

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 12 June 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 12 June 2002

(Afternoon)

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Good afternoon. We welcome from Skye the Rev John H MacLean of the Free Church of Scotland, who will lead time for reflection today.

Rev John H MacLean (Free Church of Scotland): Let us read the word of God in Isaiah, chapter 55, verses 1 to 11.

“Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters, and you who have no money; come buy and eat; come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

Incline your ear and come to Me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David.

Indeed, I have made him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people.

Surely, you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God and the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth: It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

Verse 6 reminds us that there is a time when we can look for God and a time when we cannot, that there is a time when God can be found and a time when he cannot, that there is a time when we can call on God and a time when we cannot and that

there is a time when God is near to us and a time when he is not.

Let us pray.

Help us Lord to look for the living Lord that we would know His blessing.

Bless our Parliament and all its members and help each one especially when important decisions are made.

Bless our country we pray and may we know the peace and prosperity that only the Lord can give. For Jesus' sake.

Amen.

University of St Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill: Stage 1

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is a stage 1 debate on motion S1M-3087, in the name of Iain Smith, on the general principles of the University of St Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill.

14:34

Iain Smith (North-East Fife) (LD): It is an honour to be able to present my member's bill to the Scottish Parliament for stage 1 approval. The University of St Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill is a small bill with the specific objective of enabling the University of St Andrews to award postgraduate research degrees in medicine.

The University of St Andrews is now in its 592nd year. It is Scotland's oldest university and one of the world's oldest universities. It has a long and distinguished academic record in both teaching and research, not just in the classical subjects, such as history of art, but in the sciences. The school of biology, which includes the medical sciences department, recently achieved the highest grading for its research and is at the cutting edge in many fields.

Prior to 1966, the University of St Andrews, which included Queen's College, Dundee, was renowned for its achievements in medical and applied science. Following the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, which established Dundee University, St Andrews University was no longer entitled to award degrees in medicine. The clinical part of the medical degrees that St Andrews awarded was transferred to Dundee, although St Andrews continued to provide a pre-clinical degree in medical sciences, which gives an entry to the clinical element. That is now provided in conjunction with the University of Manchester.

Despite no longer being able to offer a qualifying degree in medicine, the University of St Andrews has retained an interest in the teaching of and research into medical sciences. However, as a consequence of the 1966 act, the university has been prevented from awarding postgraduate medical degrees, in particular the medical postgraduate degree of *medicinae doctor* or MD. The university feels that that restricts its ability to attract candidates for postgraduate research in medical sciences, as other, non-medical postgraduate degrees are less attractive to qualified medical practitioners, in terms of the qualification received and of the length, time and methods of study employed.

The university first approached me about the matter in 1999, when I was Deputy Minister for Parliament, through someone whom you might know, Presiding Officer—Professor Michael Steel. I established that primary legislation would be needed to amend the 1996 act so that the university could award the MD. That required an appropriate legislative vehicle, but at the time no suitable Executive bill was anticipated.

Following my retirement from ministerial responsibilities, I was again approached by Professor Steel. That was last year. I decided that it might be appropriate to explore the option of a member's bill. I pay tribute at this point to the Scottish Parliament non-Executive bills unit for assisting me to make a proposal for the bill and to introduce the bill with the explanatory notes and policy memorandum that go with it. The bill is very short, but members should not underestimate the amount of work that NEBU has to put into bills even of that short length. I am extremely grateful to the unit for all its help.

The bill's purpose is simple. Its substantive section is divided into two subsections. Section 1(1) qualifies the provisions of the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966, which abolished the right of the University of St Andrews to hold qualifying examinations and award degrees in medicine. The bill amends the 1966 act in such a way as to allow the university to hold examinations and award degrees for research in medicine. Subsection (2) makes it clear that that applies only to those who are already qualified as medical practitioners.

The bill in no way entitles the university to award qualifying degrees in medicine again. The bill also does not specify that the degree must be an MD, although that is the degree that the university wishes to introduce, as the power to grant a particular degree and establish a new degree course lies with the university court on the recommendation of the university's *senatus academicus*. The bill gives the university the power to grant that particular type of degree qualification.

The university has consulted the four medical schools in Scotland and the University of Manchester on its proposals to re-establish the MD and has received no objections from those institutions. I am grateful to the Scottish Executive, which has also indicated that it sees no reason not to support the bill.

I thank the convener and members of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee for their co-operation in taking stage 1 evidence so expeditiously and for their support for the general principles of the bill.

The bill is small, but it should not be seen as irrelevant or unimportant. It is significant not only

to the University of St Andrews, which will be able to expand and improve on the range of research in medical sciences that it can offer, but to the wider community in Fife. I am sure that the availability of the MD course at St Andrews will help to attract to Fife highly qualified medical practitioners who wish to undertake a research-based postgraduate course while working in hospitals and communities in Fife. I know that the national health service in Fife welcomes the proposal. That is why so many colleagues across Mid Scotland and Fife—the Fife constituency MSPs and the MSPs for the region of Mid Scotland and Fife—have supported the bill. I thank them for that and I commend the bill.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the University of St Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill.

14:40

The Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Iain Gray): It is nice to be home. However, the transition is gradual, as in the bill we are still dealing with one of Scotland's ancient universities—not Aberdeen, but St Andrews.

As Mr Smith explained, the bill would allow the University of St Andrews to award research degrees in medicine to candidates who are already qualified medical practitioners. As the member made clear, the bill would not give St Andrews the power to offer qualifying exams. Regulation of the health professions, including those regulated by the Medical Act 1983, is a reserved power under the Scotland Act 1998, so any proposal for the introduction of a qualifying examination would have to be considered by the Westminster Parliament.

The University of St Andrews is not seeking the power to reinstate qualifications for admission to a career as a medical practitioner. The university offers degrees in medical sciences, which are valued and important stand-alone qualifications from a distinguished university with a track record of excellence that dates back 600 years. Those degrees double as qualifications for entry to the clinical part of a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery—or MB ChB—programme at other universities. It is clear that for many students the experience of three or four years at St Andrews, followed by three years at an urban university to complete a degree in medicine, is an attractive option.

The university already offers postgraduate qualifications in medical science, but it believes that the opportunity to study for a postgraduate medical degree at St Andrews would be an attractive option for qualified doctors.

We submitted an Executive memorandum to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee to assist it with its consideration of the evidence. The memorandum set out the supportive view that the Executive takes of the proposal contained in the bill. That proposal is fully consistent with the principle of making available opportunities for lifelong learning and does not have public expenditure implications. I am happy to reiterate the Executive's support and welcome for the bill.

14:42

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I put on record the SNP's support for the bill. With great joy, I say that this will be the shortest speech that I have given or am likely to give in the chamber.

The University of St Andrews is to be congratulated on accessing the new legislative system in Scotland in such an efficient and—as Iain Smith indicated—persistent way. St Andrews is an ancient university at which I was privileged to study. It has shown itself to be responsive to the market, has identified a need and has brought its proposal to the national Parliament. That illustrates the benefits of power being closer to the people and of passing low-cost—or in this case, no-cost—laws that are right and appropriate. We would wait for centuries for Westminster to get round to passing such pieces of legislation.

If through small measures such as the bill we can show in a limited way—with our limited powers—the benefits of good, efficient government that is closer to the people, imagine what we will be able to do once the Parliament has complete powers.

14:43

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to welcome the bill on behalf of the Conservative party. We think that it is only proper that the University of St Andrews should have the right to award postgraduate degrees for research in medicine.

As has been said, St Andrews is one of the world's oldest universities. However, according to Cant's "History of St Andrews University", its record in medicine is rather chequered. In 1668, the university rejected the establishment of a chair in medicine—I notice that the word "chair" was used even back then, so it is obviously not just a politically correct term. Two centuries ago, it was possible to buy a degree in medicine at St Andrews without having studied the subject.

Thankfully, times have changed. Although it is possible to study for a pre-clinical degree in medicine—a course that St Andrews offers jointly with the University of Manchester—the role of

research should not be forgotten. It is entirely appropriate that the university should seek a way of resolving the difficulty that it faces through having the member for North-East Fife introduce this bill.

The one point on which I want to remark, given that Andrew Wilson thinks it important to get points across, is that, although we talk a lot in the Parliament about new regulations, I am very much in favour of deregulation. Given that the bill will give the university more power, rather than introducing more regulation, I particularly welcome it. I am happy to give the bill our group's support.

14:45

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, will make a short speech. The University of St Andrews was founded by papal bull in 1411. As well as producing some first-class economists, such as Alex Salmond and Andrew Wilson—

Mr Monteith: And polemicists such as Michael Forsyth.

Alex Neil: There is a downside to everything.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Given that I am a graduate of the University of St Andrews, does Alex Neil agree that I, too, am a fine economist?

Alex Neil: Absolutely, and the member's cheeses are wonderful as well.

The image of the university is still one of an old-fashioned institution that perhaps belongs more to the early part of the 20th century than to the 21st century. That image is unfair. I was up there two months ago and went on a guided tour with the principal, Dr Brian Lang. One of the most impressive things that I saw was the new centre for biomolecular sciences. The university's research record in biomedicine and bioengineering shows that it is a first-class institution and its centre of excellence is of world renown. We should use the debate to try to update the image of the university among the general populace in Scotland, because St Andrews is one of the finest education institutions not just in Scotland, but in Europe.

The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee took evidence on the bill from Iain Smith and from representatives of the University of St Andrews, as well as from the other universities in Scotland. There is universal support for the bill. As the policy memorandum points out, there will have to be one or two technical amendments at stage 2, but I do not anticipate that those will be controversial. We are satisfied that the level of consultation on the bill was more than satisfactory and I join the Executive, Iain Smith and others in commending the bill to the Parliament.

14:48

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): My speech will be short. It gives me great pleasure to contribute to the stage 1 debate on the University of St Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill, both as the constituency member for Kirkcaldy and as a member of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. I add my support to the bill and urge the Parliament to support it, too.

The bill seeks to reinstate the right of the University of St Andrews to award postgraduate degrees for research in medicine and would give the university the authority to issue the postgraduate degree of MD. The university believes that the course will be attractive to medical students who wish to gain a research-based award and it is hoped that the availability of the qualification will also attract highly qualified doctors who wish to conduct research.

It is also hoped that the University of St Andrews will, in future, consider PhD opportunities. When the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee took evidence, I asked Dr Andrew Riches of the university about the possibility of medical PhDs in future. Dr Riches stated:

"We want to keep the legislation open. As in any university, our patterns of research training are evolving. We would like to introduce the straightforward MD initially, but perhaps follow on with PhDs."—[*Official Report, Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee*, 8 May 2002; c 2610.]

It is important for Fife that we have PhD placements in the area.

The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee took evidence from other universities and found no opposition to the bill. The committee was informed that the proposed regulations would be in line with those of other medical schools. After listening to evidence, the committee welcomed the bill.

The bill is in line with the Executive's priorities in relation to the importance of research and continuous professional development. Fife NHS Board has also welcomed the bill and we hope that the medical graduates whom the bill will attract to Fife will stay within Fife's health service and work with the people of Fife.

My party welcomes the bill and hopes that it will find unanimous support in the Parliament at decision time today.

14:50

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): As a member for the Mid Scotland and Fife region, I am delighted to support the bill and my colleague Iain Smith.

The history of the bill goes back to 1966 and the division of Dundee University from the University

of St Andrews after a merger that had lasted 69 years. Pre-clinical medical training continues at St Andrews, with most of the clinical training taking place at the University of Manchester. I am delighted that the Parliament is reinstating the opportunity for St Andrews to award a postgraduate degree for research in medicine.

As members have said, medical schools at the University of Glasgow, the University of Aberdeen, the University of Edinburgh and Dundee University—the other medical schools in Scotland—all responded positively to the move. I draw attention also to the comments from the University of Manchester—I am sure that it was being objective and non-partisan—which said that the outline of the new MD was

“comparable with the best practice in England”.

My final point follows on from Mr Neil's speech. The only thing that is ancient about the University of St Andrews is its long history. Those of us who represent the university know, just as anyone who is acquainted with it knows, that it is very much in the present century. Two years ago, the university organised an excellent familiarisation visit for regional and constituency members, during which we saw the commercial application of much of the research that was being carried out at the university. The university's research is at the cutting edge in many fields.

I share the university's wish—it is also the wish of Sir Michael Steel—

The Presiding Officer: Careful.

Mr Raffan: I meant to say Professor Michael Steel—I am sure that it is just a matter of time before he follows his brother. That might get me an extra minute.

I share the university's wish for the degree to have a positive effect on the local area. As those of us who know Fife NHS Board well are aware, the board faces a problem in that it does not have a teaching hospital and is pulled between two health boards that do: Lothian NHS Board and Tayside NHS Board. I hope that there will now be an opportunity for local medical practitioners and consultants within the Fife NHS Board area to carry out medical research and work for the degree at St Andrews without having to go to either Dundee or Edinburgh. The bill is an important move in the right direction and will have a beneficial effect not just on St Andrews but on the whole of the kingdom of Fife.

14:52

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I welcome the bill and congratulate Iain Smith on its introduction. Although the bill is modest, it is nonetheless important for the University of St

Andrews and for the wider Fife community.

The bill will allow the university to offer a new postgraduate degree for research in medicine. As Alex Neil said, the University of St Andrews was established in 1411. Over the centuries, it has contributed significantly to Scotland and the rest of the world. The postgraduate degree course will give qualified medical practitioners the opportunity to take up research and will be particularly beneficial for those who choose not to undertake the alternative PhD course, which takes three years to complete. Some discussion has taken place on whether St Andrews is old-fashioned. That has never been my view, although some of the university's practices may be a little old-fashioned. I refer in particular to the Kate Kennedy pageant, but boys will be boys, or rather boys will be girls—it is up to them.

