With regard to a possible venue for the Pontiff's meeting with the Moderator and other senior church officials, it was my recommendation that the meeting should be in the precincts of this chamber, because of its proximity to the supreme court of the Church of Scotland—the General Assembly.

Central to the message that John Paul II gave throughout Great Britain was his exhortation to make our pilgrimage in life together, "walking hand in hand" towards our final destiny with God. Whatever our daily preoccupations, we do well to keep that destiny ever in mind. That thought received particular focus recently in the peaceful and prayerful death and obsequies of our much revered Queen Mother, Elizabeth, in the 102nd year of her remarkable life. The impressive centrepiece in the splendidly ornate chapel of Glamis Castle, her ancestral home, depicts Christ's crucifixion, which is almost a prophetic

foreshadowing of God's calling the Queen Mother to himself during the solemnity of the paschal vigil on Holy Saturday.

The psalms of the Old Testament were dear to Her late Majesty, and this extract from Psalm 122, verses 6 to 9, offers us an appropriate prayer for the holy land during these tragic days:

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they prosper who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!"

For my brethren's and companions' sake, I say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

Amen.

Youth Participation

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our main item of business is a debate on motion S1M-3048, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on helping Scotland's youth to participate in communities, and on two amendments to that motion. I invite all members who would like to speak to press their request-to-speak buttons now, as that helps with the selection of speakers. I am delighted to call Cathy Jamieson to speak to and move the motion.

14:35

The Minister for Education and Young People (Cathy Jamieson): I am delighted to speak on this important issue and to welcome the young people from the Scottish youth parliament who are in the public gallery. The debate is on the motion and two amendments to it. When I saw the amendments, I was reminded that part of the problem of writing policy by motion and amendment is that both amendments have good bits, but if they were accepted, one would negate the other.

The fact that the Executive does not accept the amendments does not mean that we do not acknowledge that they have good bits. I hope that members will conduct the debate in that spirit and that we will be able to take the good bits from both amendments and move on.

It is important that the Executive listens and responds to the needs, demands and wishes of young people. The Executive's programme for government sets out an action plan for youth and gives a clear commitment to engaging with young people on matters that affect them. That can be challenging, because it must be meaningful. It must happen over time and must matter.

The clear message from the young people who are present is that if politicians want young people's support, they must talk in a way that young people understand and about issues that interest them. We must show that we take account of young people's views. It was useful that many MSPs met MSYPs today. I am sure that everyone will have left the lunchtime event with plenty of food for thought, even if they did not have an opportunity for lunch.

Participation is important because it ensures that communities benefit from the skills, energy and enthusiasm of young people and it prevents the alienation of young people—particularly those who have felt at times that their views were not being taken into account. Some countries are worried about low election turnout among adults and we must encourage young people not only to exercise their rights in communities, but to acknowledge their responsibilities. Part of the process of

involving young people is explaining to them why civic society is important and why it is important that they are part of it.

The Scottish youth summit that was held in June 2000 was the first such event in Scotland. It provided an opportunity for young people to talk directly to one another and to ministers about the issues that concerned them most. I was struck by a comment during today's lunchtime session. A young person said that it was good to be in the chamber and to talk to ministers, because they are people who are usually seen only on the telly. That sums up why we must become much more involved in such face-to-face dialogue.

The youth summit was an attempt to bring together young people with the various players, such as the statutory sector, voluntary organisations and the independent sector. The summit was the first such event, so many lessons were learned from it. Young people enjoyed it. Officials were a bit wary of engaging with young people at first, but they were enthusiastic after the event, which is always helpful. Even the then ministers enjoyed having discussions with young people.

That co-operative and inclusive approach towards the youth summit began through work with Young Scot, YouthLink Scotland and the Scottish youth issues unit. It was important that young people chose the topics that would be discussed. Questionnaires were distributed to a range of bodies to ask young people to choose the issues that were important to them. Modern technology was used, in the form of an e-consultancy website, which sounds grand, but simply means that young people were given the opportunity to consider, discuss and vote on the top topics that would inform the debate.

That is how the 16 topics that were chosen for discussion at the youth summit were determined. In advance of the day, the young people had the opportunity to be involved in pre-summit workshops and informal discussions in their local areas, assisted by their local youth workers. That involvement was crucial and we heard today how much work went into the process. The Connect Youth network is an important means of involving young people in the decision-making process.

The day involved not only the 200 young people who met at the civic centre in Motherwell. It was an event of more epic proportions that involved satellite events in Angus, Dundee, Highland, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Campbeltown. Those events linked a further 1,000 young people to the main event by videoconferencing. I understand that some of the technology worked well, but the nature of the beast meant that some of it ran into technical problems. Lessons are to be learned from that.

It was important that ministers were able to participate. They joined the workshops and listened to what the young people had to say on ministerial portfolios. The young people felt that that was important.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): The motion refers to the Executive's

"commitment to valuing young people and reflecting their aspirations and needs".

Will the Executive take the opportunity to reject the inane suggestion that the best way to deal with the complex problem of truancy among young people is to dock child benefit?

Cathy Jamieson: I want to make it clear that the Scottish Executive takes child poverty seriously. We also take seriously truancy and ensuring that young people get a good education. We have put in place a number of measures that we believe are dealing with those problems. We will continue to make that a priority.

I want to move on to some issues that the young people raised. Lessons were learned by the advisory group that brought the young people together to co-ordinate the youth summit. The group learned how we could do that better and ensure that young people are supported in the process. The young people pointed out that if they are to be asked questions, they must be given the tools to enable them to discuss the issues and take part in the consultation.

An important product of the youth summit was the toolkit that we commissioned from Save the Children. Last year, Nicol Stephen launched the report of the youth summit and the "Re:action" toolkit, which aims at enabling all those who work with children and young people to involve them in meaningful discussions. The toolkit has had wide circulation and has been used by policy makers in the Executive, local authorities and voluntary youth agencies.

Feedback has helped us to produce a refined version of the toolkit. That was not an easy task for Save the Children, as it involved a lot of work, not only with those directly involved in the summit, but with others who took the opportunity to use the toolkit before its final production. The toolkit has been very well received. Indeed, it has proved so popular that we have had to commission a reprint for distribution by the Executive and Save the Children.

I am also aware that the Parliament's Education, Culture and Sport Committee commissioned research into improving consultation with children and young people. Today, the young people said clearly that the opportunity to participate in the work of the Parliament's committees is vital. They want to be involved in consultation, not after

documents are produced, but from the first point at which the documents are drawn up. That is something that we will examine and progress.

The Education, Culture and Sport Committee used consultation to good effect in its inquiry into the need for a children's commissioner for Scotland. The committee placed a high priority on consultation with children and young people. That is to be welcomed. It is important that the Executive continues to take a lead on the issue.

I am privileged to go to a number of events throughout Scotland that involve young people. I was invited recently by the Dumfries and Galloway youth strategy executive group to one of its regular meetings at which young people and elected councillors discuss the area's youth strategy. They sit down together to work out what would be best for young people in terms of the council's policies. That means that young people are directly involved in influencing decisions about how budgets are allocated. That particular group has tackled serious and sensitive issues as diverse as sexual health, the operation of good school study leave programmes and leisure facilities.

In January, I attended North Lanarkshire Council's first annual conference on its strategy for young people. Listening to presentations by both young and old people, I was impressed by how much had been achieved in a year and was reassured by the enthusiasm for continuing that progress. Furthermore, I was pleased that the conference included workshops that highlighted the difficulties that young people might encounter in being taken seriously by adults and helped them to work on solutions to get their message across.

When I was in the Highlands in February, I heard about a project that has been developed by the Prince's Trust and others. The youth cafes in action project aims to develop a sustainable network of youth cafes in the Highlands, the Western Isles and Orkney and brings together young people in rural areas, works with them on their agenda and tries to ensure that facilities are developed that young people can use and in which they can be actively involved.

The key point is that the young people have been involved in the project from the beginning. Indeed, one of the conclusions of the evaluation of the project was that empowerment of young people was a key to success. We might sit here and think, "Of course that is the case." However, our job is to put that principle into practice. After participating in a question-and-answer session with young people that day, I am happy to report that the young people in Dingwall and surrounding areas certainly seemed to be empowered and asked some pertinent questions.

Today, young people told us how, in many local

areas, MSPs and MSYPs are out and about, doing creative things such as holding joint surgeries, visiting schools, talking to community organisations and picking up on local issues.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Perhaps I am pre-empting the minister, but I hope that she will also mention Girvan Academy's marvellous annual modern studies day, which is a great example of citizenship. I am sure that she will also mention who won the election.

Cathy Jamieson: I am delighted to take every opportunity to mention Girvan Academy, because it is a very good school and the modern studies day that Mr Sheridan referred to is a wonderful event. The chamber will probably have guessed that the winning side on the day was not my political party. However, I will not give Tommy any more publicity; I am sure that he is able to do that himself.

It is important that we involve young people in all the processes that have been mentioned. Through involvement in projects such as youth cafes, young people have the opportunity to learn teamwork and to build up skills in running organisations and being part of the wider community.

It is also worth acknowledging that we hear about young people only when things go wrong. Youth disorder is on the agenda at the moment. However, only a small minority of young people involve themselves in such activity; the majority of them want to be useful members of their communities and to help to make community life better. We need to be able to capitalise on the fact that young people who simply hang around present us with an opportunity to involve them in things that matter and that make a difference. It is not always the case that young people in groups pose a threat. Once young people become involved in community processes, those become part and parcel of their lives. We must ensure that we use the skills that young people pick up.

We know that that is happening more and more across the country. It is not enough just to consult; we must act on the information that we receive and must feed back to young people if we are not able to follow through on certain decisions. Some young people in the organisation that I used to work for would say, "Yes, it's great. We've moved on from the times when young people were seen and not heard. Now young people are seen and heard, but they're still not being listened to." We have the opportunity to show that they are seen, heard and listened to and that we are taking action. The fact that their views have been acted on and have led to a concrete result encourages young people to continue to participate, which is what we want.

In the time that it has been up and running, the Scottish youth parliament has achieved a considerable amount. Since June 1999, the Scottish Executive has recognised its value through grant support, continuing contact and making officials available to provide advice and support to the organisation.

It would be remiss of the Executive to have this debate without having involved members of the Scottish youth parliament. As I said, it is important that young people are here today. I am sure that they are listening to what we say that we will do and that they will take that message back to their communities.

The Scottish youth parliament is an exciting development that is run by young people for themselves and other young people. For that reason alone, it demands recognition. It is the first national organisation of its kind in Scotland. The inclusion of the Scottish youth parliament in our work must not exclude other young people. It is a vital component of our work.

Of course, there are other ways of involving young people. I am particularly pleased that the youth parliament is beginning to take a view on national issues and is thinking about how young people can get together and influence matters that are important to them. As part of a new training process, members of the youth parliament already participate in the national debate on education and return to their local areas to seek the views of other young people. We can usefully use that model in other areas.

The views that are collected by young people will be fed into the national debate and into the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's inquiry via the youth parliament's education committee. That provides a link for constructive work in the future. The Executive has also invited the youth parliament to work with us on the ministerial advisory group on mental health and well-being and the Scottish Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse. Valuable contributions are being made and I am confident that representatives will add value to those forums.

We will try to increase the involvement of young people in the Executive's work, particularly of young people who have traditionally been harder to reach, such as those from the Gypsy/Traveller community, those with disabilities and those from our ethnic minorities. They are all important. If there is to be true representation, we must find ways of including young people in the democratic process. That is not just about putting a cross on a ballot paper. Young people must be involved in the wider process of policy making.

Again, I recognise the work that Save the Children and other voluntary organisations have

done in including hard-to-reach and disadvantaged young people in processes. We are working with Young Scot, which has developed a particular way of reaching out to young people via schools, its website and the distribution of its magazine through the *Daily Record*. The organisation provides good-quality information, opportunities and support to enable young people to make informed choices about their lives.

We need to provide practical opportunities for young people to be involved. The statutory sector has a huge range of youth provision, mostly through community learning and development. I am sure that my colleague Margaret Curran will want to say more about that in winding up. Much of it involves informal work with young people. I recognise the voluntary sector's valuable work in activity groups and in giving young people the opportunity to learn new skills and develop their interests outside formal education.

As part of our review of Community Learning Scotland, we found that youth provision has a decreasing profile in community learning plans. We do not want to jump to the conclusion that less is happening on the ground—a look around our constituencies shows that a lot is going on. Rather, our finding points to the need to know what provision there is and shows that voluntary sector and statutory sector provision do not overlap, but complement each other. We need to know about the gaps in provision.

To follow that up, the Executive is funding YouthLink Scotland to champion the youth sector and to add impetus to the work that is needed to bring the statutory sector and the voluntary sector together. One of its first priorities will be to map youth work provision throughout the country to give us a base upon which to build.

I want to say something about participation in a wider context, in Europe. The Scottish Executive worked closely with colleagues in the devolved Administrations and UK departments to develop a UK approach to the EU white paper on youth in the run-up to its publication last November. We are continuing that joint approach in putting the ideas from the white paper into practice.

The white paper identifies four priority areas for countries. The first priority is the participation of young people, which means involving young people in the way that I have outlined. The second priority is voluntary service for young people, which means encouraging young people to get involved in voluntary service and getting volunteering recognised as a valuable thing to do. The third priority is to get a better understanding of the issues that affect young people through looking at research about young people's issues. Finally, it is important to help Administrations and politicians to understand better how to help young

people to reach their full potential.

It has been refreshing to see the EU agenda develop along similar lines to some of our current work. That shows that we have a common purpose in supporting young people.

We have already taken steps to ensure that young people are included along the way. Members of the Scottish youth parliament attended a European gathering in Paris in the run-up to the white paper. They were involved in discussions with the commissioner on European youth policy, and earlier this year they participated, as part of a UK delegation, in the European youth gathering. I am pleased that the Scottish youth parliament's external affairs committee has taken on board the EU white paper as one of its major areas for discussion.

I hope that we will continue to work closely across the devolved Administrations on the proposal to hold a convention for the young people of Europe. I have recently indicated to Peter Hain, the UK Minister of State for Europe, my wish that Scotland's young people be directly represented. I know that that view is shared by the Parliament's European Committee.

Moving even further afield, Ellen Leaver will of course have the opportunity to participate in the United Nations General Assembly special session on children on 9 May, when she will be in New York. I look forward to participating in the Edinburgh event by some kind of technological link, which I hope will work. Ellen Leaver and the delegate from Northern Ireland were chosen by their peers to attend the UN General Assembly as part of the UK delegation. I wish her all the best.

This is the first time that the UN special session has included young people as part of the official country delegations, although I am aware that the Scottish youth parliament has been represented at other events. That sends a positive message. I hope that the young people of Scotland know that their voices are heard, listened to and acted on—whether that is at a local level, in the Scottish Parliament, or at a wider international level. We are giving them the opportunity to speak directly to the people who can help them to make decisions about creating a better society in Scotland and further afield.

We are getting there. We have further work to do, but I hope that today's debate will be useful and that we will be able to give a clear message to young people in the gallery and throughout Scotland that we mean to act on what they say.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Executive's commitment to valuing young people and reflecting their aspirations and needs; recognises the importance of the Scottish Youth Summit and the follow-up launch of the

consultation toolkit “Re:action” in contributing to this agenda; agrees to support constructive work with young people as they engage in civic society and democratic processes whether at local level through local authority youth councils, or at national level through organisations such as the Scottish Youth Parliament, and welcomes work by the Executive alongside other devolved administrations and UK departments to develop the UK approach to the European Union white paper on youth and to ensure that young people from Scotland can contribute in the wider arena of international affairs.

14:57

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the debate. We move our amendment in the same spirit as the minister did not accept it. In other words, we believe that it is somewhat better than the Executive’s motion and that, if it was accepted, it would improve the motion. First, our amendment mentions active consultation and, secondly, it encourages a wide view of the world. Neither of those proposals run contrary to the spirit of the debate or to what the minister has said. Our amendment is, of course, substantially better than Murdo Fraser’s amendment, so the chamber should accept it.