NHS Fife has welcomed the bill, as have the other universities in Scotland. I am sure that the bill will pass speedily through the next two parliamentary stages.

14:54

Iain Smith: I tried hard not to mention the connection between Professor Steel and the Presiding Officer, lest I was perceived to be seeking favours. However, Keith Raffan blew that out of the water. I assure members that I sought no favours, although I certainly welcome the assistance that I received from the Parliamentary Bureau in ensuring that the bill was introduced quickly.

I thank all the members who contributed to this good, short debate on the bill. In particular, I thank Alex Neil for his speech, which highlighted the important fact that the University of St Andrews is a modern university that is at the cutting edge of technology. I, too, visited the centre for biomolecular sciences, which is an excellent establishment that does a lot of valuable work. Other universities could certainly follow the centre's example.

Andrew Wilson was right to draw members' attention to the fact that it would not have been possible to find time to deal with the bill at Westminster. An important aspect of the work of the Parliament is that we can introduce small measures that are important to the institutions involved but are fairly minor in the greater scheme of things.

The proposal is an appropriate measure for a member's bill, which I am pleased to have the opportunity to put forward today. I hope that members will support the general principles of the bill at 5 o'clock.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes this short debate, in which, of course, I had a strong fraternal interest. I hasten to assure members that I was not lobbied in any way. We will decide on the motion at decision time, which is at 5 o'clock.

Participation in Sport

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is the debate on motion S1M-3192, in the name of Mike Watson, on the value of participation in sport and how it can increase the quality of life, together with two amendments to that motion.

14:55

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mike Watson): I welcome the opportunity to recognise sport's valuable contribution to improving the quality of life for everyone in Scotland. I want to highlight the important work that is under way to update sport 21, our national strategy for sport, to inform and guide the way forward in developing sport in Scotland.

The Government in Scotland is firmly committed to the ethos of sport for all. It is essential that we provide more opportunities for more people to be more active more often. As I said, sport 21 is the national strategy for sport and we are carrying forward its threefold vision of widening opportunities, identifying and nurturing potential and achieving excellence.

When sport 21 was introduced in 1998, it set four key challenges. The first challenge concerned local strategic planning for sport. So far, sports and recreation plans have been introduced by 14 local authorities and are in preparation by a further four. Sportscotland and the Executive will continue to encourage local authorities to develop sports strategies as recommended in sport 21.

The second challenge was to establish a physical activity task force to bring together all the relevant agencies at national and local level. The task force was to agree a shared agenda for joint action to develop Scotland as a nation of participants who pursue active lifestyles. The report of that task force was published last Thursday.

At the launch, my colleague Malcolm Chisholm announced the appointment of Mary Allison as Scotland's first physical activity co-ordinator. Mary Allison will help the task force to produce the final version of the strategy, which is currently out for consultation. She will also help to co-ordinate the work of the Government and its partners so that we can meet the 20-year targets that have been set for improvements in physical activity.

That report dispels any doubts about the need to tackle the couch-potato lifestyle that it highlights. That type of sedentary lifestyle is not only the cause of Scotland's big three killers—cancer, heart disease and stroke—but an important factor

in several other conditions. The other side of the coin is that a physically active lifestyle brings a range of positive health benefits.

The task force proposes the target that 50 per cent of those over the age of 16 and 80 per cent of those aged 16 and under should meet the minimum recommended levels of physical activity by 2022. That seems a long way off, but if we are to achieve that target, we will require average increases of 1 per cent a year across the population.

Sport is by no means the only way of being physically active, but it is an important way because it is, or should be, a thoroughly enjoyable experience and because of the other benefits that it gives to individuals and to communities.

An annual survey has shown that, among children and young people, participation in sport is higher than might be believed. In the eight to 15 age group, 44 per cent participate four or more times a week in a sporting activity. As most youngsters take part at least occasionally in sport, the clear challenge is to encourage an increase in the frequency and intensity of most young people's exposure to sport and to ensure that they maintain that involvement into adult life.

The third challenge that was set by sport 21 was the establishment of the Scottish Institute of Sport, which was launched in 1998 and has recently moved to a new base in Stirling. The institute is supplemented by a network of six area institutes across Scotland. Nearly all of Scotland's 32 local authorities are involved in the various consortia that run those area institutes. That is a good example of the partnership working that we are trying to increase across local authorities, health authorities and education institutions.

Modernising sports governing bodies was the fourth key challenge. Through financial assistance, we are encouraging as much of that modernisation throughout Scotland as is possible.

After four years of sport 21, we can say that there is good progress on those four challenges. No one suggests that there is anything other than a lot more work to be done, but progress has certainly been made.

One of the aspects of developing sport 21 is human resources. For example, volunteers make an important contribution to the well-being of Scotland and its people. A significant proportion of volunteering is sports-related. Without that effort, little amateur sport would exist. That effort makes a major contribution to our social inclusion agenda. Sports volunteers help to build strong and active communities and they help to improve the quality of all our lives. The Scottish Executive and sportscotland are committed to improving support to volunteers and particularly to increasing the

number of coaches working at local level, which we are doing through our active communities initiative.

A review of the national strategy for sport is under way and sportscotland, which has been asked to update sport 21, will report to me and to Elaine Murray in April 2003. The review will build on the work done over the past four years. It is not about reinventing the wheel or reconsidering what must be done. That has been established and the review will develop the strategy.

Sport helps to foster a sense of belonging. It builds self-esteem, particularly in young people, develops confidence and brings people together. The importance of sport in diverting young people from a potential life of crime or involvement with drugs is clear. That forms an important part of the thinking behind the strategy.

All the benefits of sport should be available to everyone, regardless of gender, age, background or personal circumstances. That is why, of the three visions of sport 21, we place the highest priority on widening opportunities and increasing participation in sport. We are determined to close the opportunity gap by giving more people the opportunity to be more active more often. In doing so, we must build into the strategy the fact that different factors govern the participation of women—particularly women with young children—in sport.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): Does the minister acknowledge the essential roles played by the Glenmore outdoor centre and the Badaguish centre—both in my constituency—to ensure that young people can participate in sport? Does he acknowledge that people with a disability have the chance to participate in a wide range of sports at the Badaguish centre, which offers the opportunity for excellence in many sports?

Mike Watson: Absolutely. I have visited Glenmore and been very impressed with the work that is going on. I have yet to visit the Badaguish centre but I hope to have the opportunity of doing so. Inclusivity is important. People with disabilities who want to make the most of their ability to participate in sport should certainly have every encouragement. Such participation should be made as easy as possible.

In our efforts to close the opportunity gap and promote social justice, social inclusion partnerships are at the core of the programmes that we use. In the programme for government there is a commitment to ensure that all social inclusion partnerships have a sports component. To help to deliver that commitment, sportscotland recently doubled the £1.5 million that it had been putting into the programme. That took effect from

February of this year and work is moving ahead.

The New Opportunities Fund physical education and sport in schools programme will provide funds for a capital programme. Not only will that help to develop new and improved facilities in and around schools but, crucially, it will ensure that those facilities are available to the wider community. However, the programme is not only about bricks and mortar. We also have two revenue programmes: one will provide sporting and cultural activities during out-of-school hours, and the other will stimulate sports programmes in and around schools, with the aim of diverting young people away from crime and other anti-social activities.

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the minister consider a problem that affects far-off parts of the Highlands—that of the cost of travel for people competing in sports?

Mike Watson: The more rural areas certainly have difficulties. In our considerations for the active primary schools initiative and in our work with school sport co-ordinators in secondary schools, we are mindful of those difficulties. I am aware of the need to ensure that travel costs are covered and I will give an example of that being done. On 11 May, I attended the women's football day in Livingston. Women's football is one of the fastest growing sports in Scotland and one of the schools participating in one of the age-group finals was the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway. The institute's participation had been assisted not only for that day but for the various rounds that led up to it. I certainly take Dr Ewing's point.

Physical education has an important role to play in assisting schools to meet several of the national priorities, equipping pupils with the skills, attitudes and expectations necessary to prosper in society and to encourage the sort of creativity and ambition that will serve them well in future life. That is why in the months ahead, as a follow-on from the report of the physical activity task force, Nicol Stephen will chair a group to review the place of physical education in our schools.

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): Will the minister give way?

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Tommy Sheridan: Being a gentleman, I will let Margo MacDonald go first.

Ms MacDonald: With reference to the review of PE in schools, will the minister tell us whether that will encompass both PE in primary schools and the number of sport graduates who come out of Scottish institutions?

Mike Watson: The review will cover physical education across all schools. If young people

become aware of the benefits of sport and enjoy it from an early age, they are more likely to carry that through the rest of their life. I do not think that the number of graduates will be part of the review. However, we appreciate the crucial role that sport graduates play in delivering and coaching physical activities for young people.

Tommy Sheridan: Has the minister formed the view that in order for physical education to become a core subject we have to make more dedicated time available in schools? The experience in many primary schools is that physical education has been ignored.

Mike Watson: I want young children in schools, particularly those in primary schools, to have as much physical education as they can get, both in the curriculum and as after-school and weekend activities. I am in no doubt about that. That is why we are pushing the active primary school initiative, which is now in phase 3. We hope that almost 300 schools in more than two thirds of local authorities will participate in that initiative. I want to extend it to the maximum. I have no doubt about the benefits of that approach.

Ms MacDonald: Will the minister give way?

Mike Watson: I must press on.

It is essential that the facilities that we provide across the sporting spectrum are affordable and accessible to meet the needs of users and potential users. The report "The Ticking Time Bomb", which was published last year, showed how much investment is necessary to refurbish our swimming pools over the next 20 years—it amounts to about £500 million. That gives members an idea of the scale of the task that we face. Sportscotland is carrying out an audit of other sports facilities in Scotland so that by spring 2003 we will have an up-to-date assessment of the condition and investment requirements of our stock.

Sustainability is an issue. We must invest wisely to ensure that we get the best value for money that we can. We want to build a framework of facility provision that is sustainable, not just in the medium term but in the longer term, for the generations to follow. We need to maximise the use of those facilities and ensure that school-based facilities become community facilities.

I have outlined several areas where we have been working to meet the challenges and realise the visions of sport 21. It is an evolving process. Nothing stands still and we are well aware that we must press on. That is why we are undertaking the general review of sport 21. It is essential that the national strategy is constantly moving so that it remains relevant to the needs of sport in today's society.

The steps that we take today could have a major impact on the well-being and general health of the next generation of Scots. That should be our aim. Sport is not an optional extra, but an essential part of a healthy lifestyle. The first step is to get that message across to our fellow citizens. That is a task in which all of us, both inside and outside the Parliament, have a clear role to play.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the value of sport to the quality of life in Scotland and the importance of the role it plays in developing the health and well-being of the nation; welcomes the commitment of the Executive and sportscotland to work with governing bodies, local authorities and all other partners to widen participation in sport at all levels, and encourages all those with an interest in sport to contribute to the current review of sport 21, the strategy for sport in Scotland.

15:10

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):

I welcome the debate and the opportunity to highlight the wider benefits of sport for the country.

We have heard from the minister about most if not all of the initiatives that are helping to develop the health and well-being of the nation. In general terms, the SNP supports all that activity. However, the Executive has failed to highlight some facts and statistics. One such fact is that, between 1997 and 2000-01, local authority expenditure on leisure and recreation decreased in real terms year on year; another is that we have two full-time professional athletic coaches and England has 60.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will Irene McGugan give way?

Irene McGugan: No. I am still in my first minute.

The Executive has also failed to highlight the fact that *The Herald* reported recently that four private schools had been awarded more lottery grants for sports facilities than all Scotland's state schools combined; that Scotland spends approximately £1.91 per head of population on sport compared to £42 per head in Denmark; and that sportscotland conceded in its annual report that grant-in-aid funding from the Executive

"cannot contribute significantly to funding the basic structures and development of sport in Scotland."

That information helps to give a more complete understanding of the situation and explains why the SNP amendment attempts to add to the motion references to "real resources" being needed to ensure "real improvements". I assume that the minister does not accept that amendment.

Mr Monteith: Does Irene McGugan agree that, to consider the figures completely, one must also consider the contribution of private income—the investment by individuals in spending on sport and

leisure? Does she acknowledge that, in the period that she quotes in regard to Government and local authority expenditure, the contribution of private income has grown considerably? Does she agree that we are witnessing a flowering in involvement because private investment adds while there is perhaps a decrease in public investment?

Irene McGugan: I do not see why we cannot have both and keep the local authority expenditure up.

In evidence yesterday to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's inquiry into the purposes of education, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council was clear that any research that it conducts shows that parents want more time to be given to the expressive arts. PE falls clearly into that bracket. Last year's report by the Scottish school of sport studies noted:

"Schools are by far the best place to introduce children to sport and the benefits of health related exercise, but they must be provided with adequate means to do it ... The reality of the inadequacy of school facilities is appalling."

Those are the words of the Scottish school of sport studies; they are not mine.

A 2001 report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education found that only 33 per cent of schools had good programmes for physical education. Research from the University of Strathclyde shows that the average amount of time that is set aside for physical education in secondary schools is now less than it was 10 years ago, with 43 per cent of schools providing no PE for secondary 5 and secondary 6. Even worse, facilities are being sold off for commercial gain, sacrificing the health of students. One in seven secondary schools no longer has any access to grass playing fields, which leads to concerns about whether current procedures for protecting open space and recreational areas are adequate.