Presiding Officer—I see that we now have a different Presiding Officer; it is like buses, there will be another one along in a minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): It will be about an hour.

Michael Russell: At the start of the debate at least, I thought that it would be sensible to apply the techniques outlined in something that is referred to in the motion—the splendid “Re:action” consultation toolkit.

I have taken the basic section on “Knowing where you are going” as the template for judging the debate and where it will go. The section starts with a splendid quote from “Alice in Wonderland”:

“‘Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?’ said Alice.”

I presume that that is the minister. The cat responds:

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.”

That is one of the wisest statements that we have heard in the chamber for a long time.

The section lists useful tips and hints on developing a policy. It states that it is necessary to “Start the planning stage of the consultation by writing out the objectives”

and to

“Make sure the objectives are clear, specific, jargon-free and realistic”.

In addition, it is necessary to

“Ask yourself ‘Have I chosen the best approach to achieve

the objectives?’”

and to

“Constantly return to your objectives”

and ask whether the approach is working. At the end of the day, it is necessary to ask whether the objectives have been achieved.

Another objective must be

“to have a fun/enjoyable time for all involved”.

Unfortunately and uncommendably, that objective is missing from the motion. I must say that the rest is almost there.

The issue is not only for the Executive; it is a profound issue for the whole Parliament, particularly for the parliamentary committees. I want to reflect a little on my experience of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee’s successes and failures.

Nearly all members are committed to consultation with, and participation by, young people. I do not want to run the risk of appearing too self-interested—

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Go on.

Michael Russell: That would be unlikely. [*Laughter.*] I knew that that would get a laugh.

Each and every one of us, as politicians, must be worried about the low level of participation in conventional politics by young people.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Russell: Not at the moment. I am sure that Mr Sheridan intends to contradict me.

All political parties have more older people than younger people. No political party that is represented in the chamber appeals directly to the idealism of young people any longer. Some parties appeal to young people more than others, but there is a shortage of young people who participate in politics. Added to that, there is a shortage of young people who participate in community events. However, there is no shortage of interest among young people in such events and in—to use the biggest words—how to change the world. We must find a bridge between the idealism and enthusiasm of young people and the day-to-day work and objectives of the Parliament and its committees.

Today, we should consider that interface. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee has worked hard to consider it. I pay particular tribute to my friend Fiona McLeod, who, from the beginning of the Parliament’s work—as members of the committee will know—has been a persistent advocate of considering young people. That has

been a surprisingly difficult thing to do. Members of the committee are almost embarrassed because we do not know how to do it.

Rather interestingly, the minister mentioned that young people are keen to participate but do not believe that they are listened to. That fact comes out in all the research. Equally, young people do not believe that what they say is acted upon. That issue is not a simple one for a parliamentary committee or legislature to address, because simple demands cannot quickly be converted into action; there is a process in between. We must try to engage young people in that process to make them understand not only that they are listened to, but that, over time, their views, representations and ideas make it through into the legislative process.

There are simple matters that we must overcome. Members of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee will remember a consultation session with young people on the proposed children's commissioner bill, which took place in the chamber. That was absolutely the wrong place to have the consultation and it was done in the wrong way. The members sat in one row and the young people sat facing them in another row. When another member and I tried to break the convention by going over to talk to the young people, we were told that we were not being picked up by the microphones and that we could not be recorded.

Tommy Sheridan: I want to intervene before Mike Russell leaves that point. I was struck by the young people in the chamber earlier, who asked MSPs to listen to their views. They were unanimous in making the point that young people are not the only ones who have disengaged and who no longer participate in politics. We must be clear about that. We must tackle the general malaise. Does Mike Russell agree with those young people?

Michael Russell: I agree absolutely with that point. Tommy Sheridan raises one of the major problems in our democracy, but we cannot do everything in an afternoon, so we should stick to talking about young people. Alienation from the political process is a severe problem not only in Scotland, but—to our cost—in Europe.

We must examine and address certain key issues. One is non-participation; another is representation. It is not enough for adults to choose young people as typical or representative. We must have the mechanisms to allow young people to elect or select their own representatives, and probably a range of such representatives. The Scottish youth parliament is undoubtedly an important innovation, and I am glad that the Executive is now funding it, but we need a range of youth organisations, so that we will see different

young people coming forward for different purposes.

We must also have a commitment to integrate the views of young people in formal structures. The Education, Culture and Sport Committee has worked hard on that issue. It is equally important that other committees work on it and that the work that has been done is deepened and broadened. We should find ourselves under an obligation—even a self-imposed one—to consult, listen and act.

One of the issues that we have not yet tackled in the Parliament is the fact that we have done nothing about bringing people into the parliamentary structure. That applies across the board. Tommy Sheridan is right about the situation, for example, in relation to ethnic community participation. At the beginning of the Parliament, my friend Alex Salmond suggested strongly that some committees should bring in outside representatives as non-voting members. The idea was rejected by the Procedures Committee for valid reasons; however, it was at least an attempt to address the issue. We must continue to address it, to find ways of bringing people in.

Funding is another issue. The Scottish youth parliament receives £80,000. That is a significant grant, but it is not enough to allow all the young people in Scotland to be heard regularly. We cannot undertake consultation, or get young people involved, on the cheap. We must address that.

There are also issues about feedback. The frustration of young people in Scotland at constantly being asked to provide views and receiving no feedback on the result is a real issue. Attention has been drawn to that in several recent reports. Young people must be made to feel not only that there is a place for them in consultation, but that their views are being reflected on and that the system is undergoing perpetual improvement.

Perhaps the largest issue is the willingness of individual members of the Parliament to develop and change their political styles. Politics is a combative business. It is still about the survival of the fittest, despite the fact that, in 1999, we talked grandly and at length about a new Scottish politics.

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Is not that the attitude that prevents all sorts of people, including women, young people and other people in our communities, from getting involved in politics?

Michael Russell: Of course. I agree entirely. If Cathy Peattie had allowed me to finish my point, she would have heard that I was about to agree with her completely—as usual—just as I agreed

with Tommy Sheridan. Members are jumping in early this afternoon, instead of allowing the debate to develop.

We must change the type of politics in which we are engaged. The process is not easy or consistent. Sometimes we are not very good at it; sometimes the provocation to return to the old styles is nearly overwhelming. However, young people and many others find the political process off-putting. The underpinning issues in this debate concern our democracy and the way in which it develops. A healthy democracy is one that involves the widest range of people, from young to old—this debate on young people will be followed by a debate on agism—and from across all barriers and in all sectors. A healthy democracy is one in which people believe that it is worth while to be involved because their participation counts.

There is a commitment in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to involve young people in public life and to listen to them. The Parliament has passed legislation, including the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, that demands that children be listened to. However, unless that cuts into everything that we do—every piece of legislation, every committee inquiry and everything that we consider in this chamber—and unless there is a realisation by the members of the Scottish youth parliament and others that a difference has been made by the participation of young people, we will go on having debates, but we will not involve people.

I move amendment S1M-3048.1, to leave out from “and welcomes” to end and insert:

“encourages all of Scotland's young people to have open and enquiring minds about the future of their country, their continent and their world, in order that they might take an active part in the widest range of national and international affairs, and therefore requests that the Executive consult widely with Scotland's young people as well as with other devolved administrations and other European governments in order that there can be a positive and informed Scottish response to the European Union white paper on youth.”

15:10

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives welcome the opportunity to debate the participation of young people in politics and community affairs. We generally approve of the wording of the Executive motion but believe that the emphasis should be slightly different. I welcome the minister's comments and state that we intend to be constructive in the debate. I am disappointed that the minister felt that she could not accept the terms of our amendment, but there we are.

We are anxious to make the point that we need young people to be involved in the mainstream political process, not just corralled into groups for

young people alone. I will elaborate on that later, when I will also make some points about the low number of young people who vote.

I was especially keen to speak in the debate as I have a history in youth politics. Ten years ago, I was the national chairman of the Young Conservatives, at that time by far the largest political youth group in the UK. That led to my involvement in international groups such as the Democratic Youth Community of Europe, the European Young Conservatives, which I helped to set up in Helsinki in 1992, and the International Youth Democrat Union. I was interested to hear the minister mention the European angle of the Scottish youth parliament, as the experience of meeting and debating with young people from across Europe and the rest of the world is one that I will always remember and cherish.

Last Thursday, I was a guest at the annual dinner of Dundee University Conservative and Unionist Association. The Dundee monsters, as they are fondly known, are the only active party-political group on campus. The sabbatical president-elect of Dundee University Students Association is an active Tory, as is the vice-president. While that is good news for the Scottish Tories, it is disappointing that there is so little opposition from other parties.

Tommy Sheridan: It is also wrong. There is an active Scottish Socialist Party branch at the University of Dundee.

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry, but the Tories at the University of Dundee have never heard of the SSP.

Our greatest concern should be the low participation rate of young people in mainstream politics, as Mike Russell and the text of my amendment point out. The percentage of young people voting in elections continues to decline at an alarming rate. It is common knowledge that more young people vote in polls for television programmes such as “Big Brother” and “Pop Idol” than vote in elections. When I raised that fact at the question-and-answer session earlier today, one of the MSYPs pointed out that that affected all sectors of the population, not just young people. That is true, but there is a particular problem with young people not participating in the mainstream political process.

Why is that happening? Young people are becoming increasingly cynical about politics. Far be it from me to introduce a partisan tone to the debate, but there can be no doubt that such cynicism has been fuelled by the advent of new Labour, with its emphasis on style over substance, the pre-eminence of spin-doctors and the reannouncements of sums of money over and over again. When a Government behaves like

that, it is little wonder that young people are turned off politics.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): Does Murdo Fraser agree that, while it may be true that low levels of young people participate in party politics, young people are still showing that they are as idealistic as ever about single-issue politics? Does Murdo Fraser agree that young people could give a lead in the areas in which they are active?

Murdo Fraser: Unusually, I do not disagree with Scott Barrie. However, the difficulty that we face as party politicians is how to get people involved in the political process at this level. That is the gap that we have to bridge.

If people are turned off politics, not only is there an abstract difficulty, but the situation becomes dangerous, as we have seen from events in France in the past couple of weeks. The best thing that politicians can do is not to worship the false god of consensus but to encourage honesty in politics and genuine debate. Perhaps by doing so, we will attract young people back to mainstream politics.

Earlier today, I and other MSPs met representatives of the Scottish youth parliament. It is a worthwhile organisation, especially for those who are involved. It brings young people into contact with the political process. At a local level, local authority youth councils perform a similar function, with varying degrees of success. However, we would be making a mistake if we thought that that was the end of the story and that those groups were truly representative of youth opinion. That should not be their function.

I was interested to read some of the policies of the Scottish youth parliament, which include: abolishing the monarchy; legalising cannabis; and unilateral nuclear disarmament. Those policies are not supported by me or, I suspect, the vast majority of the Scottish public, but that does not particularly matter and there are other policies on the list—for example, a three-strikes policy for criminal justice and a suggestion that courts should be more young-people friendly—that I would support.

The Scottish youth parliament has produced some radical policies, but we should not be afraid of radical policies. When I was in the Conservative Students 15 years ago, we produced some very radical policies. Even within our party, people said that we were a bunch of loony right-wingers. The irony is that those self-same policies are the policies not only of today's Conservative party, but of today's Labour party. The important aspect of the Scottish youth parliament is the opportunity that it gives for participation. Perhaps it is more relevant for young people that they be encouraged

to play an active role in their communities, in improving facilities for their use and in encouraging other young people to vote and to join community councils and other local organisations.

The irony is that young people are interested in current affairs. I agree with Scott Barrie on that. In my region—Mid Scotland and Fife—I have been lobbied actively by young people who are engaging in the democratic process without getting involved in bodies such as the youth parliament. I will give examples. I have been working with Adam Ramsay in an effort to improve recycling facilities at the Perthshire school at which he is a pupil. The young people who are involved in the Alyth youth partnership asked to meet me to stress the need for a youth worker to run activities and to keep their youth centre open. The former pupils of Kilry Primary School attended public meetings and voiced their support for their old school in the face of threatened closure by Angus Council.

All those young people, who are from a variety of backgrounds, have involved themselves in achieving results that will benefit them and the wider community. They do not need to do that through a formal structure, such as a youth parliament. They need teachers, parents, youth leaders and volunteers to encourage them to write letters, attend public meetings and lobby MSPs, MPs, councillors and anyone they can find to help them to achieve results.

One of the great pleasures of being an MSP is the opportunity to visit schools, meet teachers and talk with pupils. I have participated in many question-and-answer sessions, which have ranged from primary 2 pupils asking me what I do as an MSP to senior pupils wanting to know whether I think that MSPs are worth their salaries. I visited Glenisla Primary School in Angus when Mike Watson's Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill was going through the Parliament. There, young people who live in rural communities told me firmly what they thought of the bill. They did not support it.

Debating is another area in which young people have an opportunity to participate. We have a fine history of school debating throughout Scotland. We have events such as the debating competition that is run by *The Courier and Advertiser* and sponsored by the Royal Bank of Scotland. The competition is annual, is open to schools throughout Tayside and provides an excellent forum for developing debating skills. On a visit to Craigclowan School in Perth in March, I met Duncan Clark, who, along with Robert McMorris, got to the grand final of the competition. He thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I am sure that, in years to come, some of the young people who were involved may sit in the Parliament.

Young people in schools and voluntary groups are interested in the communities around them and participate actively. However, they do not participate in mainstream politics, join political parties or vote. If initiatives such as the Scottish youth parliament encourage young people to become involved in the mainstream political process, we welcome them. The challenge for us all is to find ways to bridge the growing divide between our young people and us, the politicians.

I move amendment S1M-3048.2, to leave out from “agrees” to “Youth Parliament” and insert:

“pays tribute to the important role of voluntary organisations in developing the awareness of, and involving, young people in civic society; emphasises the crucial role of Scotland’s schools; agrees to support constructive work with young people as they engage in civic society and democratic processes whether at local level through local authority youth councils, or at national level through organisations such as the Scottish Youth Parliament; believes that, given the alarming decrease in young people voting in elections in recent years, schools and voluntary groups should take a lead in encouraging young people to re-engage in the mainstream political process”.

15:18

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I welcome the minister’s opening remarks. I find that I agree with most of what Michael Russell said and a great deal of what Murdo Fraser said. I apologise to the MSYPs that I was unable to attend today’s meeting. I am poorer for that.

Last week, in a members’ business debate, we spoke about the United Nations children’s summit. We welcomed the fact that the plight and the rights of children were to be highlighted at the highest level and brought to the notice of world leaders. Uniquely, children themselves were to have a voice in the UN. Members from all parties welcomed those developments, although we were anxious that the summit should not be a one-off publicity event but should mark a genuine commitment from the world’s Governments to put children’s issues at the top of the agenda.

In that debate, I said that I felt that the Parliament had made a promising start in its attempts to listen to young people and to provide them with a series of platforms, to enable them to express their views and influence opinion at the highest levels of Scottish democracy. We spoke about the Scottish youth summit, the consultation that was held with committee members, the evidence sessions during the Scottish Qualifications Authority inquiry and our wish to establish a children’s commissioner.

We should not pretend that we are yet connecting fully with young people throughout Scotland. I want to consider two strands of our

approach. I will start with the formal structures that seek to enable our youngsters to participate in civic Scotland—in events such as the special Scottish session that is scheduled to coincide with United Nations meetings next week—and our own Scottish youth parliament.

As the motion indicates—and as other members have said—our youth parliament is a vibrant and vigorous forum for debate. It has existed for 12 years and has a proud record. I hope that its members and supporters feel that it has become more directly involved in the governance of Scotland in the past three years than was previously the case. Nevertheless, I fear that it is not yet fully recognised by Scots, and is not yet fully embedded in the democratic psyche of the nation.

In the briefing that the Scottish youth parliament has provided for the debate, there is a series of suggestions about how its profile can be raised, how its work can be made more effective and how it can be drawn into a more constructive and productive relationship with the Parliament. I was delighted to hear the minister indicate that measures would be put in place in that regard, and I urge ministers and other members to examine carefully the suggestions made in the briefing and to consider whether more of them might be implemented. That would put into practice some more of the good words that we are fond of using in the chamber.

Youth forums and, at local authority level, youth councils, are forming throughout Scotland, and the remarks that I have made about the youth parliament apply equally to those councils. The local forums give youngsters an opportunity to speak for themselves and to express their views on topics of interest. However, a worry remains that the formation of such groups could lead to raised expectations, which could be dashed if there is not a genuine working relationship with decision makers at the local authority level.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am not sure whether Ian Jenkins is aware that Scottish Borders youth council is looking for voting rights on community councils, and that the convener of Scottish Borders Council—a Liberal Democrat—has not responded on the matter. Would Ian Jenkins support the call for youth councils to have voting rights on community councils?

Ian Jenkins: I will do my best to do so. I attended the most recent meeting of the Scottish Borders youth council, which I am sorry that Christine Grahame was unable to attend. She was somewhere else—perhaps in Eyemouth, at an election, but never mind.

Christine Grahame: Naughty, naughty!

Ian Jenkins: Sorry—I was joking.

Last week, Robin Harper suggested that pupil councils in schools can seem, however well meaning the intention, like structures that are put in place for form's sake, if they do not have any real influence on the school's affairs. He suggested that such councils should have a budget, or some kind of real power, so that they feel that they are being given responsibility—as well as the opportunity to make mistakes, if it comes to that.

I do not want to seem negative, because structures such as pupil councils are important and positive, and they seek to draw young people into the democratic process. We recognise that the structures are there, but they need to be made to work. In addition, there are some youngsters who will not participate in such formal institutions—and those who do need to feel valued. In a wider context, the participation of young people in less formal projects and their empowerment will often interest youngsters more directly in the life of the community in which they find themselves.

There are examples of youth projects, school initiatives and projects run by voluntary organisations in all our constituencies. They take youngsters into the community and encourage them to help themselves and others by working together, making decisions and seeking solutions to problems that they have identified. I am thinking, for example, of paired reading schemes or buddying partnerships in schools, which help vulnerable youngsters to cope with the difficult transition from primary school to secondary school, and of projects in which pupils work in residential homes for the elderly, creating gardens for the home, restoring paths through woodland, decorating residents' recreational areas and engaging them in projects that involve reminiscences about their past lives. That is really becoming involved in the community—seeing the problems that exist and the kind of things that need to be delivered by national Government and local government.

I am always reluctant to prescribe the inclusion of extra material in the school curriculum, but it may be argued that greater emphasis should be placed on education for citizenship, in some form or other. Similarly, it may be argued that all pupils should be encouraged to become engaged in voluntary service. People try hard to get work experience, but that work experience does not have to be in industry. It can be—and often is—in voluntary service. That should be part of our approach.

Tommy Sheridan: Although it is important for us to encourage young people to become involved in voluntary service at a local level, it angers

young people that, under legislation set at national level, the minimum wage for young people is lower than the minimum wage for adults. Does the member agree that that type of discrimination is not acceptable?

Ian Jenkins: We may want to debate that issue. Many of us are sympathetic to the point that the member makes. I know that there are practical difficulties with the proposal, but in theory I am inclined to agree with Tommy Sheridan.

Outside-school projects, such as the millennium volunteers, have shown us young people setting up youth cafes and finding and managing funds. Youngsters in my constituency have set up a peer group advice service that deals with drug and alcohol issues. They have set up and managed valuable drop-in centres. If youngsters are involved in that way, they start to see the real problems. If they believe that there is a route by which they can influence opinion, they will take it. If they think that there are gaps in the system, they will see no point in it. We must make young people feel that there is a democratic process.

Reference has been made to Mr Le Pen—by implication at least. Murdo Fraser asked how we can involve young people in the political process. Perhaps we could adopt a better voting system for Parliament. Then we might not get silly results like last week's French election result.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Ian Jenkins: No.

Tony Blair is worried about the problem of disaffected youth and truancy. His solutions and suggestions are wrong, but the problem is genuine. We must start to make youngsters feel that they are valued, that we can talk to them in a language that they understand and that we can respond to them.

One thing that young people must learn from the democratic process is that we do not always get what we want. They must also realise that not only young people have problems with the political process. We could have a very similar debate about better government for older people. The assemblies and meetings that we held a couple of years ago to discuss better government for older people showed that they have the same wish to be empowered, respected and responded to. I think about planning issues in my constituency. People—not just older people or younger people—need to have a forum in which their opinions are listened and responded to and in which they are treated with respect by those who are making decisions about their lives.

If we can improve our democratic processes throughout Scotland—for older people, for people of my age and for younger people—Scotland will

be a better place. The minister's speech today and the motion take us in that direction. We need not just to talk a good talk; we need to do the business. In that spirit, I support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open part of the debate. If speeches are restricted to four minutes, we should be able to include all members who would like to speak.

15:29

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I am glad that we are able to debate this topic this afternoon. There is a danger that we, as MSPs, may feel warm inside about having a nice discussion among ourselves, but that the debate may totally wash over the young people with whom we need to engage and connect. All the reports that have been done and the discussions that we have had with young people indicate that young people want us to listen to them. They also want organisations to listen to them. That is only the starting point of what we should be doing. After that, we should ensure that key agencies and Government organisations reflect on what young people have said and then engage with those young people to tell them how we are going to act on their comments and recommendations.

That is why I welcome the Scottish Executive taking the lead, setting the agenda and making it an expectation that young people are listened to by the key agencies. That is important because it legitimises the process.

Work is being done across the city of Edinburgh, some of it funded by the Executive through social inclusion partnership funding and some by the City of Edinburgh Council. Some of that work is impressive and many lessons can be learned from it. The Edinburgh youth social inclusion partnership is working with the City of Edinburgh Council to increase levels of youth participation in service planning and delivery on the things that really matter to young people. Those organisations are taking the lead in considering the best ways to get young people involved. They are also working with some of the most disadvantaged and socially excluded young people and trying to give them the crucial skills to become involved on their own terms, not those of others.

For example, EYSIP held a youth jury, which was a good experiment. Executive funding made that possible. The youth jury got some important commitments from local service providers—the City of Edinburgh Council, the NHS board and Lothian and Borders police—that they would do three seemingly simple and straightforward things. However, those things require a lot of commitment and a bit of thought.

First, each organisation said that it would

conduct a youth-led review of one aspect of its service provision every year. Secondly, each would identify someone in the organisation who would be the point of contact and be able to respond to young people's inquiries, complaints or suggestions. Thirdly, each would hold a yearly open-doors event to give young people the chance to come in, see from the inside how the service works and get a better understanding of the key issues.

EYSIP has been talking to young people about their key issues and where they want to see changes. Transport, education, leisure facilities—nothing that would surprise us—were all mentioned. The report makes difficult or interesting reading for those who deliver those services. There were a lot of common themes. For example, many young people say that they want proper, affordable and appropriate facilities. What does that actually mean to a young person?

In my constituency, there are three organisations that involve young people in delivering their services and in considering what kind of services they have and how those services are designed.

The Streetwork project works with vulnerable young people who might be homeless and have experienced all sorts of problems in the past. The project is doing some radical feedback work with young people. The project is working not in the traditional areas, but with young people as they congregate on the street. It is trying to talk to them about getting them involved and giving them the right kind of support.

The Caledonia youth project provides sexual health advice to young people. That project is also partly designed by young people so that it gives them the right kind of service, which is not patronising.

The Edinburgh City Youth Cafe, which we can see from the Parliament, is a massively popular project. Young people go there because they want to. It is safe and it gives good access to services and support. At lunch time, I heard that one of the members of the Scottish youth parliament has been on the board of the Edinburgh City Youth Cafe for six years. That is quite a commitment. Lots of young people are involved throughout the city and communities and are putting in that kind of effort.

Many young people have a negative opinion of politicians, politics and Government. That presents us with a challenge. The challenge is not new, but we have the chance to do something about it, to turn around young people's views and to ensure that our new democracy in Scotland is accessible.

The work that has been done by the Parliament has started to make a difference, but there is a lot

more to be done. In particular, we need to monitor the progress in our communities and find out the percentage of young people who are involved and how well we are doing. It will make a difference if young people can see the changes that have been made since they got involved in the discussion process.

The EYSIP report, which was published today, talks about the bottom line. For young people, that means a starting point where they have information, the chance to participate and enough control in their lives to make real choices. Our job is to help them and to work with them to make that happen. That is the best that the Parliament can do and the debate is a good start for that process. We will need to come back to the issue in the future.

15:35

Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): As the youngest member to enter the Parliament—and the youngest member to leave it—I hope that I have something to contribute on the issue of youth involvement in politics. To get away from the slightly cosy, sleepy nature of today's debate, I want to set down a number of institutional challenges, which I offer to members on an entirely non-party-political basis.

Let me start by challenging the whole idea of youth issues, which is an idea that I have always resisted. I have never believed that youth issues exist. I have never believed that people who are 20 do not care about personal care for their grandparents, or that those grandparents do not care about job creation for the young. I dispute the term "youth issues" and I dispute the inference that people draw that those issues are somehow not part of wider societal issues. Such terms are easy, facile and patronising, but they are convenient for politicians. We must put a stop to the use of such terms immediately.

Secondly, I ask that we change the tone of the discussions that we conduct about youth parliaments, youth affairs, youth issues—whatever they are called. I am a great believer in the idea that today's young people are cynical consumers. In every other aspect of their lives, they are cynical and they are tuned in. Young people deal with the mass media every moment of every day of their lives, yet politicians will all of a sudden change the tone of the discussion whenever they deal with youth issues. We have heard some examples of that even today.

In America's last election, Senator McCain, who was the oldest presidential candidate, had the youngest campaign profile. That was because Senator McCain ran on a straight-talking express tour. He ran on the basis that people were big

enough and ugly enough to hear it as it is. He believed that people understood that choices must be made and that introducing policies would involve costs. He treated people like adults. It is interesting that his campaign profile was younger than the rest.

Thirdly, we need to consider the challenge to the political parties. It is obvious that every party in the chamber suffers from a recruitment problem, but what are we all doing, as MSPs and as local leaders, to inspire and cajole younger people to enter politics? Perhaps we need to have a long hard look at that. It is obvious that every party is struggling. I do not seek to make any advantage from saying that, because the SNP struggles as much as every other party.

The thing that is missing and the key ingredient that we must recognise is that we need to see the issue in a wider framework. My father, who is a Church of Scotland minister, tells me that it is impossible to get the numbers up in the Sunday school and to keep the youth fellowship going in the way that he used to do. We have a real problem with civic involvement and participation, which affects all organisations: the Girls Brigade, the Boys Brigade, the scouts and the churches. The problems with politicians and political parties are part of that wider malaise, but we must come up with a distinct solution.

The fact that young people are still involved in single-issue campaigns tells us something. It tells us that younger people—in fact, people in general—need to know that what they are doing is relevant. They need to know that their proposals will be listened to and implemented. The point of pressure groups and single-issue campaigns is that they have a focus. They have a drive to get changes through, which politicians are missing and which political systems are blunting.

As all people in society seem to be struggling with politics and with politicians, why do we not look at that issue? The year 1999 was about a rebirth of politics. It is time to look in the mirror and ask whether that rebirth has happened. I do not think that it has. We need to look at political parties. If the members of every party that is represented in the chamber—every party with more than one member, perhaps I should say—were to look at their party's structures, they would see the dead wood. They would see the dead hand of party structures on recruitment and on the innovation that might come through.

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): Who is the dead wood in the SNP?

Mr Hamilton: I shall not name names, as it is not that kind of debate.

We need to look at the philosophy of the parties. Why do we ask, "Have you done your time, son?" instead of asking, "Are you good enough?" Meritocracy needs to be brought back into politics; it is not necessarily being delivered by party structures and by party lists. Parties need to look again at their promotion structures. I say that as someone who is about to leave.

I want to reflect on something that I read in an entirely different context. In a recent debate on government, Professor Michael Oakeshott—perhaps members have heard of him before, as he is a professor of political science at the London School of Economics—said this:

"The politics of our society are a conversation in which past, present and future each has a voice; and though one or other of them may on occasion properly prevail none permanently dominates, and on this account we are free."

The key thing that we must understand in this debate is that the involvement of Scotland's youth is not a gift to be given out by the Parliament or by parliamentarians, but a right to be asserted by Scotland's young people and a right to be accepted by this institution.

15:40

Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh (Central Scotland) (Con): I am somewhat tremulous at the prospect of following Duncan Hamilton, in case he thinks that I am part of the dead wood. Age is a state of mind, Duncan. It is only a number.

I welcome the fact that we are having a debate about helping Scotland's youth to participate in communities. I am not one of those who subscribe to the view that children or youths should be seen and not heard—quite the opposite. Before I came here, one of my duties was as a lay inspector of schools. It was my job to channel the thoughts of those users of the service to the professionals who made the decisions—Her Majesty's inspectors, whose reports plop regularly and mercilessly on our desks.

The opportunity for interaction with youngsters that the education service provides through the visits of schoolchildren to the Parliament is one of the best aspects of this job. I love it. Nothing keeps a person more grounded than when a primary or early secondary child asks, "Why did you become an MSP?" The area that I represent is reasonably convenient for visits and I have had my share of trips to Cannonball House with members from across the party divides—from back benchers right up to ministers. The remarkable thing is that, across those divides, we all got involved for similar reasons—we wanted to help local communities. Sometimes, it is quite refreshing for youngsters to see that we are not always at one another's throats.

I was involved in helping voluntary organisations and self-help groups in my local community before I ever got involved in politics. It seemed the natural thing to do: we saw a problem, or somebody who needed a hand, and we offered assistance. I hope that such a tendency never goes out of fashion. It should pass from generation to generation.

I am grateful for the opportunities that the Parliament presents to get involved with youngsters who are helping in their communities. On Cathie Craigie's birthday a couple of weeks ago, I and many others were involved in a litter-picking campaign in the village of Cumbernauld, which had been organised by the community council. The youngsters flocked to lend their support in the village, unaware that they would be rewarded with a piece of birthday cake.

I have taken part in similar ventures with brownies, guides and other groups elsewhere—yet again, youth organisations were helping and participating in their communities. One of the funniest things was when a pensioner lady came to express her appreciation of the youngsters' efforts. She had brought one of those multipacks of crisps but, after dishing out all the crisps, she chucked the litter on the street. We had to go and pick it up.

I have to sound a cautionary note. Parents would be more willing to let their children help in those activities if they did not have to be permanently on the lookout for dog dirt and discarded needles. Such is the reality of helping in the community.

From the "Put it to your MSPs" forums—one of which I took part in—which are organised by schools, with the assistance and support of Unicef, to youth strategies such as that in the very bright, but not glossy, document from South Lanarkshire Council that I have with me, I support youngsters having their say. How many of us appreciate what a big deal it is to have a skateboard park? Considerably fewer would be able to quote a line from the song "Heaven is a Halfpipe"—perhaps Duncan Hamilton could, or Frank McAveety.

As recently as Friday, I was a scribe for the cross-party group event called "Having your say" in Eastwood. It was figured that I would know my way there. I may not have agreed with everything that was said or everything that I noted, but I salute the youngsters—some of whom were members of the Scottish youth parliament and are here today—for having the bottle and the guts to get up and speak. We should harness their support and their enthusiasm, help them to get involved and encourage them to have their say.

Heaven forbid that they catch the oldie disease of apathy.

I support the amendment in Murdo Fraser's name.

15:45

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I, too, welcome the visitors from the youth parliament. I understand that they will visit my constituency next month and I look forward to seeing them at James Watt College in Kilwinning.

It is a common misconception that young people are not interested in politics. Members will be interested to know that recent research conducted by MORI found that only 10 per cent of young people were apathetic, while the majority professed interest in politics. The only way to reconcile that with voting numbers is to recognise that young people are interested in politics, but not in party politics. That is supported by the Economic and Social Research Council study on youth and citizenship. The initial findings show that only three out of 110 young people interviewed belonged to a political party, but that almost half had been involved in community campaigning and politics—a point that Scott Barrie made.