I know that ministers must be advised of developments from which the planning authority stands to gain financially, which do not accord with the local plan or to which there are lots of objections. However, in a recent reply to a parliamentary question on the matter, Hugh Henry told me that, of the seven such cases that had been notified to Scottish ministers since December 1997, only one was refused. Perhaps that is a real issue.

The recognition that sport or physical activity can be linked to health has come about only comparatively recently—in the last five years or so. Perhaps it is more helpful for us to refer to physical activity, which has a much wider application, than to sport. The information in the physical activity task force's report cannot fail to act as a wake-up call. However, when John Beattie and his team came to present the findings

to MSPs, only three of us turned up. Today, there are not many members in the chamber, there is a reasonable attendance in the public gallery and a miserable attendance in the press gallery. Perhaps that serves to underline the difficult task of getting everybody to take the issue seriously.

Physical inactivity in Scotland is a serious issue. The evidence is alarming. Two out of three Scottish adults are inactive and that level of inactivity is the most common risk factor for coronary heart disease, which affects 500,000 Scots a year and led to more than 12,000 deaths in 2000. Many people have many excuses for not participating in sport—everything from feeling too fat, too old or both, for some of us, to a lack of suitable local facilities or a lack of money.

Dr Ewing: It may surprise the chamber to learn that I was once a champion swimmer, but that I did not like gym at school, which we had a lot of. I did not like gym because I ended up hot and sweaty and was expected to go back to a maths class. There was no question of having a shower. In a way, that is how girls feel. Will gym ever be followed by showers?

Irene McGugan: The member makes a good point.

Much more needs to be done to make it easier for people to participate in whatever physical activity they want to do. For some, that means fairly simple stuff such as encouragement and the creation of confidence to participate. For others, that means overcoming more serious issues of intolerance and intimidation. Those remain issues for some disabled people and people from ethnic minority groups.

A greater choice of sport and activities would help and would encourage participation from people who are not very keen on competitive sports. We must acknowledge that there has been a move away from team sports and activities to more individual activities that people want to do on their own, such as cycling. The option of participating at different skill levels must be available, so that nobody feels excluded or disillusioned. It is also important to note the lack of indoor facilities for all-year-round training, given Scotland's climate.

I welcome the fact that the physical activity task force's work will be a 20-year initiative. Too many short-term three-year-funded initiatives have been taken, and I am pleased that a commitment has been made for 20 years. However, most important, sufficient commitment has not been given to co-ordination between health, education and social justice to make progress in addressing poor fitness levels and our appalling health record.

Effective joint working and effective funding are needed to raise the profile of sport throughout

Scotland and to encourage as many people as possible to be active. Only then will we improve the general health and fitness of the nation and produce more talented athletes who are capable of achieving internationally. The challenge for the Executive and for all of us is to improve vastly the provision of sport in schools and in the community, to create a seamless sporting structure that will allow continuous participation from childhood to adulthood.

Scotland has a proud sporting history and tradition. For our size, we have achieved much but, in recent years, our sporting success has dwindled in tandem with the nation's health. That will continue unless the right foundations of structure, policies and finance are put in place. That must be done soon.

I move amendment S1M-3192.1, to insert after "nation;"

"recognises also that real resources are needed in order to ensure real improvements in the general health and fitness of the nation and that only co-ordination across health, education and social justice will provide all Scots, especially those from socially excluded groups, with improved provision, equality of access, affordability of sporting facilities and full access to these health and social benefits;"

15:19

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to speak in the debate and to lead on the Conservative party's view. We are content to support the Executive's motion. As the minister knows from his time not only in this Parliament but in the other Parliament of which he has been a member, a bipartisan approach has generally been taken to sport policy. We congratulate the physical activity task force on its work and are happy to support its recommendations and the work of sport 21.

A debate such as today's is an opportunity not only to give support and motivate others to take up a cause, but to make positive and creative observations that might widen people's involvement in sport. I hope that that is the case, not only for the better health of the nation, as the motion sets out, but for better results from individual and team performances.

It will not have missed members' notice that we do not now have a team in the world cup—that is why we should have a policy that we can all get behind. Individuals will benefit from the programme, but it would have been good for the nation to have seen our footballers succeed and not be gubbed before they got there.

In trying to be constructive, I will take the opportunity to raise a number of points. I hope that the national physical activity co-ordinator and the

planning team will examine issues including the involvement of parents in the provision of sport in schools. It is clear that there are difficulties in finding sufficient physical education teachers and time in the curriculum for PE—

Ms MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Mr Monteith: I will in a moment, but first I will develop my argument.

It is important for us to recognise that parents offer a wealth of talent. Parents are often qualified in coaching and training certain sports; often they are more qualified than the teachers. I thank teachers for their work and effort, but they take extra-curricular work because they enjoy it—teachers like to see the benefits that PE brings to their pupils and they enjoy being involved in sport. However, the wealth of talent that parents could bring to schools is often not being tapped.

Ms MacDonald: There is no difficulty in recruiting PE teachers. The University of Edinburgh, which offers the only graduate PE course, regularly takes a complement of 100 students and the course is heavily oversubscribed. Between 95 and 100 per cent of the students stick with the course, which is a much higher percentage than for any other discipline. As I said, there is no difficulty in recruiting PE teachers, but the Government is reluctant to pay them.

Mr Monteith: Forgive me if I seemed to misrepresent the position. I meant recruitment in the sense of parents being brought forward to become involved in schools. I am sure that that is an area on which we agree.

I know of a number of parents who hold Scottish Football Association certificates, who could have coached children, but the schools do not call on them to do so. Those parents could be lending a hand in providing additional help to sports in schools.

It is also worth raising the issue of indoor facilities. It is clear to anyone who is involved in team sports that our climate, with its dark winters, limits what can be done to engage children in team sports outdoors. When the nights are drawing in, it is difficult to coach young children in team sports in muddy playing fields, other than by drilling them. Therefore, teams go to church halls and school halls, but those halls have been designed for nothing bigger than a badminton court. In such surroundings, it is difficult for coaches to instil a degree of proficiency or enjoyment. It is often the case that one half of the class has to sit out the training while the other half is taking part. It is important that we ask the planning team to examine issues such as the provision of indoor facilities.

In that respect, I highlight the example of

Norway. The comparison between the performance of its national football team and ours is quite noticeable. The provision of large indoor facilities has allowed Norway to provide a better level of skilled coaching than is available in Scotland. I am not saying that that argument is cut and dried, but it merits examination.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Brian Monteith has not yet addressed the substance of his amendment, which proposes that

“all Scottish schools have a full-time equivalent physical education teacher.”

Many primary schools in my constituency have only two or three teachers. I assume that Mr Monteith's amendment relates to the academies. If so, will he make that clear?

Mr Monteith: I am glad that the member is gasping for me to reach that point, but he will forgive me if I build up my argument before I do so.

We must challenge current conventions. For example, I hope that the planning team will challenge the assumption that certain sports should be held only at certain times of the year. It is absurd to involve children, either at school or in clubs, in sports for which the weather is not suitable. People might well prefer to play football in winter, but the convention that young people should learn about sport in muddy fields is counterproductive. It is no wonder that they want to stay in and play with their computers or be couch potatoes. We must challenge the convention that national sports organisations should set the time when their seasons take place.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Does the member accept that some children—although not many—loathe the sport of any sort? Indeed, I was one of those children: I was the last to be picked for the football team and so on. In a way, such a problem will never be addressed by the term “sport”. Perhaps there should be some creative thinking about other forms of physical exercise. I am sure that the member can think of several himself.

Mr Monteith: I happily concur with Mr Stone's point. I was about to say that physical education should not be limited just to sport. In fact, in previous speeches, I have outlined the particular importance of dance in schools. We must ensure that dance, particularly traditional dance, is encouraged in Scottish schools and that it plays a greater role in physical education. I hope that that answers the member's concerns.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Does the member also recognise the importance of girls' football in schools? It is one of the fastest growing

sports and addresses the particular challenge of making girls and young women active.

Mr Monteith: I happily recognise the contribution made by women's football and note how often girls and women outperform boys and men in national and international competitive tournaments. In fact, the sport is such a success that my son complains about finding it harder to get on to the pitch at Livingston Football Club because the ladies' football team uses the facilities so much. As such problems are caused by success, perhaps we should welcome them.

I must move on to the kernel of my amendment. Although we support the Executive and the creation of the task force and the planning team, we believe that more has to be done. By lodging our amendment, we simply want more meat to be put on the bones. We should be setting ourselves the goal of having a full-time equivalent PE teacher in every primary and secondary school. As Mr Rumbles might not be clear about what I mean, I should make it clear that schools that have only one or two teachers and a small number of pupils will not have a full-time PE teacher. However, we are looking for full-time equivalents to ensure that such schools have access to PE teachers who can share their work load with other schools and thereby give the same amount of time to those schools as they would give to a school with 30 pupils in each class. A school with 420 pupils can easily employ a full-time PE teacher, whereas a school with 42 cannot.

Mr Rumbles: I still do not understand what the member is getting at. He is not saying the same as his amendment, which seeks to ensure

"that all Scottish schools have a full-time equivalent physical education teacher."

That is what we are supposed to be voting on today.

Mr Monteith: I am sorry if the member does not understand what I mean by "full-time equivalent". I think that our suggestion is quite practical. However, even if he does not accept the wording of my amendment, he should not let that stop him supporting it. I have made what we want quite clear: we want to ensure not only that we have fine words, people sitting on committees and initiatives and strategies, but that we get results.

We must have far more PE teachers in our schools than we have now to teach team sports, individual sports such as athletics, dance and all other kinds of physical activity. By doing so, we will ensure that people not only enjoy a certain level of sport and activity but take it further and improve themselves, their school and community. That aim is worthy of support, which is why we have lodged the amendment.

I move amendment S1M-3192.2, to insert at end:

"and believes that the Executive should aim to ensure that all Scottish schools have a full-time equivalent physical education teacher."

15:30

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I, too, welcome the debate. Last week in the Education, Culture and Sport Committee, as in previous weeks, we discussed Tommy Sheridan's School Meals (Scotland) Bill, which has raised the profile of nutritional standards in schools. On Monday, I was at a meeting of the PE teachers network to discuss the report of the physical activity task force, which stressed the importance of physical activity for the health of the nation. It was a super discussion.

Incidentally, Winnie Ewing told us that she was a champion swimmer. The leader of the PE teachers network revealed that he taught Nicol Stephen when he was in primary 4, and that he too was a swimming medallist in Scottish championships—we learn something every day.

There was much discussion of the nature of PE provision and sport in schools. The teachers talked about how to make things better. They talked about class sizes, teacher training and time—issues that relate to their professional preparation for the job. They talked about PE having lost its whole-school application, perhaps because of certificate examinations, which seem to some administrators to take the place of core PE for all. Displacement was an important issue that was talked about.

Winnie Ewing talked about the discomfort of not having a shower. The PE teachers talked about how the atmosphere could be changed if there were individual showers instead of communal showers. Some youngsters do not like that side of physical activity, as Jamie Stone said.

Mr Stone: It was not the showers.

Ian Jenkins: I understand.

There was great willingness to accept that what is being done now may not be the best way to make activities enjoyable and so increase take-up.

Sandwiched between the committee meetings and the meeting with PE teachers, I attended a diabetic clinic, at which I was given lectures on my diet and on the need for me to take more regular physical activity. I can just see myself dancing away.

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): The mind boggles.

Ian Jenkins: I am sure that it does.

It is important that people engage in regular physical activity. Today, we are discussing a lifelong lesson to establish a healthy lifestyle. It is not just about youngsters. There is nothing more important than improving the quality of life of our nation, as the motion states. We can see that participation in sport raises the quality of life of individuals in terms of fitness, self-esteem and social engagement. It represents the embodiment of values and, as the task force report makes clear, it has continuing benefits for future health.

Similarly, the availability of sporting opportunities and participation in them raise the quality of life in neighbourhoods and communities, as Mike Watson said. We all recognise that youngsters who take part in sport and games are engaged in an activity that is potentially satisfying and fulfilling, and which diverts them from aimless, sometimes destructive, and otherwise socially unacceptable activity. The Executive programme, which includes sport 21 and the other things that Mike Watson mentioned, makes that a high priority. We welcome that.

Sport can also help to nurture a sense of place, a shared identity and civic pride in communities and neighbourhoods. Peebles Rugby Club has been successful this year in gaining promotion to division 1. That made the place feel better. I hope next week to be able to help Gala Fairydean Football Club to be accepted into the Scottish Football League, which will give an extra boost to a place with an already great sense of community. That is important for communities.

Of course, this week of all weeks, we see the effect that sport can have on the morale and emotional life of a nation—it is not always good, but it is always important. That side of things is ephemeral, and can be wildly overdone, but it is a powerful influence in drawing people together. If sport and physical activity are so important, we have to take them seriously, for the good of the whole population.

As we have heard, the Executive has taken considerable steps to raise the profile and to recognise the importance of sport. I welcome that strategy, as I welcome the investment from the new opportunities fund, the report of the task force, the appointment of the tsar and the important work with social inclusion partnerships. However, a lot still needs to be done. We must somehow change the psyche of our nation so that a sporting and active lifestyle becomes the norm and what is expected of people. We must change the situation that is outlined in the task force's report. According to the statistics, boys aged between eight and 11 are active, after which the level of activity slowly falls away. At the same age, girls are at their most active—which is a bit less active than boys—but after that, the level of

activity plummets and never recovers.

To create a change in how we think about our lifestyles, we must expand the policies that have been outlined. We must widen opportunities for participation by improving school and community facilities; foster relations between schools and community sports clubs; support voluntary organisations more adequately than at present; and treasure the people who run such clubs, which must be encouraged, enabled and supported, financially and politically. Generous, reliable and sustainable funding is crucial. We must share out the extra money for investment in health that has come from the UK budget so that health promotion and improvement measures are included. Sport and physical activity must get their share.

In the current education debate, we must examine the place of physical activity, physical education and sport. The debate is examining the priorities of a system that is supposed to serve the whole child. Perhaps the system once did that, but over many years we have allowed that to lapse. We must not forget that the education system is not only about academic success.

Participation in sport must be a high priority. That will not come cheaply, but we should not forget the high value of the prize, which is the improved quality of life of our nation.

15:37

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): I welcome the debate. The Scottish Parliament is beginning to make a difference. We are making a start at putting sport and physical activity at the heart of policy development, but we have a long way to go. Members will agree that there is a high level of recognition of the role of sport and physical activity in making Scotland a better place. That can be done through the recognition of talent and the achievement of excellence and through ensuring that everyone, no matter their ability or where they live, is as fit and as healthy as they can be.

I commend sport 21, which is the national strategy for sport, and the contribution that it has made to Scottish policy development. I welcome the creation of the Scottish Institute of Sport and recognise the importance of the major event strategy. I like to think that I made a small contribution to the development of that strategy.

I want to concentrate on the importance of physical activity to a range of policy objectives throughout the Executive. I welcome the publication of the physical activity task force's consultation paper, although it makes stark reading. If people read nothing else, they should read the foreword by the chairman, John Beattie, which should be compulsory reading for everyone

in Scotland. Forty-two people die of heart disease each week in Scotland because they are inactive, which means that more than 2,000 people die unnecessarily each year. That is 2,000 people too many.

I want to address some of the issues of children's and young people's fitness. No one would disagree that young people should be physically active. I take issue with the Tories' amendment. It is too simplistic to say that we simply need more PE teachers in schools. I will explain the matter to Brian Monteith in words of no more than two syllables.

A full-time equivalent—oh, that is more than two syllables, is it not?—is the same as one teacher. I know that that may be hard for Brian Monteith to grasp. One full-time equivalent would incur the same staffing cost as one teacher. Brian Monteith is talking about putting one PE teacher into every little primary school in Scotland, but that would be woefully impracticable. The secret is to ensure that schools develop a whole-school approach to physical fitness.

Ms MacDonald: I hate to take issue with Rhona Brankin on this, as she put much good work into what preceded the physical activity task force's report. However, she is wrong to imply that we can do without specialist PE teachers, especially in primary schools. Perhaps I can also help to get Brian Monteith off the hook on which he has impaled himself. I think that he is referring to the peripatetic primary school PE specialists who visit perhaps three to five schools in the course of a week.

Rhona Brankin: I do not disagree that there is a role for PE teachers in primary schools. What I am saying is that we need far more physical activity than one or two sessions a week with a PE teacher. Children in primary schools as well as in secondary schools need much more regular physical activity than that. When I was a primary school teacher, I took my class out running every day. Youngsters must have physical activity almost every day. Saying that PE teachers can deliver that is simply not addressing the question. Whole-school approaches must be developed.

I recognise and welcome the work of the active primary school initiative. We must re-examine the way in which we measure schools' commitment to physical activity and we must be able to measure schools' success in improving the physical activity of our youngsters. That must be an integral part of the whole-school evaluation by local authorities and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education.

The perceived lack of physical activity among young people tends to receive a high profile, but I will talk a little about the need to target resources. The diagram on page 20 of the physical activity

task force's report, which demonstrates how much physical activity is taking place among men and women, shows huge disparities between levels of physical activity among boys and girls. That disparity continues up to the age of about 35. As men and women get older, their level of physical activity decreases, and there are huge disparities between the levels of activity among girls and young women. I call for resources to be targeted specifically at those groups. It is also recognised that many people who have disabilities are excluded from sport.

I would also like to talk about—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): No, you must wind up, please.

Rhona Brankin: Yes, I will wind up. Before I wind up, I will mention the need to target the disparity between men and women in social class groups. The number of women in jobs that require basic occupational skills who are physically inactive is massively larger than the equivalent number of men. Any strategy needs to be highly targeted.

I will finish by asking—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you must finish. I asked you to finish after five minutes and you have gone a full minute over. Wind up now, please.

Rhona Brankin: How many people here take regular physical activity five days a week? Not many of us. That shows the scale of the challenge that we face.

15:43

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): It is not much of a motion that we are debating. It does not exactly get the blood leaping and the endorphins coursing through the system. Its somewhat unctuous tone betrays absolutely no indication that the Government understands the central priority—the core nature—of the debate that we are having. I am sorry that so few MSPs are in attendance. Members obviously thought that the debate was just about drillies, gym shoes, showers and things like that. However, it is about much more.

We know that we are an aging society and that the cost of having unfit elderly people in the health service has a huge impact on our spending policies and on our economy. We also know that the population is decreasing and that people have to work longer. Unless they are fit, they cannot work longer and—once again—that has economic consequences. Those issues should be at the centre of any Government strategic plan for the development of the Scottish nation and of our economy, rather than merely for the health of

Scotland, although health is integral to the debate.

I was rather scathing about the motion, because it does not mention motherhood and apple pie, but it does get a couple of things right, including bringing the physical activity task force into the debate. As far as I am concerned, we must place physical activity at the centre of our strategic thinking. Hard questions must be addressed because we seek an outcome, which we thought might be delivered through the health service budget, but which we are asking the education budget to deliver—a fitter, healthier community. The question is whether that has resource implications.

We have had argy-bargy about whether PE teachers are needed in primary schools and whether there are a sufficient number of PE teachers in secondary schools. As far as I am concerned, we do not have sufficient numbers. For example, there are only 10 PE specialists in primary schools in the city of Glasgow. This is the most unfit nation with the most unfit industrial capital—or former industrial capital—in Europe. The children in Glasgow schools are not staring at a healthy, fit future; it will be an expensive future for the small number of people who will have to work to pay for the benefits that they will need when they are older.

It makes sense to have primary teachers teaching their core subjects and a specialist core teacher available to primary school children. I know that Rhona Brankin disagrees with me. I also know that there was a fashionable belief in education staff rooms and think tanks and so on that Scottish teachers were excellent generalists. They are, but they are now burdened with a huge amount of administrative work. When Rhona Brankin, who is a lot younger than I am—I say that to gain her support—was teaching, there was not the same administrative burden.

Rhona Brankin: Will the member give way?

Ms MacDonald: I will continue with this point, then I will give way. Primary teachers who, like Rhona Brankin, took their pupils out running every day were thin on the ground. Even if primary teachers wanted to do that now, they could not, because of the amount of administration and the type of teaching structures that we have imposed on them. Therefore, specialists are needed more than ever.

Rhona Brankin: If Margo MacDonald assumes that the only person who can deliver PE and physical activity is a PE specialist, will she tell me how many hours a week a PE specialist would deliver PE in primary schools and how much that would cost? Is that the best way to deliver PE?

Ms MacDonald: The task of the PE specialist in primary school should be broadened. There

should be three tasks for the PE specialist in primary school: first, to teach the children; secondly, to teach the teachers; and thirdly, to teach the parents, so that they can take the lesson into the wider community through sports coaching and so on, to which Brian Monteith referred. That should be the new role for the PE specialist in primary schools. They need to be recruited now. The University of Edinburgh can find them and they stay the course, so the raw material is there with which to achieve the strategic objective.

Several other things must be done. The Government must take responsibility for ensuring that if physical activity is to be seen as a core essential of the wider education of the person, that activity must be resourced. Report after report has been full of warm words. All PE teachers and all people interested in sport and physical activity will say that each report is usually followed—as we have already heard—by local authorities spending less money on their sport, leisure and recreation policies. Fewer people are becoming PE specialists. There has been the demise of local authority PE advisers.

Warm words will not cut the mustard. We need to restate the objective, if for nothing else than to challenge the academic snobbery that has always made it impossible for PE to be taken seriously as a subject in schools and universities.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. She is on her last minute.

Ms MacDonald: I appreciate that you have allowed me to go on, Presiding Officer. I gave way earlier.

We will vote on the motion later. I make a plea that we should not cast aside the motion, the well-meaning amendments and all the rest of it. We should get serious, listen to the activity task force, see that it identifies the urgent need for PE specialists in schools and recruit them now.

15:49

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I welcome the debate, the minister's message that sport is an essential part of a healthier lifestyle, and Margo MacDonald's constructive contribution.

The Scottish Executive's sports strategy has a vision for Scotland of achieving and sustaining world-class performances in sport. In that connection, we are entitled to convey our admiration and our warmest congratulations to Mr Lennox Lewis on his outstanding victory against one of the roughest and toughest boxers in the world, Mr Mike Tyson.

When the Parliament met in Glasgow in 2000, we debated whether Mr Mike Tyson should be allowed entry to Britain in order to fight in Scotland. If I remember correctly, that fight eventually lasted only a few seconds. During that debate, the argument was advanced that, if Mr Mike Tyson had had a British passport, he would not have been allowed into the United States after committing the crime of rape. We were asked whether it was appropriate for him to receive entry into Britain when others who had committed rape would not. It would be fair to say that the Home Secretary took the view that Mr Mike Tyson had paid his debt to society by completion of the sentence for that crime.

During the course of the debate, I expressed my view that Mr Mike Tyson was not as great a boxer as our Mr Lennox Lewis, who had been totally underestimated and was a good ambassador for boxing. Mr Lennox Lewis is a man who exercises self-control—

Rhona Brankin: On a point of order. I was under the impression that this debate was about increasing participation in sport.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was thinking of asking Lord James to steer in that direction.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I was about to point out that the sports strategy document, "Sport 21: Nothing Left to Chance", contains three visions, one of which is to do with achieving and sustaining world-class performances in sport. The sportsman about who I am talking has achieved that. I am stressing the fact that he is a role model. Just as sportsmen should be condemned when they are not role models, they should be congratulated when they are. I believe that he is a fine ambassador for this country and should be given a cordial welcome by the Parliament should he come to Scotland.

He has set an example because he has been generous in his support for young people. He has spent literally—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Lord James, I think that you are straying from the motion.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I want to finish this point. Mr Lennox Lewis has spent literally millions of pounds on the funding of the Lennox Lewis college in Hackney, which is for disadvantaged young persons. In recognition of that, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of London and the freedom of the London borough of Hackney.

My conviction is that amateur boxing should not be discouraged in Scotland. Young people should be free to take part in any sport of their choice, provided that they know the risks that exist. Amateur boxing's medical safeguards are among

the strictest in the world and are kept under constant consideration.

Ms MacDonald: Can the Scottish Parliament get any better? We have had African dictators and now we are going to get heavyweight boxers.

Are the member's proposals to be gender specific? Are girls to be encouraged to take up boxing?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I cannot express any great enthusiasm for women taking part in boxing. However, I do not think that there should be a discriminatory bar to their doing so if to do so is their determination, although—for a variety of reasons—I would not encourage that.

Jack Dempsey, a previous world heavyweight champion boxer, is believed to have said that boxing had given him the opportunity not only to leave poverty behind him, but to form some wonderful friendships that stood him in good stead for life. Some great boxers have openly admitted that, if it had not been for boxing, they would have been in trouble with the law and that boxing gave their lives purpose and fulfilment.

Mike Watson: Will the member give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will give way to the minister on the condition that he will say that he will not discourage amateur boxing in Scotland.

Mike Watson: I was wary of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's pointing finger as I know that he holds a boxing blue from Cambridge University.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Oxford University.

Mike Watson: I have committed the ultimate sin, although I knew that it was not Heriot-Watt University, which I attended.

I am aware of boxing and its importance to Lord James. Amateur boxing is certainly to be encouraged—I have no difficulty with that. Amateur boxing is safe, and gives young people many core skills. I have much less time for professional boxing, although it has its own legitimacy.

Would Lord James talk a bit more about other sports? Although boxing is important, I would like to hear what he and his colleagues in the Conservative party have to say about the general participation of young people in sport.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute left, Lord James.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I think that young people should be given maximum encouragement.

In the very few seconds that are available to me, I will say that I believe that Lennox Lewis has

acted as a role model for young people and that he is unique in that respect, in that he is the only British world heavyweight champion boxer of the 20th and 21st centuries. For that reason, I think that we should warmly welcome his contribution and wish him every good fortune for the future, as we should do for all our young people, whom the minister has encouraged today.

15:56

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Widespread sporting activity is clearly important to the health and fitness of the population. It can improve quality of life and can reduce the social costs of poor health. It has many other benefits beyond that. Team sports involve social interaction and a co-operative effort; people work together and learn lessons that can be transferred into other spheres of activity.

Sport is also an area where people can contribute to social well-being through volunteering, training youngsters and organising and helping to stage events. Sport has diverse economic benefits, ranging from a healthier work force to sport's enormous commercial potential.

The debate is not about creating spectators; it is about participation and how we encourage people to make the purchase of sports goods more than just a fashion statement. An analysis of data on sports participation gives cause for real concern. Overall participation rates are lower than is desirable if we are to have a healthy population.

Organisations such as Engender argue that women are particularly disengaged from sports activity. That starts in childhood. Among children and young people, a quarter of boys and a third of girls do not achieve the minimum recommended level of physical activity. Gender differences are negligible among pre-school children, but grow throughout school years. As Rhona Brankin said, differences also exist between the genders as people get older. Two thirds of 15-year-old girls do not get enough exercise—nearly twice the proportion that applies to boys. We must develop imaginative ways to encourage boys—and girls even more so—to get involved in sport at school and to stay involved in it as adults.