The excellent European Commission consultation paper, "A New Impetus for European Youth", says:

"Participation must be encouraged without exception"

regardless of whether it is

"one-off or ongoing, spontaneous or organised."

I am sure that we all agree with that point.

The Scottish Parliament has a role to play in engaging young people. As we have heard today, all members meet young people through school groups that come to the Parliament. However, it is not enough just to talk to them—we must listen and act upon what we hear.

The other day I received a petition from a group of young people in my constituency. It is a very colourful explanation of what they are looking for in the local area and I am quite proud of it. I have not met any of the young people yet, but I look forward to doing so soon. The petition says:

"When you were a child, did you get into trouble for having fun? Why do all kids get into trouble for doing what kids do? Were grown-ups never kids themselves?"

There are some very pertinent points there. It concludes by saying:

"Let's do what's best for the children, after all, they are our future! Kids smile. Children first."

We can all learn a lesson from those young people and I look forward to meeting them to discuss their petition soon.

Another group of young people in my constituency recently formed a skateboarding

group—rather like the group that Lyndsay McIntosh mentioned. She said that Frank McAveety might be a skateboarder—

Mrs McIntosh: I only said that he might know the song, "Heaven is a Halfpipe".

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Sorry, but I am a mosher.

Irene Oldfather: I had the great fortune to meet OPM. Lyndsay McIntosh has obviously forgotten about my own foray into rollerblading, which got me into a little bit of trouble. There is a video of that somewhere if anyone wants to see me practising.

The young people who formed a skateboarding group have successfully lobbied North Ayrshire Council for a skate park to be constructed near a local school. They have said that they will help to run and fund the park. I am sure that the minister is aware of that project, because she lives close to the proposed site. What was particularly welcome was the proactive approach of the council, which worked to seek out the concerns of young people and to take their views seriously. We all welcome that.

The motion refers to the Commission's white paper on youth, which I quoted from earlier. Following enlargement, there will be 75 million young people in Europe. The European project itself is still young—it is still being debated and reformed. If it is to make progress, it needs the enthusiasm, ambition and commitment of our young people across Europe. The minister, in her opening comments, mentioned the youth convention. I have written to her on the subject and I welcome the fact that she supports it. I have also written, on behalf of the European Committee, to Peter Hain, asking that he nominate a Scottish young person for one of the UK positions on the convention. I hope that the Parliament will support that suggestion. I support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We look forward to the showing of Irene Oldfather's video on some other occasion.

15:49

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP): I want to pick up a theme that has run through a number of speeches today. We all know about article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is about hearing children, but it is also about listening to them. I say to the minister that it is also about doing something about what we hear.

I wish to raise an issue that the minister knows is dear to my heart. We need to produce a national strategy on youth space for the young people of

Scotland. It is not good enough for us to say continually that youth cafes and leisure facilities are provided by local authorities; that answer is not good enough. We have national strategies to deal with youth crime and youth alcohol abuse, which are delivered by local organisations. It is time that we listened to what young people have been saying to us since day one of this Parliament, and provided a national strategy on youth space in Scotland. There is evidence that that is what young people are asking us for. They are telling us that it is what they want.

Reference has been made to the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on children and young people's "Having your say" events, of which we have had three, in Ayr, Arbroath and Newton Mearns. On each occasion, a recurring theme was, "Give us our space. Come and ask us what we want, then give us our space to do our own thing." That would be an answer not only to giving young people their own space, but to the great bogey of youth crime and youth disorder.

Ms Curran: I was horrified to hear Fiona McLeod say that youth crime was a bogey. It is a serious social problem.

Fiona McLeod: I agree that crime is a serious social problem, but the way in which parts of the press react to youth crime issues is over the top. We should take cognisance of that.

I quote from the notes on the cross-party group's Newton Mearns event, which Lyndsay McIntosh attended. Young people

"feel drugs and alcohol would not be such a problem for young people if they had places to go. A place to go would also prevent young people from hanging around the streets, which could help to make the streets safer and reduce crime."

That is what young people are telling us—give us our space and help us to be responsible citizens.

I have evidence from my experience as a volunteer youth worker. In 1996, we set up a drop-in cafe in the village where I live. On the Friday nights when the cafe was open, there was a 300 per cent drop in the reporting of crime involving young people. In the past few months in Milngavie, in my constituency, we opened Cafe 1, which is a cafe for young people. Most important, young people are involved on the management committee. The local police inspector told me that on the four nights a week that Cafe 1 is open, there are no reports of youth disturbances. That evidence shows that we should work towards achieving what young people are asking for, but also allow young people to contribute to ensuring that we have safer communities.

I make a final plea to the minister for us to listen to young people. We should hear what they say, but also react to it. A suitable finish to today's

debate would be to say that we will talk to young people about a national strategy on youth space for young people.

15:54

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

The danger of motions such as the one that we are debating is that they are somewhat nebulous and devoid of specifics. Duncan Hamilton is right when he says that this has tended to be a cosy debate, with us talking to one another. Frankly, we are probably alienating the Scottish youth parliament even more by sitting down here in this basement chatting to one another.

There are a lot of spare seats in the chamber. It might not have been a bad idea if we had just had an informal session—a joint session perhaps—with the Scottish youth parliament representatives sitting in the chamber. We could have forgotten the business for today. We would not have had to have a vote, but if we had, we could have allowed the Scottish youth parliament representatives to vote. That would certainly have been more relevant. After all, if we can have those from the Scottish Parliament business exchange programme who are shadowing MSPs—and whom I welcome—sitting at the back of the chamber, which required us to bend the rules, surely we can have the young people down here as well.

Cathy Jamieson: We did that at lunch time. Young people were concerned about the fact that it is difficult for them to have access to the chamber because there are more members of the Scottish youth parliament than there are chairs. I gave the commitment to investigate that, if it is a problem, so that we involve them in the process.

Mr Raffan: I am grateful to the minister for that answer, but that event was different from what I am describing. I would happily help her to bring in extra chairs. We have loads of space. It would have been easy to fit in everyone in the chamber. I was just making a point.

When we have a debate such as today's, we use the buzz words of "consultation", "participation" and "involvement". We talk in our usual jargon. We all know the problem. Young people—particularly those who are aged between 18 and 24—are much less likely to vote, because they are alienated from conventional politics. However, as other members have said, that does not mean that they are uninterested in politics. The remarks of Rod McKenzie, who is the editor of BBC Radio 1 news, struck a chord. He said:

"Radio 1 believes that its target audience of 15-24 year olds are not disinterested or depoliticised. But they are fed up with the sterile and formulaic Westminster political coverage—men in suits shouting at each other in parliamentary jargon across the dispatch box"—

or across the chamber. He went on to say:

"Every time we ask for their opinions online on paying higher taxes to fund the NHS, tuition fees or foxhunting, we get a massive, passionate and thoughtful response. So this isn't about de-politicised youth—it's about Westminster not being relevant."

I hope that we do not fall into Westminster's trap, but we are on the edge of doing so. I know that there is great anti-Westminster feeling here. We are never to mention the big W, so we should not try to imitate it. I have a horrid feeling that we are beginning to do so.

The solution to young people's alienation is not in our hands; it is in the hands of young people. It is not for us to tell them to use the mechanisms, systems, forums, assemblies or parliaments—a pretty ghastly word to many young people—that we have chosen. We must ask young people how they think we can make what we do more relevant or attractive to them and involve them more. That means meeting them on their own ground and in their own space, whether that is in drop-in centres, youth cafes, youth clubs or elsewhere. We must talk about the issues that they, not we, want to talk about. Our involvement and the Executive's involvement should be in making resources and facilities available to stimulate the process, but not to control or dominate it.

I will give a few examples of success that we can replicate elsewhere. The Aberdeenshire youth forum that Aberdeenshire Council ran about two years ago was a weekend event that involved about 200 young people from all over the county. Alex Johnstone, Elaine Thomson, Richard Lochhead and I participated in a panel—God, it was one of the toughest meetings at which I have spoken. Young people set the agenda and decided what they would discuss and the format. That is how it should be.

On Monday, Stirling University Students Association held workshops during politics day and had a panel session at night. Robin Harper participated with me in that event and the panel session had a much higher turnout than the university's general election meetings did. We should do things in the way that young people want us to do them.

I ask for the minister's attention, because I am making an important point. I would be grateful if she listened, because I want a response. In drop-in centres such as the Corner in Dundee and Off the Record in Stirling, which are jointly financed by local authorities, health boards and the Executive, young people are on their own ground. They can talk to one another and get the information that they need. They are not told what to do, but if they want information about sex, drugs or whatever, they can obtain it at such centres. We need such facilities in every town and city in Scotland.

Cathy Jamieson rose—

Mr Raffan: I have given way once to the minister. Perhaps Ms Curran can make a detailed response when she winds up the debate in her inimitable way. That would help.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It would also help if Mr Raffan wound up soon.

Mr Raffan: I would like to say more, but I will do so on another occasion.

Participation should mean that children and young people have the ideas and establish the forums or projects, then invite adults to join them in making decisions. That is how we will increase participation and end alienation.

16:00

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Keith Raffan mentioned the importance of direct engagement. I recommend to him the experience I had last week of direct engagement with my constituents on the issue of youth disorder. I recommend it to him as a reality check to some of the discussion that we have had today. I want to talk briefly about that meeting. I have two abiding images of it. One is of more than 600 people inside the hall and more than 100 outside it, who were united in anger, frustration and fear because of their experience of youth disorder. The second image is of a group of young men—school students—who, having returned from a football practice, were bemused and bewildered that they could in any way be identified with or connected to the source of such distress.

It is clear that youth disorder is a problem that exists across our communities. We all know of older people in particular whose every waking moment is determined by the actions of youngsters—where they walk when they are out and in which room they sit in their own houses. That experience deserves our attention.

It is equally clear that, because of the disorder of some young people, other young people are excluded and prevented from participating in the lives of their communities. We know that most young people are not involved in the problem, but we also know that some young people exclude many other young people from using the facilities in their communities. There is a rising trend of young women reporting violent abuse by their boyfriends and partners. We also know that young men are more likely to be the targets of direct violence.

A number of the people who were present at the meeting last week spoke about having to stop their children going out, or of getting taxis for them if they did let them out. That is because of their fear of violence. The problem is greater for families in

poorer communities who do not have the luxury of a car to ferry their children around.

The problem of lack of youth participation in communities does not exist in a parallel universe. However, in the interests of young people and to give them rights to engage in their communities, that issue must be tackled. We need to build an alliance across age groups and neighbourhoods, including all those who see community bullying and intimidation as unacceptable.

Much has been said recently about truancy. I want to say first that truancy is a symptom of a range of problems. It is essential to focus on the causes and nature of truancy in order to develop appropriate strategies. Youngsters who are out of control—bullying others, intimidating their families and communities—need different measures from those needed for the young people who are bullied at school or in the community and who retreat from school.

Other strategies are needed for young people who are afraid to leave their homes because of what is happening there, or who are being kept at home, for example young girls who are kept at home as carers or young housekeepers. Those children need strategies that tackle the behaviour of their parents, because it is that behaviour that denies those young people the right to participate in an active childhood. We need particular strategies to deal with different circumstances.

It is essential, when seeking solutions, that we engage with young people who suffer as a consequence of youth disorder. I am active in doing that in my constituency. We need to work with young people who are being bullied. We need to offer service and support for those who need help to reveal, rather than conceal, what is happening at home. The youngsters with whom I worked in a previous existence understood that rights brought responsibilities. They liked always to challenge and they demanded high standards from those who worked with them.

Truancy is a complex problem, but we will create a greater problem if we do not hold on to the importance of compulsory education. All our young people have the right to experience the liberation that is offered by education.

The best youth work I ever came across was tough, demanding and challenging. The young people were treated with respect and, rather than being patronised, demands were made of them. The youth workers listened to the young people and challenged them when they disagreed with them. The best young people I ever met were those who asked not for sympathy, but for the means through which they could seek solutions to their problems.

Our communities and our democratic process are strengthened by the serious involvement of young people. We must address the particular exclusion of young people in our deprived communities who do not have the capacity or luxury to get involved in some of the processes that have been set up thus far. Young people are the best hope for our communities to become safe and secure places for all our citizens to enjoy.

I welcome the debate and I wish more power to the minister in the work that is ahead of her.

16:04

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Young people tell me that they want action, not words. I have taken on board the fact that the Education, Culture and Sport Committee has had frequent contact with young people, whereas the Justice 1 Committee and the Justice 2 Committee have still to do that. Given that the committees are addressing diversionary programmes for youth offending such as drug taking, perhaps it is time for those committees to take advice from young people.

I want to be practical. I will demonstrate how difficult it is for young people to get anything going. I want to talk about Scottish Borders youth council, which I know about. I say to Ian Jenkins that I was not in Eyemouth. I do not know where I was, but I was doing something important.

Scottish Borders youth council was established in November 2000, but after spending so much time building up its constitution, policies and ideas, it has just lost its community education officer, who supported the council throughout, but who was sacked on the spot yesterday. That has happened just when the council is embarking on some real targeted projects. The reality is that the situation is very hard: there has been some tokenism and patronising behaviour, which has not helped the youth council at all.

Of course, the Scottish Borders youth council has a link with the Scottish youth parliament, as it sends two members from each of the Borders constituencies to represent it. The youth council wants to be taken seriously. I paraphrase article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child when I say that I think that the organisation should be heard and that its views should be taken into account in decisions that affect it. I mentioned one such decision in an intervention on Ian Jenkins.

Although the youth council's representatives already sit on Hawick community council and Galashiels community council, they have no voting rights. Young people should have such rights, because they are engaged at that level in the community. From such successes, they can

develop to national level and engage with national issues. In fact, they can do that in parallel with their engagement with the community. Those aspects do not have to be separated.

On Thursday, the youth council will meet to discuss skateboarding facilities in the Borders. I have learned more about skateboards in the past few months than I ever knew before. The only skateboard park in the Borders is in Hawick and it is oversubscribed. It was, interestingly enough, funded by the police; the youth council has found that the police are really engaging with the park to find means of diverting children away from what I might loosely call mischief—which can of course grow into criminal activity. I can give all members including Duncan Hamilton a guarantee: I consider skateboarding parks to be a youth issue; I broke my foot going down some steps, so there is no way I would ever get on a skateboard.

Michael Russell: Speak for yourself.

Christine Grahame: Mike Russell has just given us an undertaking that he will have a go on a skateboard.

The youth council also helped Scottish Borders Council to draft its transport policy, which shows that issues between the generations are not exclusive.

Furthermore, young people know the real facts about drugs. For example, today I found out the price in the Borders of drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine. I am sure that even the authorities do not have that information. We have to find ways of discovering what is happening to young people on the ground.

We also have to find out how to divert young people away from a potential life of crime. The youth council representatives told me that we have to catch such people at the age of 12. When the youth council's members went round schools in an attempt to get people to join it, it was 12-year-olds who came forward, not the teenagers who were already into the drink-and-drugs lifestyle. The youth council members simply wanted to engage those children in something more worth while in the community.

Unlike Mr Raffan, I will keep within my time and end on this point. The Scottish Borders youth council requires not just proper funding, but consistency of approach and people who take the issues seriously—I know that MSPs from all parties do so. However, we are sometimes seen as old and out of date and we must catch on to issues such as the importance of skateboarding. I assure the chamber that I speak for myself on that point.

I commend Mike Russell's amendment to the chamber. We have a long way to go before we can ensure that the youth of Scotland make a real

input to this very young and developing Parliament.

16:08

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I support Murdo Fraser's amendment, and particularly commend the various voluntary organisations for the help that they have given—and continue to give—young people. It would be good if our Scottish education system could again become the envy of the world.

As a father of four children, including two teenage daughters, I am a fervent supporter of young people's participation in everything, especially the washing-up. However, children and young people are now exposed far more to the workings of everyday life because of their comprehension of information technology, which in most cases is better than that of their adult counterparts. They have a new network of communication, which is broader and speedier than that of previous generations, and they use it.