It is ironic that although girls will not get involved in sport at school, as soon as they leave school and start working they join aerobics classes and get involved in keep fit and so on. We need to find ways in which to ensure that girls can participate in sport and feel comfortable with it. On a point that was made by Winnie Ewing, it is all right to pooh-pooh the need for a shower, but young girls of a particular age need to feel comfortable and they need to feel that they are listened to, which would ensure that they can participate in sport at

the level that they choose.

Other sections of the population also have low participation rates. Young people who have disabilities and those from ethnic minorities find it difficult to participate in sport. The recent film, "Bend It Like Beckham", illustrates the obstacles to participating in sport that are faced by youngsters from ethnic minorities.

Sport 21 was established to tackle the deep-seated inertia of our population. Several projects have been aimed at addressing that, with encouraging results. SportsScotland, for example, has run the active primary schools programme to address the issue, which is a major one for social inclusion partnerships.

We must recognise the important work that is done by local authorities, which run sports centres, encourage people to participate in sports and try out new areas of sport. I think that they are key players in the delivery of sport. We can also learn a lot from elsewhere; there are good examples of progress in Wales.

We have the report of the physical activity task force, which advocates a range of measures and covers the review of the physical education curriculum in schools. We need to evaluate imaginatively how children engage in physical activity in schools, be it dance, PE or whatever—although I am not so sure about boxing. We need to encourage children to participate in physical activity.

We need to examine the reasons for the differences between the genders' involvement in sports—we need to address the reasons why girls do not want to participate in sport. We need to make sport relevant to parents and we need to influence them as gender role models for their children.

I agree with Margo MacDonald that it is important that parents understand the rules and that they are able to be involved in sport. Many football clubs and other sports clubs are run by parents, who are keen for their children to participate in sport. We need to plant a seed for the future. Children who are involved in sport are more likely to enjoy and take part in sport as adults.

I am pleased that the minister is aware of the problems that exist. He noted that there are differences in gender requirements, that there is a need for facilities such as child care, and that sports co-ordinators have brought benefits to children. I look forward to implementation of the recommendations of the physical activity task force and to a fitter and healthier Scottish people.

16:00

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Murray Tosh on having climbed almost all Scotland's Munros, which is no mean feat.

The minister might agree that, given the contribution that physical activity can make to improving an individual's health and well-being, today's debate could be led by the Minister for Health and Community Care. Often we ignore the long-term problems that can arise in a society because of lack of physical activity among younger and older people. It is important that we take every opportunity to educate all members of our society about the potential health benefits of physical exercise.

Some 20 per cent of younger people in Scotland are overweight. That illustrates the potential problems that we are storing up for the future in cardiovascular disorders, diabetes and high blood pressure. If we do not adopt a longer-term strategy to tackle those problems, they will return to haunt us.

Margo MacDonald noted that a lack of physical exercise has a health cost for individuals and a financial cost for society. It is important that, where possible, we encourage young people to participate in regular physical activity. In doing so, we must tackle the barriers that prevent individuals from participating in such activities. The physical activity task force report cites 13 reasons that people commonly give for not participating in physical activity. Those reasons range from lack of money, being too old and having no one to go with to being put off by the weather. The last reason—point 12—I found rather disappointing. If we in Scotland depend on good weather to encourage people to become involved in physical activity, very few people will participate.

We must ensure that people are aware of the benefits that can be gained from physical activity. In her speech, Cathy Peattie talked about the need to ensure that physical activity provision is as inclusive as possible. We must ensure that all members of our society are able to participate in physical activity equally and fairly. Provision for disabled people at sports centres is often limited to a ramp leading to the door. It is necessary to ensure that staff are educated and that they are able to work with disabled people, so that disabled people can participate in the activities that interest them. Fergus Ewing referred to the Badaguish centre, which specialises in providing outdoor activities to young disabled people. We must also ensure that staff are aware of the religious and cultural sensitivities—for example, relating to dress—of people from ethnic minority groups.

It is disappointing that the report does not

appear to tackle the issue of outdoor education. One of the many sad legacies of the Thatcher Government was the systematic closure of local authority outdoor centres, which were set up in the 1950s and 1960s to ensure that all young people had an opportunity to participate in outdoor activities. Because there is now a shortage of such facilities, it is very difficult for people from deprived communities to participate in activities in which they might be skilled. I hope that, in trying to increase the level of physical activity by young people and others, the minister will ensure that our education system provides young people with an opportunity to participate in outdoor activities.

If, for example, someone is studying standard grade or higher geography, there is nothing better for them than going on a day's walk somewhere such as Glencoe to study glacial features, which will give them practical experience of the academic subject that they study in the classroom. I hope that we can consider the issue holistically. Excellent centres such as Glenmore lodge, which I visited recently with the cross-party sports group, were set up specifically to give young deprived people the opportunity, which every young person should have, to walk in the mountains of Scotland. I discovered that it has become very difficult for young people from deprived communities to participate, because local authorities are not providing that service. I hope that at the end of the process, we will ensure that young people are given the unique opportunity to appreciate the natural beauty of Scotland.

16:06

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I want to expand on what Dr Ewing said about rurality, access and remoteness. I draw members' attention to the far north, which is my part of the world. Mention was made of covered indoor facilities; counties such as Inverness-shire and Ross and Cromarty are fairly well served with regard to leisure centres. However the story is very different in Caithness and Sutherland. The history of that is difficult and is not really worth going into, but it is associated with council spend. Let us leave it at that. The net result is that towns in Ross-shire, such as Dingwall, Fortrose and Invergordon, which have populations of 4,000 to 6,000, have leisure centres, but towns in Caithness, such as Wick and Thurso, which have populations of 9,000 to 10,000, have no sports facilities.

The sport 21 document, "Sport 21: Nothing Left to Chance", states:

"Sport 21 has three visions for Scotland.

A country where sport is more widely available to all".

We are talking about sport throughout Scotland.

I want to highlight the fact that within my constituency the lack of provision deprives people to a large extent.

There is not a lot of hope that, under the reformed system of local government, much can be done. That is to do with section 94 consents and the fact that the big leisure and recreation spends of the 1980s and early 1990s are things of the past. None of us holds out a great deal of hope that we will sort out the problem through traditional routes. However, the money exists, because

"Sportscotland receives a grant of approximately £10 million from the Executive and has well over £20 million from lottery funding."

The problem that we have in Caithness is to do with administration and the means by which we can access funding. I thank the former Deputy Minister for Environment, Sport and Culture, Allan Wilson, for his long and helpful correspondence on the issue. I also thank sportscotland, from which I have received thoughtful and considered replies to my letters. It always pointed out that the fact that the area into which I am trying to get leisure centres is not a full-blown social inclusion partnership area presents a difficulty. Sportscotland hinted in a letter of 10 May 2001—well over a year ago—that there might be flexibility in developing that.

By complete coincidence, I received a letter today from Mr Ken Melhuish of Caithness Sports Facilities Ltd. I want to read short extracts from that letter, which will outline the problem. The letter states:

"The attached letter, from the Scottish Executive, appears to put the ball into Sportscotland's court but Sportscotland in a recent E-mail from Martin Bowie (Projects Director for Regional Sports Centres) stated: 'I have liaised with Jim Macdonald, the Acting Lottery Director, regarding the Geographic/Thematic SIP question and **advised that we will only consider projects in Geographic SIP areas as defined by the Scottish Executive**'."

The problem is that it appears that SIPs in Caithness and north Sutherland are thematic, such as the part of Thurso known as Ormlie. Because of the difference between a thematic and geographic social inclusion partnership, we have difficulty in getting the right rules in place to proceed with projects. The other thing that worries me is that the volunteers in Caithness, who have set up a limited company, are up against the clock, because economic development review panel funding runs out shortly.

I am led to understand that the capital lottery fund for regional sports centres will be time limited and that the amount of money that it can give will soon drop.

I do not expect the minister to respond to my points in reply to the debate, but I ask the

ministers to adopt the style that Allan Wilson adopted when he took my points on board. I ask them at least to keep the channel open in future. I will be entering into correspondence on the matter and will be glad to copy that correspondence to the ministers in due course. In Caithness, young people, old people, people who are keen on sport and people who are not keen simply do not have the facilities that other parts of Scotland enjoy. In my view, that is fundamentally wrong. I thank members for listening to me.

16:10

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Last Wednesday, I dropped in on a conference that was organised by sportscotland as part of the review of sport 21. I hoped to hear some new ideas on how to increase participation in sport and on how to improve our rather mediocre performance in international events. To be frank, I was disappointed.

One of the keynote speakers devoted almost his entire speech to singing the praises of the private finance initiative and public-private partnerships. Surely it is not the job of sportscotland to promote a funding mechanism that is so controversial that even the Accounts Commission for Scotland is questioning it because it does not provide best value for money.

The other keynote speaker was an adviser to the Parliament's Education, Culture and Sport Committee. Nothing in her speech convinced me that the committee is giving adequate priority to sport in its current inquiry into the purposes of education. Unfortunately, no member of the committee was present to persuade me otherwise. Indeed, I did not see another MSP at the afternoon session that I attended, although I understand that the Deputy Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport opened the morning session. The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament must give sport a higher profile. It is no wonder that there is lethargy and inactivity at grass-roots level if there is lethargy and inactivity at the top.

Last week, the physical activity task force revealed more evidence of physical inactivity and merely confirmed what we already knew. As Rhona Brankin said, every week in Scotland more than 40 people die of heart disease because they are too inactive. The problems start in early life with a high incidence of obesity and heart conditions, even among primary school children. The Executive is not addressing the problem with the required urgency.

It is all very well to appoint a physical activity co-ordinator, or fitness tsar, and I wish Mary Allison well. However, it seems to be the done thing these days to appoint a tsar if there is a problem. We

have a tsar for crime, a tsar for drugs, a tsar for food and now a tsar for fitness. For heaven's sake—we are not living in 19th century imperial Russia. This is Scotland, which is supposed to be a modern 21st century democracy. The people of Scotland elected a Parliament and the Parliament elected ministers to do the business. Urgent ministerial action is needed, particularly from the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, the Minister for Health and Community Care and the Minister for Education and Young People.

I welcome the efforts that are being made by school sport co-ordinators and physical education specialists, but more incentives should be given in order to get other teachers involved in school sports. Many teachers opted out at the time of the dispute in the 1980s, but surely the McCrone settlement provides an opportunity for a fresh start by giving teachers the necessary incentives to devote more time to organising sports for young people.

The fact that many young people are interested in sport can be seen from their enthusiasm for big events such as the world cup, despite the fact that Scotland did not qualify for it. As Cathy Peattie said, it is absolutely essential for health reasons that we encourage our young people to become players rather than mere spectators. Instead of simply watching our neighbours, such as England and Ireland, go on to greater things, we should adopt that approach which, in the longer term, might also help to improve our performance on the international stage.

16:14

Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):

When I was of primary school age, physical fitness was not an option but a necessity. From the age of eight, I had to get on my bike every morning and cycle the three miles to school. When I got there, an interesting game would be going on in the playground: a perpetual game of three and in. We had one set of goals, which at our school was made not from jerseys but from two particularly well fashioned rubbish bins. That game would sometimes start as early as 8 o'clock in the morning and would continue through the morning break and lunch time. Some of us would even stay back in the evenings to participate a little while longer before going home. That kind of physical activity underpinned a great deal of the sport that went on at that time.

Given what was said earlier, I want to highlight the irony that, at the time, that game of three and in was a case of every man for himself. The girls were not welcome. Thirty years later, however, things had changed to some extent, as my daughter eventually captained the school football team. She was the first girl to have done so and

she took the team on to some success. I therefore understand the point that was made by some of the lady members because, when my daughter left primary school and went to the secondary school, she was no longer welcome to play football at a genuinely competitive level. The girls were simply not accepted at that level. The resulting resentment that she experienced had a significant impact on her and has perhaps shaped her character to this day. However, the amount of physical activity that took place in schools in those days was largely due to necessity.

We must also remember the need for role models, to which Dennis Canavan and Lord James Douglas-Hamilton referred. Young people want to compete in sport because they wish to model themselves on someone who has had success. In Scotland, we are beginning to suffer from the law of diminishing returns, because, without models of success, young people will not have an interest in sport.

There are fewer people who are fit enough or willing enough to become involved in the process.

Ms MacDonald: Although I do not disagree with what Alex Johnstone has said about the role that leading sports people and other such role models play, I think that he is really talking about football, which is what most members have done. Talking only about football militates against an appreciation of all sports. Rather than tune in to the football programmes that masquerade as sports programmes, people should listen to John Beattie's programme on a Saturday morning on BBC Radio Scotland—I hope that the cheque will be in the post.

Alex Johnstone: I apologise if I have talked too much about football, but I am keen to highlight the other role models that existed only a few years ago. Alan Wells won an Olympic gold medal in the 100 metres race. We had boxing success at both amateur and professional level in Scotland. A whole generation of young people treated those figures as role models, but that motivation has dried up because of the lack of success.

The Deputy Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Dr Elaine Murray): Will Alex Johnstone ignore the contribution of people such as Rhona Martin and Jackie Lockhart, who are role models who have won Olympic and world championship gold medals? He must surely agree that it is good to see excellent female role models in sport.

Alex Johnstone: I dare not suggest that I would ever ignore their contribution.

It is extremely important that we all understand that there is an ever-shrinking supply of talented and fit individuals in the very young age groups who will be able to compete at the highest level. We need to put in place a system that can

encourage at a young age the development of ambition in our young sportsmen and women. We need a system that can sort out those individuals and pass them on to the clubs and other organisations, which, thanks to the enormous activity of volunteers, are now in a position to provide team and individual sports at the highest level for young Scots.