I remember my formative years. All was love and lettuce leaves, and the buzzword was macrobiotics. We felt the inspiration and hope that John F Kennedy generated for a better world, and the tears and despair that followed his murder. It was the era of the cold war, which concentrated our young minds on world events much more than on national politics. There was a clear delineation between right and wrong and God was always on our side. Most politicians seemed to exist only for the benefit of satirists and had silly walks and wore bowler hats.

The British politicians whom I particularly remember were always lampooned figures. There was Harold Macmillan, who told us that we had "never had it so good".

There was Harold Wilson, who smoked his pipe and tried to protect the pound in our pockets, and there was the inimitable George Brown, who was popular because of his style and inebriated appearances on grainy black-and-white television sets. I remember a television programme called "The Brains Trust", which implied that only old people had any brains and were certainly the only people who were worth listening to.

However, young people were calling to be heard. That was reflected in the revolutionary sound of Merseybeat, wondrous new dress codes that were generated by Carnaby Street and outrageous hair styles that were guaranteed to shock the older generation. We did shock them. However, with the benefit of hindsight, a great deal of youthful energy and thinking was ignored and therefore wasted. The older generation never considered that energy and thinking to be useful to

the political process and the younger generation could not relate politics to their everyday lives.

We should learn from the past and facilitate a change that will harness the thoughts and energy of our youth for the benefit of our nation. The years before responsibilities such as holding down jobs and raising children become priorities are years in which young people have time to think about what is right and what is wrong, and to formulate opinions and habits that will guide their later years; it is a time when there is still purity of thought that is untainted by cynicism. The eyes of children behold the truth and the rights of expression should never be denied to them.

Everyone now complains about voter apathy, especially among young people, so the Scottish youth parliament is a welcome addition to encouraging participation and understanding of our political process. It is important that it attaches to the different regions of Scotland and not only to Glasgow and Edinburgh. Alex Johnstone and I participated in a workshop in the youth cafe project in Arbroath and were highly impressed.

I hope that the Scottish youth parliament will produce future politicians of high calibre, who will be the darlings of the press and who will improve people's lives. I hope that they produce a society in which freedom reigns and there is an acceptance that duty to our fellow citizens is a price that we must pay for the acquisition of rights.

16:12

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Today has been an interesting day. I started it with Sarah Boyack and other MSPs at Edinburgh youth social inclusion partnership's presentation, which Sarah Boyack mentioned. I was impressed by the fact that the evidence that was taken came entirely from young people, who were from organisations that represent 4,000 young people in Edinburgh. The evidence taking was thorough.

At lunch time, as vice-convenor of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament for children and young people, I had to chair its meeting. I apologise to the youth parliament because, unfortunately, I could not be at the youth parliament's meeting. The meeting I attended was important. There were five speakers, who represented five important organisations—it would have taken possibly six months for us to reorganise the meeting. It was intended to help us to work out our timetable of discussions over the next year, particularly in relation to a subject that has been mentioned today by Fiona McLeod—youth space. Alan Rees from the International Association for the Child's Right to Play gave a presentation.

The enormous problems that vulnerable young

people have when they leave care and try to find work and make their way in our society is another big issue for young people. There was a good presentation on that issue by John Dickie, who is the head of the youth unit at the Scottish Council for Single Homeless. He mentioned a council that has made tremendous strides in improving conditions for young people in respect of homelessness by consulting on a multi-agency basis, not with the agencies themselves, but with young people who are involved in those agencies. From that consultation, not only have the services that are delivered been improved, but new services have been invented with the help of young people.

I move on to democracy in schools. If we merely graft on good developments—such as the Scottish youth parliament and local youth parliaments—to what we have at the moment, it will be like grafting a healthy branch on to a tree that has very few roots. Youth councils in schools must have real powers. A sham school council teaches young people that democracy does not work. If the decisions that a school council takes are not acted on and it does not have real powers and a budget, all that such a council will teach young people is that democracy does not work. Primary school councils and secondary school councils must have real powers—although they might be small and restricted—so that when they take a decision it is acted on. They can pay for those decisions from their own budgets, when necessary.

I talked with representatives of the Association of Scottish Community Councils the day before yesterday. I asked what that association is going to do about getting young people on to community councils. It said that it is trying to do that, but that its experience was often that young people stayed for a little while and then left. I asked whether the way that community councils work had anything to do with that. The association said that that was probably to do with the fact that most of the people who are involved in community councils are old people. However, there is another answer to that question: community councils must adapt the way in which they work, so that young people feel empowered when they attend them and feel that they are being listened to. They should, as has been said, also be given a vote.

Ian Jenkins said that schools could do more about teaching citizenship, but schools have been doing that. I declare an interest as an ex-modern studies teacher. I hope to stay in the Parliament for long enough not to go back to it, although I thoroughly enjoyed it. In schools that teach modern studies, citizenship is a highly developed subject that provides wonderful ways of involving young people in discussing issues realistically and positively. Modern studies should be the vehicle for academic teaching of politics in schools.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We have some time in hand, if members want to go on a little longer than usual.

16:17

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): Like other members, I welcome the debate. I acknowledge the minister's commitment to young people. That commitment is not just to young people who are active in their communities or to those who have problems or feel excluded; she has a commitment to all young people.

In my constituency of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, the majority of young people are active. Although a small group are involved in anti-social activities, all too often all the young people get bad press because of that. Problems exist in many areas because of a wide variety of factors, but we have a responsibility to harness the potential of young people to make positive changes in their lives and in their communities.

It is often suggested that young people's interest in politics does not seem to be as active or widespread as it once was. I question whether that is the case. We seem always to have been trying to get young people involved in politics. The situation is not now so different from when I was young. I was in the minority of people who were involved in politics in their teens. As Scott Barrie and other members said, young people throughout the country are involved in politics, but they are involved in campaigning and community politics. That is the difference.

The big difference between young people now and when many of us were young relates to the point that Cathy Jamieson and Lyndsay McIntosh made about the attitude in the past that young people should be seen and not heard. We have heard about that in the debate. A big change has taken place—young people want to be involved. They want to be heard and they want not only to be heard, but to be listened to, so that they have an opportunity to shape the policies that will affect them. They want to have the power to contribute to policy making. They want to be listened to, so that their voice makes a difference.

North Lanarkshire Council has recognised the need to work with young people and to develop services. It was one of the first local authorities in Scotland to produce a youth strategy. Unlike Duncan Hamilton, who has left the chamber, I believe that we need strategies, not only for young people, but for many different issues. North Lanarkshire Council's strategy was developed in partnership with young people. That was a true partnership; it did not pay lip service to young people. They were involved in shaping the strategy, they have ownership of the document

and I am sure that, as time goes on, they will have the confidence to ensure that the strategy is acted on and built on. North Lanarkshire Council recently held its first annual youth conference, which Cathy Jamieson attended and which was a huge success. Other youth events, such as the recent youth voice conference in Cumbernauld College, have given politicians and the people who are involved in delivering youth services a clear indication of what young people want.

Young people want to be involved. They want politicians who are approachable and who make young people a priority. They want the opportunity to make contributions that they value. They also make it clear that they want politicians who listen to them. A point that arose at one of the conferences last week was that politicians talk a good game, but do not always follow up on the tactics on which they expound at meetings.

Robin Harper mentioned school councils for primary schools. Such councils are in action and are happening in my constituency. The youth community forums in the North Lanarkshire Council area are in their early days, but they exist. We must build on those examples of good practice.

I regularly visit schools and youth clubs in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. One thing that is missing there, which seems to be missing everywhere in Scotland, is a skateboard park. Skateboarding and inline skating are popular sports. In conjunction with the council, I gathered about 16 names of young people who were interested in the development of a skateboard park. We wrote to those 16 young people to ask them to come together to discuss their requirements for the park. To our surprise and great pleasure, 100 young people turned up at the hall. The news of the meeting had spread like wildfire. Instead of skateboarders from only the Kilsyth area, there were skateboarders from throughout Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. They wanted to take part and to shape the development of the park and they did not want anyone to do that for them.

Every MSP has a responsibility to work with young people and to be as accessible as possible. We must communicate with young people in different ways, not through surgeries at the end of the week, but through e-mail, the internet and text messages. We must communicate with young people in their terms. It would help all members if we learned to communicate in those terms.

The Scottish youth parliament is an excellent forum. The members of that parliament from Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and Lanarkshire—I do not know whether any of them are in the public gallery—have been active in encouraging North Lanarkshire Council to develop its youth strategy.

In 1995—the days before local authority reorganisation—we spoke about producing a youth strategy. It took a committed councillor, Councillor Jean Jones, to engage with young people and to make the youth strategy happen. I congratulate the members of the Scottish youth parliament, particularly those from Lanarkshire.

I hope that this welcome debate will encourage more young people to be heard and that it will change opinions and encourage more adults to engage with young people at their level.

16:25

Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP): This is a worthy subject to debate. I shall address more general matters than the specific issue of the youth parliament. As members have said, there is a declining turnout of both young and old at elections. We need to reflect on that. It is not a matter of simplistic solutions. Longer polling hours and easier voting might help, but they will not address the underlying problem of disengagement from civic society, whether of youngsters or people of a considerably older generation. We must also address the way in which people are being informed about key issues.

A well-informed electorate are more likely to vote. Members have commented on the fact that the turnout for the referendum on the Scottish Parliament was higher than the turnout that elected us. I predict that any referendum on the euro will have a considerably higher turnout than the turnout for past Westminster elections, as considerably more effort is made to educate people about the clear issues. If people are interested in and informed about the issues, they are more likely to vote. We must take that on board.

We do not operate in a vacuum—plenty of studies show what motivates people to vote. If the minister has not read or heard of Professor Henry Milner, I recommend that she read his work on civic literacy. In Finland and Sweden, there is a far higher turnout for elections at all levels than there is in the United Kingdom or the USA. It is not rocket science. The issue has been investigated and we must address it. It concerns not only the young, but all age groups. There is also a paradox. The fact of the matter is that, the older people get, the more likely they are to vote even if they have not voted before. People become politically engaged through being in a trade union, joining a political party or taking part in voluntary groups. It is engagement in civic society that interlinks people and gets them involved in the election process in a democratic society.

I agree that we have to address key matters at school, but we must be wary of simplistic solutions

such as civic studies. They are important but we must also put a great deal of effort into encouraging youngsters—especially females—to participate in sport. The tragedy is that, when youngsters reach the age of 16, society has difficulty in maintaining their interest in sport, notwithstanding the fact that there has been a proliferation of gyms. We must recognise the fact that simply bringing in civic studies will not result in people voting at the age of 26, 36 or whatever. The issue is getting them to participate in the democratic process, and a large part of that depends on literacy. We need an educated electorate—that is the lesson of the Scandinavian countries.

There is too much abuse of youngsters at present, with pejorative descriptions such as “generation X” and the “MTV generation”. Who creates, manufactures and garners wealth from MTV? It is not people who are aged 18 or under—they have no real influence over what goes on. The people who benefit from the creation of the MTV generation are a few people of a considerably older generation.

Civic literacy is not just a matter of requiring that people have the basic abilities to read and write; it is about involving people, so that we can address the digital divide, and ensuring that people read quality broadsheets, so that they are informed. Without that, we will end up with an MTV generation of people who sees one minute of news time for every 59 minutes of music or whatever else and who will not be capable of making an informed decision and will simply not vote.

My colleague Duncan Hamilton is not here, but I have a comment to add to what he said. If we had put all the money that was spent on the American presidential campaign into literacy schemes, not only would we have dealt with illiteracy in the United States, but we would have dealt with illiteracy almost around the globe. That would have been far better for all of us in humanity, as the outcome would have been more people voting and we probably would not have ended up with the current President. That is a lesson for those of us on the left and a warning to those on the Republican right. If we educate our people, they are more likely to vote for parties that want to create a more egalitarian society. That is the virtuous circle that is being created in the Scandinavian countries, as opposed to the vicious cycle that has been perpetrated in the United States and which is beginning to enter this country and, in some respects, Australia.

As I said, we need to upscale the literacy of our people. There are other simple matters that need to be addressed, such as proportional representation, support for public broadcasting,

which is vital for us to get our messages across, and the encouragement of the broadsheet press. If we allow ourselves to live in a dumbed-down society with a dumbed-down electorate, we will get the Government that we deserve. If we wish to replicate what has been achieved in the Scandinavian countries, as many Scottish Executive ministers do, we should start by addressing basic matters such as encouraging literacy and encouraging people to participate in all aspects of democracy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thanks to the sterling efforts of Cathie Craigie and Kenny MacAskill, we are back on time. I call Donald Gorrie to wind up on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

16:30

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I was a slow starter and took no interest in public affairs until I was 30 or so. Since then, I have become heavily committed to youth activity, youth work and youth democracy, but I have no personal experience of those areas. In the next debate today, which is on agism, I will declare an interest. Although I was a slow starter, I perhaps had more stamina than some people did.

We have to fund voluntary organisations and youth participation in them much better than we do. The funding of voluntary organisations at a national and a local level is pathetic and contributes to many of our social problems. We have to find the money to fund them better and create a positive society instead of dealing with the problems that our negative society creates for young people.

The best way for young people to learn about democracy is not to listen to people like us piffing away but to practise it themselves—doing is the way to learn. There are many good examples in Scotland of good and democratic local groups. We have to encourage far more of those and get young people involved in voluntary organisations. Different organisations teach different things. The scouts and other uniformed bodies teach a hierarchical approach to discipline, but they also teach the young people that they have tasks that they must undertake that are important for the group, whereas youth clubs, for example, have more internal democracy and can involve young people more. We have to get the community education bodies and so on to recognise that fact and involve young people more in decision making. In sports clubs, young people can play a great part because the slightly older ones have many of the skills involved and the young people will listen to them and use them as role models.

People have to learn about co-operating—on the

whole, Scots are bad at that, which is why the English usually defeated us—and about rights and responsibilities. Those things do not come naturally; they must be learned. Robin Harper made a good speech about participation in school councils and boards. That is an important point, as those bodies are examples of places where people can learn the things that I mentioned. We have heard about the issue of giving people their own space, which is also important. Youth cafes and so on are fairly unstructured but provide young people with places where they can meet and do their own thing.

We have to listen to young people. They must tell us how to communicate with them—I have not got a clue about that, but I am happy to learn. We have to learn their priorities, which might differ from ours. We all have to learn about that—many politicians are good at consultation as long as everyone agrees with them. We have to accept that the people whom we consult might disagree with us. Similarly, young people have to accept that they cannot get everything that they want immediately. Teaching them that fact involves their getting feedback—from speaking to youth groups, I am aware that the lack of feedback is a common complaint. We have to explain that it is not always possible to get what they want but that we are doing our best and, in due course, it might come. I was struck by the fact that, when we were trying to set up a youth cafe in Edinburgh, even though we failed several times to secure a building and the process took two years, the group of young people hung in there. We can get them to do that if we explain the situation to them.

My party and I feel that people should be able to vote at 16 and that we should take any decision to that effect that is within the power of the Parliament. There should be a youth commissioner. I know that the Executive has accepted that in principle, but we should make more rapid progress towards establishing one. We need local and national funding for the youth parliament and other democratic youth organisations, so that they can represent the views of young people and put their case better.

People are old for a long time; they are only young for a short time. We must have better mechanisms for involving young people. At least the debate is a useful start.

16:35

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I, too, welcome the debate, not only because it is important that we encourage participation for its own sake—we are democrats after all—and not only because it is important for our own self-interest that we find new blood to replace aging hippies such as me, but because I,

like Murdo Fraser, have fond memories of my time in youth politics, if I may call it that. I would recommend participation in youth politics to anyone, as they would learn much and gain great benefit from it.

I am sorry that the Executive did not see fit to accept the Conservative amendment, which was lodged in a generous spirit. Although it says "leave out", members will notice that the words that we have left out are included in our amendment. We want simply to add comments about voluntary organisations and schools to change the emphasis of the Executive motion, which we feel is too institutional.

Organisations such as the Boys Brigade, the scouts, the guides and the Woodcraft Folk, and overarching organisations such as YouthLink Scotland, are important in bringing people through to participation. I agree heartily with Sarah Boyack on voluntary organisations and the work of councils in setting up institutions such as youth cafes to encourage young people to participate and find a way of putting their views across.