That work must be done in the schools, but they lack the necessary number of sufficiently talented teaching staff who can identify such individuals. We need such staff to give the young people encouragement and pass them on to those who will eventually bring them to be Scotland's future successes. As our amendment suggests, unless we ensure that there is an appropriate supply of qualified teaching staff in our schools, we will not break the vicious circle of Scotland's highest-level sporting prowess falling to a low ebb.

16:20

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I start with a plea to move the Parliament to Aberdeen permanently, so that I can get some routine into my life and play squash twice a week every week throughout the year.

The debate is important because time and again in the chamber we have discussed Scotland's health record, particularly obesity in young children. The most exercise people get these days is pressing the accelerator or clutch in their cars or walking down their local high street to McDonald's to buy more burgers to accelerate heart disease.

Young people have been mentioned in the debate several times. It is important to catch people when they are young to try to encourage them to adopt a healthy lifestyle. That means getting them to play more sport and to participate in physical exercise when they are young. The shortage of PE teachers—mentioned eloquently by Margo MacDonald and other members—is crucial. Rhona Brankin says that other teachers can fulfil the PE function and, although that is true to a certain extent, those teachers have other preoccupations.

In 1998, there were 52 full-time specialist teachers in Aberdeenshire, a number of whom were PE teachers. In 2002, we have 25 full-time specialists so the situation has become a lot worse. In Aberdeenshire, there are only eight full-time equivalent PE teachers for 158 schools and 20,500 pupils. Those eight PE teachers are delivering only a quarter of the PE provision that is recommended by the Executive. That is what is happening at the coalface in our schools.

Some secondary school PE teachers in Aberdeenshire to whom I spoke told me that they are noticing a huge difference in the kids who are

coming through from the primary schools. Those kids are less fit and less willing to participate in exercise and sport. We must take into account that that has a big impact on their futures.

I am astonished that Rhona Brankin keeps intervening on all speakers to say that the debate is not particularly important because there are other ways round the problem. However, as Margo MacDonald said—

Rhona Brankin: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: There she goes again. I am delighted to take an intervention.

Rhona Brankin: Does the member recognise that the situation is complex and that, rather than merely employing physical education teachers, we must take a whole-school approach to sport? Does he recognise that although one school might have access to a PE specialist and another school might not, the pupils in the second school might be more active physically than those in the first?

Richard Lochhead: Rhona Brankin is right to suggest that many issues are involved. However, in this litigious age, other teachers are terrified about getting involved in all the sports in their schools. They would rather have a trained specialist—in case anything goes wrong or to ensure that nothing goes wrong in the first place.

Schools often do not have facilities. Often, by the time that kids get changed and move all the tables in the dinner hall that they have to use as a gym, the half-hour PE period has been cut to 20 minutes.

When the Parliament was in Aberdeen, I had a members' business debate on drug misuse in Grampian. Drug figures from throughout the country show that it is mainly young people who turn to substance misuse. Why do they do that? They tell me that it is because their communities have no facilities. They want sports facilities. They say that education to get them off drugs is very useful but that what they really want is other facilities to let them fill their time. However, there is a shortage of sports facilities. We should be trying to get those kids to participate in sport and not to participate in substance misuse. Especially in rural areas, the lack of facilities is a huge issue.

We should have a formula. We would not allow communities to be without health facilities or police stations so, similarly, we should work out a formula to prevent communities from being without sports facilities. Areas with populations above a certain level should have access to affordable sports facilities. Not only would that address Scotland's health problems, it would allow people to be much more active.

The world cup has been mentioned. I notice that

today's papers are talking about how Denmark was able to knock out the world champions. Denmark is a small country—it is the same size as Scotland. However, it has many things that we do not have—and not only its own Government. It has many sports facilities as well. The papers are saying that the reason why they have done so well in the world cup is that they have excellent sports facilities. Footballers in this country have been contrasting our sports facilities with those in Denmark. Sweden, Ireland and Denmark—all north European countries—are doing extremely well in the world cup. Not only do they have better health records than Scotland, they are doing better than us at football.

I want to pick up on Alex Johnstone's point about role models. Peter Nicol is the number 1 squash player in the world. I was speaking to his father at the "Taste of Grampian" food festival on Saturday. He told me that many other people who are coming through the same squash club, at Westhill outside Aberdeen, could be among the top players in the world. However, they get no support. Peter Nicol is from Westhill in Aberdeenshire, but he represents England in the squash world championships because, south of the border, all the support services, such as physiotherapy and hotel accommodation, are laid on for him. We need more Peter Nicols. He should be doing a fantastic job for Scotland, although recently he has been doing a fantastic job for England.

The Government has a bad habit of producing glossy brochures and meaningless motions. Just for once—to change the way in which Scotland operates, to improve our health record, to get more people involved in sport and to be more successful at sport—the Executive should introduce some radical solutions.

16:26

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I want to begin with a confession: I have been supporting England in the world cup. I am glad to have got that shameful secret off my chest. When I was travelling through to Parliament on the train this morning I had my radio earpiece in and I was anxious not to let out any groans or cheers—although I suppose that many people would have assumed that I was cheering on Nigeria.

The idea that England should do badly at football is one of the odd and rather negative ideas that illuminate attitudes to sport in our country. Another example might be our attitude to the Brazilian player, Socrates, who captained the national side in the 1980s—some members may remember him. He is still famous in Scotland, not so much for his undoubted footballing abilities, but because he was notorious for smoking 40

cigarettes a day. It is typical of the Scottish nation that even our sporting heroes are those of the hard-smoking, hard-drinking, hard-living variety. The message and benefits of sport are sometimes lost in our perverse enjoyment of the negative.

I would like to think that attitudes are changing. In particular, I would like to think that the Executive's support for sport for all is helping to change attitudes. I want to give some examples from the west of Scotland and Glasgow in particular that demonstrate that. The women in sport initiative has undoubtedly been one of the most successful programmes supported by the Government. Cathy Peattie commented on the policy and the importance of targeting those who may not have the opportunity to take up sport or who face obstacles. Training sessions for marathons and 10km runs, ladies nights at the pool and gym and jogging networks have all helped women to exercise without feeling embarrassed. This year was the 10th anniversary of the Glasgow women's 10k and 9,000 women took part. Two years ago, when my wife took part in the annual 5k in aid of breast cancer charity there were 4,500 runners and last weekend there were 7,000 runners.

The message is of sport for all and activity for all. That message is being put into practice. The general practitioner referral scheme, where elderly patients and others who would benefit are prescribed exercise rather than medicine, is an excellent example. It is good physically and socially, a fact that is recognised by the support of sports centres in Glasgow, such as Scotstoun and Bellahouston, which put on a coffee and cake deal to supplement the swimming or walking.

Ms MacDonald: I am extremely glad that Mr Macintosh mentioned exercise on prescription, as I did not have time to refer to it in my speech. That programme points to the necessity of considering the resourcing of sport. The national health service is expected to bear the burden of that programme and often it is the private facilities that gain from it. The resourcing of that programme should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Mr Macintosh: Indeed. The point that I was making was that it is the sports centres in Glasgow that supplement and support the deal.

The tennis programme is designed for people of ages two to 82 and aims to bring tennis to people of all social backgrounds. This summer the young people's tennis programme is being extended to Drumchapel and Castlemilk, which I hope will challenge the elitist attitudes that surround tennis.

Perhaps the most important development has been school sports co-ordinators. That is finally making good the damage done when the Government of the 1980s lost the good will of

teachers who were taking extra-curricular activities.

Finally, there is a need for sport and leisure as a profession to be developed and supported. SPRITO Scotland, the national training organisation for the sport and leisure industry, is looking to become a new sector skills council and I hope that the Executive will support that development. However, there are issues to be tackled here. Workers in sport and leisure often experience extremely poor wage levels and limited career progression.

Intake to training courses can have little bearing on the needs of the industry or the likelihood of a job at the end of the course. Perhaps most important of all is the support that we can give the voluntary sector, which can be the main or first point of access to physical activity for many in our communities.

We can improve our elite performances, but the key to success is what we do for the many. Scottish teams are famous for clutching defeat from the jaws of victory, but I believe that the ethos of sport for all, supported by the Government, is challenging our sometimes negative perceptions of sport and giving us all a healthier future.

16:30

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I am happy to support the motion and the SNP's amendment. Between them, they cover many of the issues.

At the moment, we are still piffing around on the subject. We need to put real money into sport and other activities, as doing so pays dividends; it makes people happier and it might even gain some votes. We need to build sports centres. If we do that, we will not need to build all the jails that we are talking about building. We need to train up sports coaches. If we do that, we will not have such a shortage of nurses because there will not be so many people for them to look after. If we give grants to local sports clubs, we will not need to put more and more money into the police. We are not talking big money: a few hundred pounds to a lot of sports clubs makes a lot of difference to the youngsters to whom they can give regular activity. It all makes good sense.

Many good speeches have covered the health aspect in particular. One aspect that has not been covered much, other than in Ian Jenkins's speech, is the role of sport in reducing youth crime and other problems. One of the main strands in creating modern sport was the 18th century English headmasters of boarding schools for boys, who greatly encouraged sport to keep their charges out of mischief. I do not know how much

that succeeded, but the basic idea is correct. If we provide good activities for young people, they will not get into trouble. That is not the only reason—or even the main reason—for doing sport, but it is a significant reason.

Dr Winnie Ewing: To support Donald Gorrie, I instance the fact that, in my former constituency of Hamilton, the father of the world champion boxer Walter McGowan created his own gym in Burnbank. He encouraged the police to send troublemakers to him. He said, with his eyes glistening with delight, "Give me a vandal and I will make him an athlete."

Donald Gorrie: Government should be well-enough organised to bring together money that would otherwise be wasted on jails, for example, and money that is dedicated to the health service and put it into preventing people from needing the health service or jail by giving them good activity, making them happy and ensuring that they enjoy fun.

Another aspect of sport—the social aspect—has not been mentioned much. Sport helps to create good social animals. For various reasons, many of our fellow citizens are not good social animals. One of the highlights of my youth, which was probably a sheltered upbringing, was the first time that I went to the braw lads gathering with the Edinburgh Southern Harriers. Some of the young ladies in the party introduced me to all sorts of drinks that I had not met before.

As well as having an important social aspect, sport has a team-building aspect. If youngsters with a difficult background are taken rock climbing, they know that, if they let go of the rope, the chap below them is in big trouble or if the chap above them lets go of the rope, they are in big trouble. That is serious, character-building activity. I know that all that is rather unfashionable, but it has a real effect.

Ms MacDonald: We should not underestimate character-building stuff, but we must consider the hard facts of the resourcing to provide the facilities in which characters will be built. Hutchison Vale football club in Edinburgh is trying to persuade the City of Edinburgh Council to release land to allow the football club to cater for more than 200 kids in that area of the town. Local authorities do not have the required resources for such initiatives. Ministers must consider strategically what they ask local authorities to do with ever-less money.

Donald Gorrie: That emphasises the point. The two athletic clubs in Edinburgh with which I have an honorary position would benefit enormously from lower charges and better grants. We have starved such local organisations of money for a long time. That shows again that the ministers, who have done good work, must persuade their

colleagues to put serious money into the budget for sport. If they did that, we would save much money and have a happier Scotland. We might even win the odd match.

16:36

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

All parties agree that participation in sports should be widened. Several members have referred to the problems of ill health. Despite increasing affluence, ill health in the population is increasing. As several members have said, Scotland has serious problems with heart disease, cancer and stroke, which could be countered in some cases by exercise. Furthermore, the level of obesity is growing among young people. We must examine ways of countering those problems, if for no other reason than to reduce the burden on the NHS that is a result of those health problems. That is why we want to encourage participation in sports.

I have never believed that sporting excellence is a measure of a country's standing. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and before that, athletes from the Soviet Union and East Germany cleaned up Olympic medals, while people in their home countries suffered under evil socialist regimes. Meanwhile, we in the free world did not win as many medals, but at least we had our freedom. I know which I prefer.

I do not suggest that the minister recommends Soviet-style concentration on sports, but a small improvement in the quality of our football team would not go amiss. The world cup is rather sad when the Scots are not there. Alex Johnstone referred to Scotland's lack of sporting success, but we are world leaders in sports such as darts and snooker. Perhaps they are not the sort of sports that the minister is talking about.

Cathy Peattie: I appreciate that the sports that the member mentioned are valuable, but does the continued discussion of sports such as snooker and darts exclude women and girls from participating in sport?

Murdo Fraser: The member has more expertise in the matter than I have. I was not sure that women were excluded from darts or snooker. In my local pub, as many women as men play darts, but my experience must be different from Cathy Peattie's.

My colleague James Douglas-Hamilton—our very own pugilistic peer—referred to the importance of amateur and professional boxing.

If we accept that we all want greater participation in sports, how will that best be achieved? More sport in our schools must be the starting point. Not so long ago, the idea of competitive sport in schools was condemned as

elitist by some on the left. I hope that those days are gone. Perhaps, as Peter Mandelson has said, "we are all 'Thatcherite' now."

School sport is vital, as it encourages activity and promotes physical well-being. It also teaches young people about competition and the need to value others, whatever their abilities. The education system must be at the heart of any strategy to promote sport. That is why Scottish Conservatives want more physical education teachers in our primary schools. We are calling for a full-time equivalent PE teacher in every primary school in Scotland. That would be the single most important measure that the Executive could take to promote participation in sport in Scotland.

Rhona Brankin rose—

Murdo Fraser: I ask Rhona Brankin to give me a second; I want to make another point.

Margo MacDonald said that there is no shortage of PE teachers available to be recruited. That would have a cost. We have costed our proposal at £11 million. That is real money, but it is a drop in a bucket compared with some Executive initiatives in its strategies, consultation documents and glossy leaflets.

We have heard much about considering things. Many members have said, "We must consider this and we must consider that." We have had three years of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive—it is time to stop considering things. Let us do something positive. Let us get some PE teachers in our schools.

Rhona Brankin: Murdo Fraser states that resources make a difference. Does he support the targeting of particular groups that are excluded at the moment from sport and physical activity, namely girls, women and those with physical disabilities?

Murdo Fraser: Indeed. I want to see everybody being encouraged to take up sport. At the moment, there are those, including young women, who are not participating as much as they should. It is clear that they would benefit if resources were to be put into sport.

I will deal briefly with the idea of full-time equivalent PE teachers, as there seems to be some confusion on the subject.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr Murray Tosh): The member has one minute.

Murdo Fraser: I can tell members that *The Times Educational Supplement Scotland* is in no doubt about the meaning of full-time equivalent. The meaning is clear. There should be a full-time PE teacher in schools of sufficient size and, in smaller schools, a peripatetic teacher should be used for the appropriate number of hours. The

number of hours will depend on the number of pupils in the school. That is not a complicated idea. I suspect that the members who take issue with it are simply looking for an excuse to cop out of showing support for the idea of full-time equivalent PE teachers in schools.

If we are to see a real improvement in the level of sports activity in our schools, we need to have PE teachers in our schools. Rather than saying that we must consider this and consider that, let us see some real action. Action has to start in schools—let us get some PE teachers. I urge members to support the Conservative amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Irene McGugan to close for the Scottish National Party. The member has seven minutes.

16:41

Irene McGugan: Once again, we have experienced a constructive debate on sport and a fair degree of consensus has been achieved. There seems to be broad agreement on the issues and on what needs to be done about them. I hope that the minister will take every opportunity to act on the issues that have been highlighted today.

Some of the evidence indicates that on occasion the Executive views sport as something less than a priority. One example is the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's report on sport in schools. The report was published in October 2000, yet the Executive's response was not received until April 2002. The report drew conclusions and made recommendations that deserved action and response a great deal sooner than that. They were valid then and they are valid today.

The report's headline conclusion was that there is a need to improve the participation of young people in sport while they are at school. The report recognised that sport can play a major role in improving the health, motivation and achievement of young people across the social spectrum. The report called for greater emphasis on using sport as a vehicle for health and for academic improvement. Those are exactly the sort of things that we have discussed today, almost two years later.

Mention has been made of school sport co-ordinators. It is good that some input is going into schools again, even if it is a poor replacement for a system that was in place 20 years ago. That system was allowed to disappear, largely because of pressure on local authority funding. I stress that the school sport co-ordinators should involve all relevant partner organisations in the community, as that will lead to optimum effectiveness.

The school sport co-ordinator programme needs to be monitored and evaluated over time, as that

will allow best practice to be established. There are concerns that, due to limited national direction and a lack of coming together of experiences, the co-ordinators' training has been inefficient and ineffective. That has led to a hotch-potch of delivery and mechanisms across the country.

I understand that the current Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport has rescinded the previous minister's decision to establish a school sport alliance. If that is the case, perhaps the deputy minister will set out the reasons for that decision in her summing up. I also note the proposed ministerial review of PE and that the make-up of the group will be announced in the next few weeks. I understand that the group will examine ways of continuing to raise the profile of PE and that it might also examine the issue of numbers in PE classes, which would be useful. I ask the minister to confirm whether the review will include school sport.

Swimming has rightly been mentioned, if fairly briefly. Although we have had debates about the value of learning that skill, we know that many community swimming pools have closed down in recent years because of high maintenance costs. Moreover, even some of the new schools that are being built at the moment, such as those in Glasgow, do not have swimming pools. As a result, swimming might soon be dropped from the curriculum. We want swimming lessons to be provided to all pupils to ensure that they can all swim a minimum of 25m by standard 1.

The SNP recognises the importance of sport in all areas of life and its contribution to society. It would be a matter of regret if the Executive decided to reject our amendment, because it is important that we make clear the intention to embrace co-ordination, joint working and joint funding, to improve access by reason of geography or funding, and in all ways to ensure that groups that are too often socially excluded have such access. We must all push for any initiative that improves the provision of sport in schools and the community to ensure that future generations include physical activity in their lives from childhood to adulthood.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Elaine Murray to respond to the debate. Dr Murray, we have inadvertently gained a couple of minutes. We might be able to limp to decision time if you can speak for 12 minutes.

16:46

The Deputy Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Dr Elaine Murray): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will try to speak a bit slower than usual.

This is a very appropriate time to discuss sport. What with the world cup at the moment,

Wimbledon coming up and the Commonwealth games at the end of next month, the subject is very much in people's minds, even though there are different degrees of Scottish interest in those competitions. At this point, I should perhaps congratulate those teams from the British isles that have progressed to the next round of the world cup. My only plea is that, if the team supported by Kenny Macintosh wins, we do not have to see the winning goal for the next 40 years. That said, it might knock replays of the other goal off the box.

The Tories made much play of excellence. It is important to celebrate that quality and indeed the competitions that I have mentioned provide role models in that respect. Success is not just about bringing together communities and nations; it is also inspirational. For example, when Wimbledon is on, we see children out with tennis racquets; when marathons are on, we see people running in the streets. The other day, I was even pleasantly surprised to discover my eldest son, who has not been physically active, playing football. As several members have pointed out, we have to capitalise on people's interest in watching sport and convert it into a desire to participate in sport and physical recreation.

Margo MacDonald did not like the way in which we had framed the motion and asked whether we were serious. Actually, we are deadly serious. Unless we use these methods to improve Scotland's health, we will continue to be the sick man of Europe and to build up a huge health bill through trying to make people well again. Some of our efforts must be directed at preventing people from getting ill in the first place and at enabling people to live to a healthy old age. If people are to live longer, they should do so in good health. That is to everyone's benefit.

Ms MacDonald: I am absolutely delighted to hear the minister restate the seriousness of the objectives that are outlined in the sports strategy and the physical activity task force strategy. However, the issue comes back to resources. We have to put our money where our mouth is. Will the Executive put more money into recruiting more PE teachers, sport co-ordinators and PE advisers? Will it spend more money through the local authorities to provide facilities and coaching?

Dr Murray: The issue of PE teachers will be addressed in the review that my colleagues in the education department are undertaking. We will argue for increased resources in sport, because that is part of our job as sports ministers. We hope to be able to make a convincing case to our colleagues when the time comes. Many other partners invest in sport. Reference has been made to local authorities. Perhaps there is work to be done with local authorities to increase the profile of sport in their community plans.

We have talked a little about sport 21, which is not being reviewed just because somebody feels like having another review. Sport 21 is a strategy that was designed to expire in 2003. Now we want to find out how we can build on it and refine it to create a policy that will take us forward in the five to 10 years beyond 2003. I strongly encourage the MSPs who have contributed forcibly to this debate to get involved in that debate. Dennis Canavan was disappointed by what he saw last week. If that is the case, he should get in there and say what he thinks should be done, because the opportunity is available. I do not want a glossy Executive document on the Executive's policy for sport. That is not the intention—it is Scotland's policy for sport. The review affords the opportunity for all the partners to get together and create Scotland's policy for sport.

Fergus Ewing: In the spirit of making a positive suggestion, I inform the chamber that my colleague Michael Matheson was too modest to mention that he is a member of a mountain rescue team. Does the minister acknowledge the key role that mountain rescue teams play, not only in evacuating casualties safely from the hills, but in teaching safe practice in outdoor activities, in particular in our hills, in teaching young children in lectures and by other means, and all the other work that they do—on a volunteer basis—and which they cherish?

Dr Murray: I am happy to do so. That is why I am taking part in the Moffat mountain rescue challenge next Sunday. I have much sympathy for and give much support to mountain rescue teams.

In discussing the review of sport 21, we also have to make links. Mention was made, for example, of the national debate on education. That affords a crucial opportunity for people to make points about the importance of physical recreation and the contribution that sport can make to pupils' learning. I encourage all partners to get involved in that consultation process, and in the consultation on the draft strategy of the physical activity task force. The review of sport 21 can be a success only if all our partners are involved. That means involving local authorities and encouraging them to find ways to include physical activity in their community plans.

Sportscotland recently commissioned a household opinion survey on people's attitude to sport. The sample was approximately 1,000 people over the age of 16. That may not be a huge sample, but even so, the results were interesting, because 90 per cent of the sample agreed that sport adds to the quality of life in Scotland for the population in general. Only 4 per cent of people disagreed. It was encouraging that so many people, who perhaps do not participate in sport, recognise the contribution that sport makes to the

population's quality of life—although we aim to get those people interested in taking part in sport themselves. Two thirds of people considered that sport added to the quality of life for them personally. Of course, some of that may have referred to the contribution from observing sport, rather than participating in it.

On age profiles, the great majority of young people regarded fun and enjoyment as the benefits of participation in sport, but across all age groups there was an appreciation that there were also personal benefits in terms of health and fitness. People identified those benefits as more important than even the community benefits, such as regeneration and crime reduction. It is important that the benefits of building active communities are recognised.

Demographic and other factors were evident in the survey. I am not sure whether the sample was large enough to be representative, but it appears that rural communities value sport more than do urban communities. That is interesting, in the light of what Jamie Stone said. I will digress, and say that of the new funding for physical activity from the New Opportunities Fund, more than £53 million is for facilities. I urge local authorities to examine how they use that funding, so that they can make sport accessible to people in different communities.

Rhona Brankin: Does the minister recognise that a disproportionate amount of money is spent on sport for young men, compared with that which is spent on young women? Will the minister undertake to examine the amount of money that is spent on college and university sport to begin to address that discrepancy in spending?

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Before the minister responds, I appeal to members not to wander around the chamber, but to concentrate on the reply.

Dr Murray: I intend to mention later the differences in participation rates between young men and young women.

We must consider the aging population. The survey found that, as people get older, around 40 per cent identify themselves as having a disability that limits their physical activity or the work that they can do. The demographic change must be taken into account when we examine sport as time progresses. We can either increase participation among a smaller population sector—which I do not favour—or reintroduce sport to the sectors that are typified by non-participation.

There are issues of accessibility. For example, mention has been made of physical recreation for people with disabilities or health problems. I am interested in the developments in the prescription of physical activity by GPs, to which Ken

Macintosh and Margo MacDonald, in her intervention, referred. That development is welcome and its progress will be interesting. We must encourage people to switch sports as they get on in life and help them to realise that alternative sports exist when they are not fit enough for some others.

We must be aware of constraints on people's time. People tend to work longer hours, to travel for longer and to want more time with their families, which means that they have less time for organised physical activity.

Ms MacDonald: Will the minister give way on that point?

Dr Murray: No, I had better press on.

There is a growth in sports activities that fit into short time spans. Those sports sometimes require changing facilities that are more accessible to people for shorter periods. We need more home-based activities and opportunities for sports in which families can participate together.

Higher education is a major influence on participation in sport, because students have increased access to a range of affordable sports activities. That could be good news for the levels of participation in physical activity by women, because there has been an increase in the number of women who attend higher education. We must consider the points of transition, because we know that physical activity tends to fall away during transition from school to jobs or into the community.

Ms MacDonald: Will the minister give way?

Dr Murray: I cannot. I am beginning to run out of time.

The key in the longer term is to encourage children and young people who are at school to participate in sport and to develop a lifelong habit of physical exercise. That is essential to our nation. At present, the physical activity of the average person peaks at the age of nine and then deteriorates. As many members have said, that deterioration is particularly fast in young girls. That is sometimes because young girls do not like competitive team sports and might prefer activities such as dance, as Brian Monteith pointed out. Some women want to take part in team sports—women's football is, I think, the fastest-growing sport in the world—but we must consider activities that are more attractive to young women, such as aerobics and equestrian activities.

The school sport co-ordinators programme and the active primary schools programme give children access to different sports and physical activities. Young people can be the link that brings their parents into sport. Young people often see examples of physical activity not at home, but

instead in schools or communities. That can involve their parents in physical activity.

The sport 21 review gives us the opportunity to examine the issues that must be addressed and the challenges that must be faced. We have a common belief that sport matters. The way in which we develop future strategies for sport and physical recreation is vital to the quality of life in Scotland. I chair one of the review groups that brings together stakeholders and I intend to meet the deputy ministers of other portfolios to discuss the way in which sport and recreation impact on their portfolios. There are opportunities for joined-up government.

I am happy to accept the SNP amendment. However, that does not mean that we do not put real resources into sport. Real resources are going in. We will look for all the opportunities that we can find to maximise the contribution that those resources can make.

I will not support the Conservatives' amendment. Whatever the meaning of the Conservative amendment, its wording suggests that a physical education teacher will be put into every school—including a one-teacher rural primary school.

Mr Monteith: Nonsense.

Dr Murray: I am afraid that that is what the amendment says, and that is why I cannot support it.

Scottish Parliamentary Ombudsman and Health Service Ombudsman Annual Report

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): We have two items before we come to decision time. The first is consideration of motion S1M-3186, on the publication of the Scottish Parliamentary Ombudsman and Health Service Ombudsman for Scotland's annual report.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament notes that the Scottish Parliamentary Ombudsman and Health Service Ombudsman for Scotland intends to lay his Annual Report for 2001-02 before the Parliament and orders the Clerk to publish the report.—
[Mrs Margaret Smith.]