Similarly, schools have a key role, not only in what they teach. Kenny MacAskill's point about literacy was well made and important. However, I draw his attention to the fact that Australia, where voting is compulsory, consistently returns conservative Governments. Extra-curricular activities in schools, such as debating clubs, are also important. They encourage greater participation and it is important that such aspects are not forgotten.

Robin Harper: Does Mr Monteith agree that there is still a huge untapped potential for community involvement in the environment? Does he agree that young people really want to get involved in that?

Mr Monteith: Robin Harper will no doubt be pleased to hear what I have to say a little later. I share Scott Barrie's view—as did Murdo Fraser—that single-issue politics shows what parties are missing out on. I will develop that theme a little more.

I came into politics through the London Road church youth group, to which I went along simply to find something to do on a Sunday night. I ended up inviting all political parties to come and talk to the members of the youth group about what they offered. Only two parties replied: the Communist party, which sent somebody along who, funnily enough, worked in the then Scottish Office, and the Conservative party, which sent David McLetchie along. Thus began my career, which, as well as involving great fun in the Federation of Conservative Students, over which I will draw a veil until another occasion, saw me become chairman of the Scottish Young Conservatives at

the ripe young age of 30.

That appointment is one of the matters that I want to highlight in regard to Murdo Fraser's comments. It is important that we ensure that political parties engage young people. I found that the political parties were comfortable with student groups and youth groups because they could corral the young people into those groups and ignore them. If we are to involve young people and give that involvement the respect that it deserves, we must ensure that it is mainstream involvement. We must ensure that people get positions in parties on merit and are able to become constituency chairmen or hold office irrespective of their age.

One of the problems with political parties is that they have, in many respects, lost their idealism. I agree with what Irene Oldfather said about young people being interested in politics as opposed to political parties. Part of the reason is that political parties are no longer dealing with the big issues, such as nuclear disarmament and the cold war. Political parties have to engage in big debates that are of interest, such as on globalisation. How many times do we hear political leaders talking about globalisation? It is a particularly important matter for young people who question me about it. Young people are particularly concerned about ecology and the environment, too, yet we hear very little about it—other than gestures—from our parties. The euro has also been mentioned as an issue of interest to young people, which will surprise people.

There are two things that we can do. First, we can give out the message that politics can be fun. Indeed, we could prolong the debate with the many anecdotes about the times that we have had in the careers that have brought us here. Secondly, and more important, we need to treat young people with respect. If we treat young people with respect, as they are coming up through political parties or are involved in state or voluntary sector institutions, in schools, clubs and so on, they will engage with us and will participate. Treating young people with respect means listening to them.

16:41

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP): Although this is the end of the debate, I would like to highlight a very useful starting point for this subject: the need for all those who are involved with children and young people to recognise that participation is a fundamental right of citizenship. That would indicate that children and young people are valued not only as the citizens that they will become, but for being citizens now, a point that was eloquently made by a member of the Scottish youth parliament at lunch time.

I will refer briefly to the European Union white paper on youth, which is mentioned both in the Executive motion and in our amendment, although it has been mentioned by only one member in the debate. I do so not least because I am now a member of the Committee of the Regions commission for culture and education, which deals with youth issues. The white paper on youth took almost a year to put together and involved many young people from different backgrounds as well as policy makers and others.

One of the most important messages of the white paper is that young people see themselves as responsible citizens. They want to be involved in community life and they want their views to be heard on a variety of issues. The document suggests that their will to participate has to be given room for expression at various levels—from local to national—and that no type of commitment should be excluded. As Irene Oldfather said, participation must be encouraged without exception. That means making participation easier for those young people who have the greatest difficulty in getting involved and providing better access to existing structures for young people who are not members of organisations.

That finding from the EU reflects some of the things that have been said in the debate, and I see the fact that we are together on this issue as a positive thing. Many organisations in Scotland, not least the Scottish youth parliament, are very active in ensuring that children and young people can participate in decision making. Organisations use various methods to do so and display different levels of participation. Much of the work that is going on at a local level is innovative and inspiring, as has already been highlighted.

However, there are barriers to full and meaningful participation, some of which have been highlighted. Those barriers mean that some young people, including disabled young people and young people from ethnic minority communities, are excluded. They are not excluded intentionally, but questions are raised about the need to make mainstream provision better and accessible to everybody, perhaps through changes to the structures through which it is delivered.

There are some simple ways in which to improve the situation in that regard. Perhaps making available more resources to improve access or to provide equipment and additional staff would encourage and enable more disabled young people to take part. We should also respect cultural norms. Changing the time of meetings might increase participation by young Asian women, who are expected to return home early.

Two things are apparent. First, good-quality work with young people is essential. The cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on children

and young people has held consultation exercises in Edinburgh, Arbroath, Ayr, Galashiels and Newton Mearns—I hope that that is the definitive list. We are pleased that it has been recognised that the group has put into practice a real commitment not only to seek out the views of young people but to listen to them. The biggest problem is that there are differing priorities. As Fiona McLeod indicated, provision of youth facilities is not always at the top of council agendas. However, inadequate youth facilities are the issue that has been raised with us most frequently throughout Scotland. We need to find ways of addressing that problem. If provision of youth facilities does not become a priority for the adults who make the decisions, young people may conclude that their views are not being taken seriously.

Secondly, changes to existing structures—both locally and nationally—may be necessary to ensure that commitment to participation is present at all levels. Robin Harper made the point that that commitment needs to be present in schools and communities right up to the level of the Parliament. The education department has developed ways of consulting young people on a number of issues. If appointed, a children's commissioner would be another driver for progress towards ensuring that children's voices are heard and that their needs are addressed. It is very important that young people are consulted on all the issues that affect them, that they are kept advised of what has been decided and that they continue to have an input into policy development. As has been said, much depends on resourcing, but we cannot expect to increase youth participation without first allocating sufficient resources to make that happen and to support the processes involved.

I note that the Executive motion

“recognises the importance of the Scottish Youth Summit”.

So do we. However, it took a year for a report on the summit to be produced for the 1,200 young people who took part in it. Young people's lives move on very quickly and a year is a long time for them. We need to be responsive to young people's and children's lives and to ensure that, when policy makers say that they will do something, it is done and any progress is visible to young people. That is a wee lesson for the Executive from the youth summit. Young people should be able to hold us to account for action points that have been agreed.

Today, many suggestions have been made about what we need to do and we have heard about some examples of good practice. We have heard less about the need to monitor those for effectiveness, so that we can measure the involvement of young people and determine accurately whether the actions that we are taking

are really effective. I am not aware that such information is properly charted either locally or nationally. Perhaps it should be.

There is an overwhelming commitment in the Parliament to tackling the barriers that exist to young people's participation. We hope that we are sending out the message that we are genuinely convinced of the necessity and benefit of involving young people. However, our actions must reflect our words.

16:49

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): I am very pleased to sum up for the Executive in this interesting debate. Members from all parties have shown a clear interest in youth affairs.

At the risk of shocking Duncan Hamilton, I will focus on the points that he made, which were significant and interesting. We cannot afford to be simplistic about the terms "youth issues" and "youth affairs". During the debate, members tended to slip into assuming that there is a straightforward youth agenda—that all young people think and act in the same way and that all young people represent issues in the same way. We must recognise the diversity that exists among young people and be careful not to marginalise and ghettoise the youth debate.

Duncan Hamilton also made a telling point about the political process and how it might militate against our genuine aspirations. We should all examine the processes that we have gone through, including candidate selection and our expectations of behaviour in that process, which could serve to keep young people out of politics. Brian Monteith also referred to that issue.

The question is not just about the political issues that do or do not attract young people. It is how those issues are articulated, managed, prioritised and dealt with. We must hold ourselves to account and perhaps show some humility in the way in which we pursue some of those issues. Duncan Hamilton's contribution to the debate was helpful.

Obviously, the Executive has to categorise and compartmentalise to some extent in order to ensure that agendas are covered. Nonetheless, I argue that it is important that we give a focus to young people's interests. It is in that spirit that we want to respond to the youth issues debate.

Along with Cathy Jamieson, I emphasise our support for the Scottish youth parliament and many of the youth organisations in Scotland. That support should be not only for the voluntary contributions of those young people, but for the people who work with them in supporting those organisations. What has been demonstrated today

is the result of many years' hard work; it is a tribute to young people and their staff that they have been so effective and articulate in raising their issues.

Part of the function of the Scottish youth parliament and other youth organisations is to articulate the important issues that we need to understand. Those organisations are prepared to work alongside us in attempting to address the complex realities that face so many young people. The theme of today has been that we have to listen and act. The Scottish youth parliament has to be a partner with us as we try to advance that agenda, deliver a growing awareness of political institutions and increase their relevance to the needs and concerns of young people.

We must also begin to deal with the disengagement of young people from the formal political process and to assist young people to understand that, if they disengage, that could be to their cost and decisions could be made that do not represent their interests. We need to engage young people in a proper debate about that.

There is no disputing the fact that we need to engage properly with young people and devise sophisticated methods to encourage their participation. As Kenny MacAskill said, that is not just an issue for Scotland; it has a focus at the UK, European and international levels. Cathy Jamieson's introduction gave us detailed indications of how we are trying to develop that.

Irene Oldfather highlighted another theme of the debate—adult versus youth. I just about remember the frustrations that I had as a young person when adults seemed to have forgotten their youth and what it is like to have fun. Adult society did not seem to welcome young people. Like other members, Johann Lamont articulated young people's frustrations when they are condemned because of the actions of a bullying minority. Adults focus on the difficulties of young people and not on their successes.

Brian Fitzpatrick: I trust that ministers will reflect on the serious points that Johann Lamont and others made about the fact that the first, and greatest number of, victims of youth crime and disorder are other young people. Concerns about that throughout my constituency and others are not just the result of some press bogey; they are real concerns, particularly among young people. The levels of public disorder act as a powerful disincentive to youth participation.

Ms Curran: Yes. I will return to that point. It is a serious issue and I support what Johann Lamont said.

Brian Fitzpatrick interrupted me as I was about to quote Shakespeare:

"Crabbed age and youth cannot live together:
Youth is full of pleasance, age is full of care."

As someone who is getting towards crabbed age—I am sure that many members will testify to that—I sincerely hope that it is not completely lacking in pleasure.

We also know that youth issues are not all about pleasant experiences. That is the point that Brian Fitzpatrick has raised. We need to understand that being a young person in today's society involves considerable challenges. Many young people face strains as they try to manage the transition from childhood to adulthood. We must ensure that we do all that we can to assist them in that process. One thing that came out clearly in the debate was that we should not be too sweeping in our assertions about young people. We need to understand the complexities of the experiences that they face.

As Deputy Minister for Social Justice, I am pleased to summarise and reply to the debate. The fact that I am doing so not only represents the commitment of ministers across the Executive to mainstream youth issues—that point came up time and again—but indicates the truly cross-cutting nature of the proper responses that are demanded to the many issues that young people have raised with members.

As Cathy Jamieson mentioned, I have a strong interest in developing community learning and development policy. Christine Grahame made an interesting point about the need to ensure that young people are fully integrated into communities. The same point was made to us at lunch time by members of the Scottish youth parliament. There is a need not only to integrate young people into their communities and into society, but to ensure that young people have their proper stake in those communities and in society.

Nonetheless, we must also understand that young people need their own youth services. As Ian Jenkins said, we should not pretend that we are connecting fully with young people in Scotland. Despite all the efforts that have been made, which Cathy Jamieson properly outlined, we need to understand that there are many barriers that hold back many young people and prevent them from participating in the way that we would want. Perhaps the most significant of those is economic disadvantage, but there are also issues surrounding young people with disability and those from an ethnic minority background who are perhaps not given the proper resources and facilities to become involved.

I argue strongly that youth work can help us a great deal to develop an appropriate response to those challenges. As someone who has had considerable youth work experience and who

taught youth work for a time—perhaps, like Robin Harper, I should declare an interest—I know that youth work can contribute considerably to the development of services and facilities for young people. Youth workers can make a considerable contribution to the development of appropriate mechanisms for economic and educational intervention. Youth workers can also develop a range of activities that broaden young people's horizons through the development of youth groups and youth forums.

Johann Lamont made the point clearly that we have high expectations of our young people. Action is important. We want to contribute to a Scotland in which we can deliver a successful transition to working life. We must understand that we best serve the interests of young people—and of disadvantaged young people in particular—when we drive up attendance and attainment in the school system and when we insist that all our services are of first-class quality. The education services in particular must deliver by meeting the needs of all young people.

We are not complacent about the need to take action on a number of fronts, including health, training for work and the widening of access to higher and further education. We will also argue for the provision of youth facilities, which is a point that was well made in the debate. The mapping exercise should address some of those issues.

Recently, we have had an interesting public debate about youth crime. It is important that we ensure that existing facilities work effectively for young people. We must ensure that no young person slips into trouble for the lack of anything to do. We must drive public services to listen and to deliver for young people. As Johann Lamont pointed out—I say this also in response to Brian Fitzpatrick's point—we need to tackle youth disorder and youth crime with determination. We must do so not only because that is in the broader interests of community safety, but because it is in the interests of the young people themselves.

I am sure that I am not the only person to want to quote Disraeli—although I suspect that some Conservative members may not want to—who said:

"The Youth of a Nation are the trustees of Posterity."

We must recognise and understand the issues that face young people. We must develop a framework for real and effective partnership that supports organisations at the local and national levels while recognising the diverse range of needs and issues that come under the youth umbrella.

If the morality of a nation can be measured by how it treats its old people, its foresight can surely be judged by how it treats its young people. As

someone said to me at lunch time today, young people are not just the future; they are the present. By having a minister for young people, the Executive has shown its commitment and dedication to pursuing young people's issues.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): As a result of today's business, there are three questions to put to members. The first question is, that amendment S1M-3048.1, in the name of Michael Russell, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3048, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on helping Scotland's youth to participate in communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 60, Abstentions 15.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second

question is, that amendment S1M-3048.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S1M-3048, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on helping Scotland's youth to participate in communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Amendment S1M-3048.2 is agreed to.

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In that case, I will put the question again—I most certainly did not hear a no. The question is, that amendment S1M-3048.2 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

AGAINST

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 43, Against 62, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have to say to

members that the clerks and I did not hear a no when I first put the question, so please shout louder in future.

The final question is, that motion S1M-3048, in the name of Cathy Jamieson, on helping Scotland's youth to participate in communities, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Executive's commitment to valuing young people and reflecting their aspirations and needs; recognises the importance of the Scottish Youth Summit and the follow-up launch of the consultation toolkit "Re:action" in contributing to this agenda; agrees to support constructive work with young people as they engage in civic society and democratic processes whether at local level through local authority youth councils, or at national level through organisations such as the Scottish Youth Parliament, and welcomes work by the Executive alongside other devolved administrations and UK departments to develop the UK approach to the European Union white paper on youth and to ensure that young people from Scotland can contribute in the wider arena of international affairs.

Agism

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S1M-2849, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on agism. The debate will conclude without any question being put. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible. Members who are leaving the chamber should do so quickly and quietly.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes research findings by Help the Aged indicating that over 50% of Scots in the 65-74 age group feel that the country treated older people as if they were "on the scrap heap" and "a burden to society"; believes that such treatment is unacceptable and perpetuates ageism in society, which can be seen in both deliberate and inadvertent discrimination in the attitudes of both public and private sector organisations, allied to continued media stereotyping of older people, and therefore considers that the Scottish Executive should identify and address areas of age discrimination in Scottish public life so that older people feel valued and can make a full and positive contribution to society.

17:04

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): We have just finished a debate on young people participating in communities, so it is highly appropriate that we end the day with a debate on older people participating in communities.

I welcome everyone in the visitors gallery who has come to follow the debate. I thank the many members who signed the motion, particularly those who have stayed for tonight's debate. Clearly, the issue struck a chord with members—that is a testament to the commitment across the Parliament to tackling agism. I have a suspicion that the interest in the debate might have something to do with the sterling work that organisations such as Help the Aged are doing in raising the issue directly with members. I thank Help the Aged for bringing the issue to my attention and for all the work that it has done on raising awareness of age discrimination in health, education, social care, transport and citizenship.

The Scotland Act 1998, which set up our institution, defines equal opportunities as

"the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons"

and lists several areas, including age. However, Help the Aged's research shows how far we must go if we are to achieve fair treatment for our older citizens. The fact that 50 per cent of our older people feel that they are "on the scrap heap" should shock every MSP and motivate us to sign up to Help the Aged's campaign to change attitudes. The fact that many older people feel that

they are a burden to society is also something that we should not accept.

We face several challenges: making older people feel valued; changing attitudes among the rest of the population to stamp out discrimination; and ensuring that we have monitoring in place to identify problems and to take action where it is needed. We need to send out the message that stereotyping and hackneyed images of older people are unacceptable. If such images were of women or people from ethnic minorities, they would rightly cause offence.

As a society, we lose a great deal by allowing direct or indirect discrimination against older people. Let us take employment as an example. Long-term unemployment among the over-50s means that people are living on low incomes or in poverty. It is estimated that across the UK, £16 billion in gross domestic product and £5 billion in benefits and taxes are lost from the many people who would like to work.

We also lose out on the experience and maturity that older people can bring. That is why positive employment policies by companies and public sector organisations are important. We need flexible employment opportunities for older people, although we must ensure that those people do not lose out on their pension rights. We urgently need more training for older people so that they can keep up to date and develop new skills. There is a clear role for Scottish Enterprise to take the lead in setting the agenda for employers in both the public and private sectors.

Agism is also a social justice issue. One of the most important areas for older people is health. Our older people deserve better. A recent report on the health care of older people in Scotland showed that, although there was no evidence of agism, there was great concern among older people about its influencing health care. Older people do not want to be treated differently from others in the national health service. One of the key recommendations of the report is that the attitudes of some health care workers need to be improved. There is also a need to highlight the problem of delayed discharge, which causes distress to many older patients and their families. There are many challenges for us to tackle.

I will focus on older women. All too often, older women are invisible to policy makers. We face a challenge in ensuring that older women are living not just longer, but more healthily. In England, a fascinating project is being carried out by the Pennell Initiative for Women's Health, which has developed pilot schemes with employers and communities and has shown that many older women would welcome a focus on their health needs and on what could be done to improve their health.

The Scottish Executive should establish a national advisory panel on women's health. That would let us get at the facts, generate the research that needs to be done and give us a clearer framework for work on older women's health. I ask the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care to raise that proposal with Malcolm Chisholm and to give it serious consideration.

We cannot afford to ignore our older people. We all know that the demographics show that we are living longer and that, over time, the population of Scotland is aging. Much has been done through the better government for older people initiative, but that is only a start. We need the Scottish Executive to identify and address age discrimination across public life, because only then will older people feel valued and will we be able to develop comprehensive policies to give older people the chance to make a full and positive contribution to society.

Local government must also make a contribution. The older people's equality forum in Edinburgh is a great example of a council bringing older people into discussions, so that their views can be taken on board in the design and delivery of the council's policies and services. That has led to a much greater focus in Edinburgh on accessible and affordable transport, community safety issues and support for carers. There have been some practical spin-offs: recreational opportunities have been promoted for older people in the city; research has been performed on piloting new technology to help people to live independently; and independent advocacy services for older people have been extended for those who live in residential care.

I return to my first comments. Older people feel undervalued and on the scrap heap. The Parliament has a chance to do something about that, whether through having the right employment policies, ensuring access to affordable transport, giving opportunities in leisure and education, creating safer neighbourhoods and warm households for people, or ensuring access to high-quality health care. We need to accept that what we do in this chamber is relevant. We can make a difference. I hope that the fact that we are having this debate will send a message to older people that we are listening to them and that we know that there is an awful lot more that we need to do.

The United Nations has set out a key principle for older people. It believes that we need

"To add life to the years that have been added to life."

That is a useful principle for us all as we age and as we work with the older people in our communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): Time is very tight, because of the number

of members who wish to speak. We will try to get everybody in. I call Sandra White, to be followed by Brian Fitzpatrick. Four minutes maximum, please.

17:11

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I thank Sarah Boyack for securing the debate and the various organisations that supplied information for the debate.

Sarah Boyack's motion mentions specifically the 65 to 74 age group, who feel aggrieved that they have been dumped on the scrap heap. I will concentrate on people aged 50 and over, who also are deemed to be on the scrap heap. That includes me and quite a few folk here. As the convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on older people, age and aging, the issue raised in the motion has come up time and time again at our meetings. In fact, we received a comprehensive presentation by Lesley Hart on the issue.

The motion calls upon the Scottish Executive to "identify and address areas of age discrimination in Scottish public life".

I will concentrate on that point. The Scottish Parliament should be the first organisation to omit agism from its job application forms. I will provide a couple of examples of agism from Scottish Executive job application forms. Under the heading "Age", the first form states:

"the normal retirement age in the Scottish Executive is 60".

Under "Equal Opportunities" it states that the Executive does not discriminate on the grounds of age, gender and so on. An updated Executive application form quotes the same phrase as before under the heading "Age". However, under "Equal Opportunities" the reference to age has been removed.

In my wisdom, I wrote to Angus MacKay, the then Minister for Finance and Local Government, asking for information on the Scottish Executive's recruitment policy and referring to the requirement to retire at 60. A new form of words has been added to Scottish Executive application forms:

"There are no specific age limits. However, the normal retirement age in the SE"

is still 60. That is under review. Perhaps the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care can update me on that.

Sarah Boyack told us about the disadvantages that women face, but everyone is disadvantaged from the age of 50, in particular people who live in areas where there is a great deal of poverty. They find it difficult to secure jobs. I congratulate the

firms—there are four or five of them—that have policies to recruit people over the age of 50. Those companies see those people as loyal workers, who take little time off. That is a marvellous and positive way in which to look at older people, if we can call folk over 50 older people.

I return to my earlier point about discrimination and the Scottish Executive's policy on working in this Parliament. MSPs are not age restricted, so I do not see why employees should be. If we are to place this Parliament at the forefront of the issue—I see Hugh Henry laughing, but I am sure that he will give me a straightforward answer—why have we not taken up the European directive from November 2000 on a general framework for equal treatment in employment? The directive says that legislation to implement it should be in place by 2003. Will the minister assure us that that directive will be implemented by 2003 for the Parliament and will apply for people who want to be employed by the Parliament?

17:15

Brian Fitzpatrick (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Sarah Boyack is to be congratulated on her hard work to secure the debate. I trust that agism will not be reflected in responses to the debate. As members of a devolved Parliament, we are closer to the people whom we are elected to serve. We do not have the excuse that we lack contact on the issues that affect older people in our constituencies. Since I was elected, I have welcomed groups as disparate as Kirkintilloch elderly forum, the Springfield-Cambridge over-50s, representatives of the Auchinairn activity centre and volunteers from Contact Point in my constituency. Those people can meet us and speak to us in our constituency offices and raise with us the issues that are important to them.

I am sure that the minister does not need me to remind him that it is important not only that we listen, but that we hear what people say and that we dwell and act on what they say. A common strand is emerging—it arose earlier when we discussed the youth summit. Recently, I met constituents at Twechar day centre. All that they wanted to talk about was disorder in their village. Drugs had come into their village in a way that they did not understand. Drugs had not been a feature of their village previously and they were killing other activity throughout the community. They said that if MSPs could make one change, it should be improving policing in their area, to allow people to go about their business as they had in years past. We must listen to our communities, as they say that youth disorder and drug-related crime are a major concern.

I hope that we will take up the change of attitudes that Sarah Boyack urges on us. We have

been involved in much activity in connection with the year of volunteering. In my constituency, many of our local volunteers are older people. That is a challenge for younger people. That situation relates partly to changes in work patterns and in family life. A 92-year-old man in my constituency works in a lunch club to help the old folk in the community. If he is not guilty of agism, neither should we be.

Throughout the Executive's work, I hope that we will examine our interactions with older people. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee is developing its lifelong learning report. A key group in that work is silver surfers—elderly or older people who use new technologies to enrich their lives and improve their family contacts. My mother recently applied for the European computer driving licence. That is not a gimmick. She has grandchildren throughout the country and Europe and she has family in northern America and in Australasia, so the e-mail system has been a great way for her to keep in contact with her family, and she wanted more information on how to use her computer better. There are women and men like that throughout Scotland. The old cliché is that to get something done, we must ask a busy woman. That woman is often a busy older woman.

The volunteer centre in Kirkintilloch in my constituency recently secured sustained funding of £150,000 for befriending projects, which will allow it to plan. Older people assist and befriend excluded and isolated groups. I trust that the minister will touch on how we can better organise the volunteer effort among older people, to provide opportunities that they can take up in settings that are appropriate to their needs.

17:19

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): In introducing her excellent motion, Sarah Boyack dealt well with employment. As that is, regrettably, a reserved issue, I will keep off it and talk about politics and the voluntary sector. I will follow up some of Brian Fitzpatrick's comments. I probably have to declare an interest, as I am the third oldest member of this august establishment. I have my nice bus pass and other such benefits. My excuse is that I got involved in politics when I was about 30, which means that my political span is not as long as someone who got involved at 17.

There is a benefit in having older people in politics. That is because we can be more independent. I have no future—I have only a past. The whip might say to me, "You are very naughty, Donald. You must not do that." What I say in reply cannot be said in public in the chamber, but there is nothing that he can do. He needs my vote more than I need his patronage, which I will not get anyway. I feel great sympathy for the younger

members who want to have a career. They have families to feed and there is a lot of pressure on them. I have had a lot of pressure on me and so I sympathise fully with them.

Older members can make a contribution, but I know also that we can be dead boring. I remember that, when I first joined the former Edinburgh Town Council, there was an excellent Labour councillor who, whenever I proposed an idea, would say, "Oh, we tried that in 1933 and it didn't work." Twenty-five years later, I found myself saying the same things. We do not have all the answers, but we have some of the answers.

I also want to talk about the voluntary sector, which Brian Fitzpatrick spoke about well. I am sure that we have all visited organisations that promote, recruit and support volunteers. We could do a lot more to support volunteering. I am sure that there is a hidden reservoir of people with a great deal of talent. People may think that the work is too high powered, but a man or a woman in their 60s who is honest and who can add up can become the treasurer of an organisation.

In my experience, treasurers are the hardest people to find. It is always possible to find conveners or chairpeople. Potential egomaniacs like me will quite cheerfully become chairpeople, but treasurers have to do some work and they do not get the same glory. That is a small example of where older people could make a great contribution. In the context of the previous debate, it would be possible for a pensioner to become the treasurer of a boys' football team. It is possible to mix the old and the young.

Many voluntary organisations could benefit from the participation of older people who can contribute by making home visits, befriending and so on. Young people need help in running their tenancies and that takes human beings as well as money and properties. The human qualities and life experience of pensioners can contribute greatly and that is even more the case for people in their 50s. People of my son's age work far too hard. They cannot find time to help in a voluntary organisation. The good side of that is that they will probably retire in their 50s. They will be burnt out, but when they retire early, they can make a bigger contribution to voluntary organisations.

The Executive has a role in helping to advertise and stimulate volunteering. We could send out a leaflet with every council tax demand, suggesting that people volunteer.

17:23

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank Sarah Boyack for the opportunity to represent the grey vote. I am not sure where old age begins, but it is probably about 20 years

beyond the age that one is at any given time. Recently, I took consolation from a new definition of middle age, which includes the ages 35 to 65. For the next 18 months, I will cling to that definition with desperation. My view of age is one that I developed as a kid. People of 30 seemed utterly ancient, until I became 30. The next progression of decade anniversaries passed relatively painlessly and with increasing gratitude that I am still here.

As I indicated earlier, prejudice towards the elderly is akin to all prejudice. That is because the observer makes presuppositions on the basis of appearance. That is no more valid with regard to elderly people than it is to ethnic minorities, people of different religions, the fat, the thin, the red-haired or the disabled. People are what their genes, their lifestyle and their life experience has made them. Each individual is a unique distillation of all those qualities.

The old are present in larger numbers than ever before. It is tempting, and almost inevitable, for accountants to see them as potential burdens on a decreasing number of younger people, whose taxes have to pay for their upkeep. Stopping people working at 60 or 65 reduces their salaries and tax contributions and obliges the state to pay them pensions. If we can delay that, it must be of economic benefit to the nation, as well as to the individuals who want to keep working.

In other European countries, the starting age for old age pensions tends to be above ours, and there is a determination in the European Union to discourage people from taking the early retirement that Donald Gorrie mentioned and to allow people to work beyond current retirement dates. I endorse that approach, although it should not be compulsory.

Older people are a great source of knowledge. For example, I taught a beginners guide to the first world war course at Strathclyde University's senior studies institute, the very title of which indicates that it was not open to the under-50s. Although none of my students had actually fought in the war, the parents, grandparents, uncles or aunts of many of them had. As a result, everyone in the room brought a huge amount of depth and different experience to the subject. I urge the younger people who might be listening today or reading the *Official Report* of the debate tomorrow to talk to their grandparents now while they still have the opportunity and to find out what they remember about life in what they would call the old days but what was in fact their youth.

Older people are an important resource and should not be barred from employment either by open or covert prejudice. If a job is within their capabilities, they should not be debarred from it on the ground of age. We should follow the example of age discrimination legislation in the United

States and allow people to work for as long as they are fit to do the job. I should point out that three leading firemen who died on 11 September were aged 54, 63 and 71. Presumably all of them were physically and mentally capable of being on duty that day.

In short, agism is prejudice, and prejudice is wrong. It stifles individual growth and opportunity. As long as older people want to work and have the physical and mental aptitude for the job, they should not be debarred on the ground of age.

17:27

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Sarah Boyack on securing this debate. Many members have spoken about practical steps that should be taken to challenge agism, whether it be through improved access to health, fair employment practice or the contribution of the voluntary sector. I must confess that I am not sure that I agree with Donald Gorrie's view that the voluntary sector is a haven for burnt-out executives.

As Sarah Boyack pointed out, the Executive and the Parliament are responsible for promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination in whatever form it occurs. With an increasing proportion of our population becoming older, it is essential that we tackle agism. As the chamber has recognised, agism takes many forms. It is apparent in the perception that older people are a burden, in the evidence of enforced early retirement—indeed, many fewer people aged 50 or over are in work today—and in differential access to services. None of that is acceptable, and all of it must be challenged.

The Executive's equality strategy provides us with a useful framework on which we can build, because if we are to make significant and sustained progress on older people's experience, we must mainstream consideration of their concerns into our legislative, policy-making and resource allocation processes. We must also ensure that that approach extends into local government services, the national health service and across the public sector.

I want to spend some time considering society's perception of older people, in particular the view that somehow they are on the scrap heap or are a burden to their families and have nothing to give. Quite frankly, I find that astonishing. I spent a period of my youth—which some would say is long gone—in a place called Hong Kong. I grew up in a society that valued older people; indeed, it positively revered them. That reverence recognised a lifetime of experience and wisdom and recognised that older people's knowledge would help us to learn for the future. Society's

attitude and perceptions cannot be changed overnight. We need visible and positive examples of older people and we need to harness the power of the media, but we also need to change how we do things on an everyday basis.

I want to mention better government for older people pilots, which were carried out throughout Scotland. The aim of the pilots was to improve public services for older people by meeting their needs better and listening to and encouraging their contributions. Each pilot concentrated on a different issue, such as transport, volunteering and benefits, but the direct involvement and participation of older people was consistent through them all. They worked in partnership with agencies on the ground. Perceptions of the agencies and communities that were involved and even the older people who were involved were changed. There are now new ways of working and specific improvements to services. More important, there is long-term cultural change.

That lesson is important for all of us. By engaging with older people and listening to, learning from and acting on their information, there are better results for older people and society. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience that we should value.

I recognise the work of the many elderly forums and older people's organisations throughout Scotland and in my constituency. From the Vale of Leven elderly forum to the Good Companions group in Dumbarton, their energy, knowledge and commitment constantly challenge policy makers to do better for older people. More power to their elbow.

17:32

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): Sarah Boyack is to be congratulated on raising the subject of agism, but it is unfortunate that the debate has a 5 pm slot. It is more unfortunate that no journalist is in sight. Racism, gender balance and disability rightly receive great prominence in the chamber, but perhaps agism does not receive the publicity that it is due, unless there is a hidden person from the press whom I cannot see.

Many past links between youth and the aged no longer exist. In the national service, for example, large companies employed huge labour forces of all age groups prior to the information technology age. A colleague of mine once said that MSPs should retire when they reach 55—he must have been giving me a message. He added that they should certainly not go beyond the age of 60. I had to remind him that, if it had not been for a 66-year-old old age pensioner in 1940—Winston Churchill—it is unlikely that most of us would be here today.

There are many other examples of age not being a barrier. At 43, George Foreman went the distance with Evander Holyfield for the world heavyweight boxing championship and lost only narrowly. Two former Wimbledon champions from the 1920s—Jean Borotra and Henri Cochet—played a passable tennis match in the 1990s. Borotra was 90 years old and Cochet was a mere 88. Yesterday, the Queen announced forcibly that she had no intention of retiring at 76. After retiring as a US senator, the astronaut John Glenn went back into space at 77 years of age. I know of a brain surgeon who is 65. One wobble of his hand or scalpel by a fraction of a millimetre could cause death or paralysis for a patient. With all due respect, how many 25-year-olds have such skill?

There appears to be age discrimination in the workplace, on television, in the media, in certain areas of politics and in many other areas. Sometimes, it feels strange that I remember air raids in the second world war, seeing Churchill at the end of the war and the death of George VI when hardly any of my colleagues remember them, or indeed were born when those events happened.

The problem originated from ground rules that were established in the past. Two or three centuries ago, life expectancy meant that one was old at 50 and perhaps at the point of death. In the 19th century, it was not uncommon for leading politicians to be active in their seventies, but life expectancy was low.

I am almost 72. I do not feel that I am, although I probably look that age. I am lucky. Winnie Ewing is the mother of the house and I am the father of the house. She once said to me, "Are we responsible for producing a lot of those MSPs?" I have to say that my mind boggled. Successful organisations in all areas require a cross-section of ages. The Scottish Parliament and politics are no exception to that, nor is any other area.

Finally, I will mention a comment that Donald Gorrie made in his speech in the debate earlier this afternoon. He stated:

"People are old for a long time; they are only young for a short time."

I add that the longer someone lives, the more they experience. At the same time, we need the energy, thrust and drive of youth. Cathy Jamieson should be congratulated on what she put forward in the earlier debate. Both sides must value and respect each other for the common good.

17:35

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): Our ages are all coming out of the cabinet. I am 57 and have found that I am now an older person—it is as if I have somehow lost my

individuality. That is complete nonsense.

I remember that in 1997 a young man at a political selection meeting said to me, "Christine, do you think that you're up to it? You're no spring chicken." This ex-spring chicken is in the Parliament and that young man is not; that says something.

There is a serious problem with perceptions of aging, because perceptions lead to attitudes. For example, there is what I call the "my dear" syndrome. People know that they are there when somebody in the medical profession says, "How are we, my dear?" Notice the use of the plural. The situation becomes worse when they say, "How is she?" as if the person is no longer there. That has a serious impact on the way in which some younger members of the medical profession treat older people who are in bed. They are treated as if, because they have become older, they are somehow not individuals.

When my mother was very ill, we put up on the wall beside her pictures of her in her youth, with her family and at her golden wedding, to bring home to some of the younger staff that she was a person with a past, a present, a family and individuality. The attitudes of staff changed on the spot.

I do not want to be grim, because I have a future, although Donald Gorrie may only have a past. I am here to talk about my perceptions of aging. I think that there is fun at 50—I know because I have been there and I am doing it. I believe that there is sex at 60 and I am looking forward to it—no doubt someone can advise. I think that there is sin at 70 and I am looking forward to that, but what is there at 80 and 90? I will tell the chamber.

I had two old chairs in the conservatory that needed a facelift, as some of us do. I phoned up the upholsterer I know from many years ago, whom I had not seen for 10 years, and said, "Tommy. Are you still doing upholstery?" He replied, "Yes, but I dinnae do a quick job." I said, "That's not a problem. You do a good job." Tommy came along. He was a fit-looking man and I guessed that he was in his 60s. He looked at the chairs and costed the job. He said that he would take them away and would be a few months. They were heavy, old Windsmoor-type chairs—Parker Knolls. He picked one chair up and took it down my long hall and out to his white Volvo estate. He loaded it in and came back and took the other one.

Months passed before he came back with the chairs. I had a look at them in the back of his white Volvo estate and said, "You've done a blooming good job." He said, "Could you help me carry them in?" That was when I found out how heavy they were. We lugged them back into the house. I saw

how nice they looked and thought, "Right, the next project will be the old suite in the living room that the cats have shredded." I took him through to the living room, showed him the old suite and asked him to give me a cost for doing that, because he is not cheap. He had a look at them and said, "I don't know if it's worth it, Christine. I might be pushing up the daisies." I said, "You mustn't talk like that. That's not the way to look at life. How old are you?" He replied, "I'm 92." So, I am here to tell the chamber that at 80 and 90 there is upholstery.

17:39

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): It is difficult to follow Christine Grahame. I, too, am a member of that elite group of people in the Parliament who are over the big 50.

I welcome the positive steps that the Scottish Executive has taken through the development of the equality strategy, the creation of a dedicated older persons unit within the Scottish Executive and the provision of free personal care for older people, which tackled a blatant discrimination that meant that patients paid for care on account of their age.

I will concentrate on the health and well-being of older people. I recognise the work of the expert group on the health care of older people, which was set up by the Scottish Executive. Older people are the core business of the NHS. Specifically, I will concentrate on the health and well-being of older women. I want to give some statistics about older women. I do not make any apologies for that; it is vital that we understand what research shows about that particular group. Studies show that one fifth of the UK population are older women; that the number of reported cases of depression in women over 45 is twice that for men; that 59 per cent of women over 75 live alone; and that 78 per cent of widowed people are women.

Sarah Boyack mentioned the Pennell Initiative for Women's Health, which exists to champion the cause of older women's health by researching and addressing the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs of women who are over 45. The Parliament has a responsibility to improve every woman's prospect of living well into a healthy old age and should promote understanding of health issues and take action to benefit women from middle age to very old age.

As Jackie Baillie said, one of the major public policy challenges for the Parliament is how to mainstream equality issues. I add my voice to Sarah Boyack's call for the setting up of a national advisory panel on women's health. The Pennell initiative aims to set up a major conference on the health and well-being of older women and to

establish pilot projects that are aimed at improving the health of women in socially excluded communities, in black and ethnic minority communities and in more rural communities. I ask the minister to take a request back to Malcolm Chisholm for a meeting to discuss the Pennell proposals.

I seek the minister's assurance that the health and well-being needs of older women are being addressed in the work of the national physical activity task force. We talk a lot about encouraging young children to be more active to avoid problems in later life. Major issues need to be addressed in encouraging older people to be active. We must concentrate on the health and well-being of older people, rather than on the problems. I ask the minister to give me an update on that, either today or in writing.

I pay tribute to the many older people in my constituency of Midlothian and in Scotland who are active in the voluntary sector, through arthritis and cancer charities, pensioner groups and elderly forums and by running gala days, and who care for partners or grandchildren. In some cases, older people are the mainstay of the voluntary sector.

I thank Sarah Boyack for the debate. If the Parliament does nothing else, it must speak up for people who do not have a voice in Scotland. The Parliament must represent everyone in Scotland, regardless of their age.

17:43

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

I congratulate Sarah Boyack on obtaining the debate. John Young quoted Donald Gorrie in the previous debate. I would like to alter what Donald said. He said that people are young for a short or limited time and that they are old for a long time. I would like to say that they are old for an increasingly long time. The number of people who are over 65 is likely to increase by 50 per cent in the next 30 years and the number of people who are over 80 is likely to double. That has huge implications for the health service and for personal care, and is a debate of its own.

I want to echo something that Jackie Baillie said. I switched on my car radio in the middle of a debate on agism. A young Kenyan was being interviewed about how older people are treated in Kenya in comparison with how they are treated here. The comparison was very unfavourable. Older people in Kenya are treated with great respect as one of the most valuable parts of that society. It is ironic that we arrogantly regard the west as the most developed part of the world, but our treatment of the old is much more primitive and much less sensible and wise than it is in the so-called underdeveloped world. I think that we

have lost something important.

I shall make two brief points. The first is about engaging with older people. Like other members, I meet pensioners forums. The people who run the Perth pensioners forum, whom I meet almost monthly, have more energy and stamina than I have. I met them most recently last Friday. They are tremendous at raising the issues that concern them and their members—issues to do with transport, bus passes and the health service, for example. They need help with the running costs of the forum, although those are very small, and I have tried to help them by putting them in touch with parts of the Executive and the lottery. As members said in the previous debate, it is important that members of the Executive and the Parliament act as facilitators to enable such groups to operate effectively and to lobby on the issues that deeply concern them.

Sarah Boyack covered the issue of employment comprehensively. I agree with Sandra White and Help the Aged that mandatory retirement should be outlawed. Early retirement should also be considered from a different perspective, given the changing pressures on the economy and the increasing number of older people. There should be flexibility and people should be able to work for as long as they want to, full time or part time. In Sweden, 75 per cent of the over-50s are economically active, and I would like the percentage in this country—which is currently 64 per cent—to rise to that level.

If older people are not in full-time or part-time employment, we should utilise their ability, experience and maturity in the voluntary sector, as Donald Gorrie said. I recently attended a voluntary sector fair in the Rothes Halls, in Glenrothes. There I encountered an organisation that is run by older people, in which retired people from a range of different professions and trades provide experience to help new small businesses to grow. That is a vital organisation and the people who are involved in it get huge satisfaction from helping something new and young to grow. Mentoring services are also important. The United States is far ahead of us in developing mentoring, which involves the old and the young.

I like the phrase “adding life to years”. That is what we must be about. We must make the later years worth while. We must enrich the lives of older people—and enrich society—by making those lives full of opportunities and possibilities to contribute.

17:47

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Hugh Henry): I congratulate Sarah Boyack on securing the debate. I thank her

for giving us a welcome opportunity to have an open and humorous but serious discussion on a subject that concerns all of us—if not now, eventually.

As Keith Raffan said, our society has not been as good as others at valuing older people. Jackie Baillie made a telling comment on the way in which societies such as that of Hong Kong value older people. Parts of our society used to have that respect for older people, but we have lost it. Those of us who came from big, extended families in working-class communities will remember the role that the grandmother and the grandfather—if he lived long enough—played in supporting the rest of the family. The older members of the family not only helped to raise the kids and give the occasional thruppence—half a crown if they were really flush—but gave advice and support. They also helped to instil values that have become lost in our fragmented and fractured society.

Sarah Boyack has done something useful in helping us to focus on an issue that is extremely important. I share her concerns and the concerns of others about the perceptions that exist. It has been stated clearly in the reports from the chief medical officer, which have been mentioned, that there is no evidence of discrimination against older people in the health service in Scotland. However, the perception that there is discrimination is worrying. If people feel that they are not getting a proper service because of their age, we have to consider that matter carefully.

A number of points have been made in the debate. I will address some of them now and I will reply individually to the members whose points I do not cover.

I want to put on record the fact that older people have been and continue to be a priority for the Executive. Rhona Brankin, Sarah Boyack and Jackie Baillie have mentioned some of the Executive's initiatives. We value older people and the Executive has invested time and effort into addressing some of the problems that face older people in our country. Not only have we introduced free personal care for the elderly, but we have put in place initiatives on central heating and, later this year, we will address concessionary travel. We are making important improvements that will enable older people to play a full role in their local communities.

Colin Campbell and others are absolutely right: we should not take the attitude that, just because someone has reached a fixed retirement age, they have lost their value to society and are to be dispensed with. Those members who have spoken about the economic loss to society that results from not involving older people are right. We do not want to take a hard attitude and raise the retirement age. For generations, many people

have fought to lower the retirement age. People who worked in heavy industries such as coal mining, shipbuilding and steel working valued the opportunity to retire at an age when they still had at least a couple of years to go. Equally, we have to recognise that industries and workplaces have changed and that some people who are working now can continue to play an active role. The fact that we are living longer means that we can continue to play a more active role for more years than people could previously.

People who want to continue to work should be allowed to do so and to contribute value to society. However, as Brian Fitzpatrick and others have mentioned, those who perform the valuable role of volunteering in our society should also be encouraged. The Executive is paying attention to that issue. As members have said, there is a wealth of experience and talent in our older population. Indeed, when we talk to older people's groups, we see a wealth of enthusiasm and energy that would put many others to shame. In a sense, it depresses me when I go around local community groups and find that the same people are active in all the various groups, but the older people who are involved—not just in the elderly forum but in tenants groups, health groups, church groups and so on—still have an energy and enthusiasm from which we could all learn.

Sarah Boyack is right about flexible opportunities, which we want to encourage. As Sarah Boyack and Rhona Brankin have asked, I will speak to Malcolm Chisholm about the national advisory panel and the work of the Pennell project. We will see what we can learn from those ideas.

As Sarah Boyack said, the better government for older people initiative must be viewed only as a start, not as the end product. There is a whole lot more still to do.

Sandra White asked about age discrimination in public life. The Executive is trying to age proof its personnel practices to eradicate the potential for discrimination by April 2003. I cannot comment on the issue in so far as it relates to the Parliament, but I hope that those who are responsible for that will consider the matter. She mentioned the fact that I was laughing when she was talking, so I should point out that I was only sharing a joke with Colin Campbell. Donald Gorrie said that he has a past but does not have a future and Colin Campbell has, unfortunately, just been deselected as a candidate by the Renfrewshire branch of the SNP and replaced by a younger man. I do not know whether the SNP has examined its agism policies, but I am glad that Colin is still able to laugh.

Brian Fitzpatrick mentioned silver surfers. Increasingly, we find that older people throughout the country are using new technology. Lifelong

learning developments are important in encouraging that. My colleague Wendy Alexander has spent time considering how we can continue to encourage people to learn throughout their active lives.

Colin Campbell was right to urge young people to ask their grandparents about their experiences. I remember that my father would talk to my children about things that he would not talk to me about. An empathy exists between grandparents and their grandchildren—perhaps because they do not have to be up half the night with the children and can ship them back—and it is important that we cherish that.

Jackie Baillie mentioned promoting equal opportunities. She was right to say that enforced early retirement and the use of words such as “burden” must be put to rest once and for all.

John Young talked, as others did, about employment. We want to encourage flexible employment policies. Some of the firms that encourage older workers, such as B&Q and Asda, say that they get more value from their older workers. Indeed, customers comment that they seem to get more and better service from older people. That is not to say that we want to start discriminating against younger people, who were the topic of the previous debate; it is just that we need to consider what older people can contribute to our society.

I will not go into what Christine Grahame said about fun at 50, 60 and 70. I will leave others to comment on that.

Christine Grahame: Is it a reserved matter?

Hugh Henry: Employment is a reserved matter, but that will not prevent Christine Grahame's colleagues in the SNP from putting it into their manifesto for the next election.

Rhona Brankin was right that we need to mainstream equality issues. I will raise that with my colleagues in the Executive. She asked about the national physical activity task force and older women. Mary Mulligan and I had a meeting recently with members of that task force, which will report soon. One of the frightening things that is coming out of the task force's work is that our society is becoming less and less active and that that lack of activity is an even bigger threat to our health than smoking. It has also been shown that, not only do not enough young people participate in activity, but older men and women need to be encouraged to do a minimum amount of activity throughout the week. There is evidence that their lives will be prolonged and improved as a result.

The debate has been important but not nearly long enough given the significance of the subject. We will continue to consult on age and aging

issues. I hope that, in that process, we can collectively develop a constructive debate throughout Scotland that values older people and says that they have a role to play. They have a voice that needs to be heard. They have a contribution that will make our society better.

Meeting closed at 17:59.

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