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The second item before decision time is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S1M-3198, on the designation of lead committees.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following designations of Lead Committees—

the Justice 1 Committee to consider the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/246);

the Justice 1 Committee to consider the Criminal Legal Aid (Fixed Payments) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/247); and

the Justice 1 Committee to consider the Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/254).—[Euan Robson.]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S1M-3087, in the name of Iain Smith, on the general principles of the University of St Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the University of St Andrews (Postgraduate Medical Degrees) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S1M-3192.1, in the name of Irene McGugan, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Mike Watson, on the value of participation in sport, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fitzpatrick, Brian (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (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)

Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South 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)

Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (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 Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 97, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S1M-3192.2, in the name of Brian Monteith, which seeks to amend Mike Watson's motion on sport, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (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)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (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)
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (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)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Ms Margo (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 69, Abstentions 27.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S1M-3192, as amended, in the name of Mike Watson, on the value of participation in sport, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises the value of sport to the quality of life in Scotland and the importance of the role it plays in developing the health and well-being of the nation; recognises also that real resources are needed in order to ensure real improvements in the general health and fitness of the nation and that only co-ordination across health, education and social justice will provide all Scots, especially those from socially excluded groups, with improved provision, equality of access, affordability of sporting facilities and full access to these health and social benefits; welcomes the commitment of the Executive and sportscotland to work with governing bodies, local authorities and all other partners to widen participation in sport at all levels, and encourages all those with an interest in sport to contribute to the current review of sport 21, the strategy for sport in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S1M-3186, in the name of Margaret Smith, on the ombudsman's annual report, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes that the Scottish Parliamentary Ombudsman and Health Service Ombudsman for Scotland intends to lay his Annual Report for 2001-02 before the Parliament and orders the Clerk to publish the report.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that motion S1M-3198, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the designation of lead committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following designations of Lead Committees—

the Justice 1 Committee to consider the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/246);

the Justice 1 Committee to consider the Criminal Legal Aid (Fixed Payments) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/247); and

the Justice 1 Committee to consider the Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/254).

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Fireworks

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S1M-2822, in the name of Shona Robison, on the sale and use of fireworks. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. Members who wish to contribute to the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the results of the survey carried out by the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in which almost 98% of people supported tighter restrictions on the availability of fireworks; recognises that there has been a large increase in the problems caused for both people and animals by the irresponsible use of fireworks; is concerned that the voluntary code of practice for the sale of fireworks is frequently disregarded, and considers that the Scottish Executive should do everything in its power to tighten up on the regulations relating to the sale and use of fireworks and, in particular, should review the powers available to local authorities in respect of vendor licensing.

17:05

Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP): The Atomic Warlord is

"Like a nuclear holocaust as this 112 shot barrage vents its might and ferocity."

The Midnight Thunder is a

"25 shot, very very loud air bomb. Not for the weak hearted. Available for under £8."

Those are examples of sales pitches that irresponsible retailers use to encourage people to buy fireworks. People market and sell fireworks by promoting their explosive capacity and there are increasingly frequent reports of fireworks being used as weapons. Some of those fireworks are bombs by another name. For example, the Black Cat firework, which weighs 21lb, has a greater velocity than many mortar bombs. The advice is that it should not be detonated within 80ft of a structure.

In a recent survey carried out by the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 70 per cent of community councils that had received complaints about fireworks reported complaints of fear and anxiety among humans. That is no wonder when, for example, Corkerhill community council in Glasgow cited problems of

"fireworks in letter boxes, stuffed in milk bottles, thrown under police cars."

Bus services in Glasgow were discontinued during the build-up to bonfire night because bus drivers were being threatened with, among other things, fireworks. However, those fireworks can be bought

easily at retail outlets. The ease with which such weapons are sold under the guise of fireworks and their availability to anyone, including children, must be reviewed at the earliest opportunity.

I am raising the issue in our Parliament in response to many complaints and concerns from constituents and community groups in my area and throughout Scotland about the misuse of fireworks. I put on record my thanks to the SSPCA for its support and valuable research on the problems that are caused by the irresponsible use of fireworks.

Clearly, the misuse of fireworks causes huge distress to thousands of people. Last year, 89 people were injured by fireworks and had to have hospital treatment for those injuries. Thousands more are inconvenienced and disturbed by fireworks being let off in their street.

We also know of the effect of fireworks on domestic and wild animals. The SSPCA's research shows that, last year, 8,000 animals received veterinary treatment for firework-related injuries. The research also shows that 100 per cent of community councils that had received complaints about fireworks reported incidents of fear and anxiety in animals, that 28 per cent of them reported injury of pets and that 40 per cent of them reported attacks on animals.

The firework problem is getting worse. Over recent years, the SSPCA has received an upsurge in letter and phone complaints. It seems that 2001 was a watershed, as there was a significant increase in the use and abuse of fireworks last year. The traditional firework season gets longer and longer and fireworks can now be bought all year round.

The current legislation on fireworks is not working. Fireworks are regularly sold to people under 18, despite the fact that that is against the law. The voluntary code of practice for the sale of fireworks is frequently ignored. It is supposed to restrict the sale of fireworks to the three weeks before 5 November or to other festival times. However, the SSPCA today purchased three rockets called War of the Worlds—12 June does not strike me as a particularly well-known festival day, unless one is an English football fan. I heard of a firework outlet that had four times the permitted amount of fireworks in stock. The fireworks were removed but the shop was back in business the next day because the local authority lacked the appropriate powers.

The public want something to be done about fireworks now, as the recent SSPCA survey confirms—98 per cent of those asked said that they supported tighter restrictions on the sale and use of fireworks. Scotland's councils also want something to be done and two thirds of the local

authorities expressed a willingness to review or support changes to fireworks regulations.

What can be done? I know that some people support a complete ban on fireworks, but I think that that would be difficult to enforce and would lead to a black market in illegal fireworks. It would be more effective to encourage a more responsible use of legal fireworks with a more effective range of controls over use and supply. No one wants to be a party-pooper. Fireworks that are properly handled—preferably at an organised display—can be good fun. However, I believe that the Scottish Executive should, as a minimum, review the powers available to local authorities in respect of vendor licensing.

That proposal is supported by a number of Scotland's councils and I am pleased that it has also drawn the support of the police organisations in their submission to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities fireworks task group. The submission calls for the tightening up of the legislation governing sales, retailers, possession and premises. Specifically, it states that there has to be stringent vetting of sellers to ensure that those applying for a certificate are of good character. It also states that more cognisance needs to be taken of previous convictions for related offences by persons applying for a certificate and that applicants for a certificate should be required to show need before being granted a certificate. At present, there are no controls over the number of retail outlets that sell fireworks in an area. In Paisley, for example, there are 62 certificates in force, which seems rather excessive to me.

A vendor licensing scheme could do all that and could be introduced through an amendment to section 44 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. If we wait for Westminster to do something, we could wait for ever. Time and again, private members' bills to address the problem have been introduced at Westminster. Two more private members' bills are scheduled to have their second readings at the end of the month. However, because of their low place on the list, they are unlikely to be dealt with.

I welcome the establishment of the COSLA fireworks task group and I hope that, when it reports in October, it will back the idea of a licensing scheme for vendors and put its weight behind persuading the Scottish Executive to press ahead in implementing such a scheme.

My motion has been signed by members of all but one of the political parties in the chamber. It would have been nice if members of all parties had signed it. However, I know that people such as John Young have taken a keen interest in tightening up controls on fireworks. If there is the political will in the Parliament, something can be

done about the problem. I do not want to have a constitutional debate on the matter; I want action. I suspect that that is the view of the vast majority of the Scottish public.

I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say and trust that he will offer some hope to the thousands of people whose lives are made a misery by the misuse of fireworks.

17:13

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I thank Shona Robison for bringing this debate to the Parliament. As she said, each year many members receive letters from constituents about fireworks safety issues. My constituents in Kirkcaldy certainly send me them. The representations primarily refer to disturbances caused by the irresponsible use of fireworks or the apparent sale of illegal fireworks.

The irresponsible use of fireworks is of great concern to me and is probably the most difficult issue to deal with. The motion calls on the Executive to

"tighten up on the regulations relating to the sale and use of fireworks and ... review the powers available to local authorities in respect of vendor licensing."

I whole-heartedly support that.

The sale of fireworks is covered by consumer protection legislation, which is a reserved matter. However, I know that the Government is aware of the depth of public feeling on the noise and nuisance caused by fireworks, which affect all UK citizens, and I understand that discussions with enforcement authorities and the industry are on-going at a UK level. That is to be welcomed.

It is pertinent that this debate is taking place today. As Shona Robison mentioned, the COSLA task group is to hold its third meeting tomorrow in Cumbernauld. The task group draws its members from the far north of Scotland, the central belt, the Borders and across Scotland and assesses the nature of fireworks problems across the country. The SSPCA, the fire service and the police are all participants in the group. Tomorrow, a representative of the fireworks industry will give a presentation to the group. As Shona Robison said, the group will report back—on 22 August, I believe—and I look forward to hearing its findings.

The establishment of the group is a signal to the public of the concern of elected members and of our determination to seek workable solutions. Anyone who witnessed the Queen's jubilee celebrations or the European cup final at Hampden—dare I mention football?—will appreciate the pleasure that can be derived from well-organised fireworks displays.

I agree with Shona Robison that a complete ban

would be unworkable. It could drive the problem underground, which would be detrimental. In any case, fireworks can be bought over the internet or from abroad. The question is more about keeping tighter controls.

Under the British Pyrotechnists Association's voluntary code, fireworks should be sold only in the three weeks before 5 November. Although that code has some effect, it is not working across the board. Most of the complaints that I receive about fireworks concern incidents that have taken place outwith November, and certainly late into the night.

I thank the SSPCA for its briefing. The statistic that, in 2001, 8,000 animals required veterinary treatment because of fireworks is, to say the least, unacceptable. We have a duty to support all our citizens and domestic and wild animals. With the best will in the world, our ability to reduce firework abuse lies in our ability to control their availability.

The public expect tighter controls in the use and sale of fireworks. This debate will demonstrate that we share their views and that, with cross-party support, we hope to progress the issues to reach workable solutions.

17:16

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I congratulate Shona Robison on securing this evening's debate. The issue has attracted her attention for a long time and she should be congratulated on her pursuit of it.

I declare an interest: my birthday is on Guy Fawkes day—now members know when to send me presents. When I was young, I was given fireworks as my birthday present. By that I mean that my father used to set them off in the garden. It took me until I was about nine years old to realise that I had been cheated. My present went up in smoke, whereas everyone else's presents lasted at least a few days.

The problem of fireworks is indisputably getting worse. The voluntary code is simply not working. Shona Robison mentioned the proposal for a licensing scheme, which could ensure tighter restrictions on sales. There has to be a greater restriction on what vendors can do. The idea of vendor licensing has been supported by police and local authorities.

Let us consider how the names of fireworks have changed: we now hear about Atomic Warlords, Midnight Thunders and Superblitzknall rockets. In our day, we just had Catherine wheels and rockets. The new names suggest the extent to which the power of fireworks has increased; as their power has increased, so has the danger to many people.

We know that people with learning difficulties,

people with mental illness and old folk can be absolutely terrified by the bangs from the fireworks that we have these days. Things are bad enough in the three-week period leading up to Guy Fawkes day; at least when we hear a big bang then we know that there is a good chance that it is a firework. It is the use of fireworks outwith that three-week period that is causing the most distress. I am sure that some old folk must wonder what is happening when fireworks go off at 10 o'clock at night.

Much more needs to be done and I look forward to hearing the minister's remarks. The issue has cross-party support, because we have all been contacted about it by our constituents, who are extremely concerned. It is now beyond the time when the Executive should have taken action on the matter.

17:19

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): I thank Shona Robison for securing this members' business debate on an important subject. The issue is a continuing concern for the cross-party animal welfare group—and since I took over as convener of the group, we have not been short of topics, such as the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill.

As members have said, no one has anything against the well-organised events that have been held during the jubilee celebrations. The problems arise when people become terrorised because fireworks are being used inappropriately. We need to curtail such inappropriate use.

Frank Roy, the member of Parliament for Motherwell and Wishaw, who is hoping to bring about changes to legislation at Westminster, has said:

"Fireworks are getting more powerful and are often used as weapons."

Shona Robison made the same point. There have been reports of telephone boxes being blown up and people's windows being blasted by rockets that youngsters have fired. Today, a member of the SSPCA managed to obtain three such rockets, which we displayed outside the chamber. As Tricia Marwick said, it is clear that the voluntary code is not working.

Reports confirm that the most vulnerable, particularly the elderly, are at greatest risk. The cross-party animal welfare group is also concerned by the effect of noise from fireworks on animals. The SSPCA survey of vets indicates that, in 2001, 8,000 animals received treatment because of fireworks. As Shona Robison said, 2001 seems to have been a particularly bad year. Thirty-three per cent of the vets who responded to the survey reported serious cases, ranging from

ones in which animals became aggressive and destructive to ones in which animals were killed in road traffic accidents. So the reports go on.

There is no doubt that there is popular support for greater regulation. A number of petitions have been submitted. I know most about the petition from Frank Roy, but I gather that the Dundee Labour party is also drawing up a petition. John McAllion may want to speak about that.

What do we need to do? Frank Roy suggests that we restrict the sale of fireworks to limited times, that we have a strict new licensing regime for shops and that we ensure that fireworks displays are run by licensed operators. However, those are UK proposals and may take some time to implement. What else can we do? The cross-party animal welfare group wrote to Melanie Johnson, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Competition, Consumers and Markets, to ask her whether fireworks could be removed from the Explosives Act 1875. She replied:

"Regulation of the safe manufacture and storage of fireworks are health and safety matters which are reserved to Westminster and are the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Even if the requirements controlling these areas were to be removed from the Explosives Act, any replacement regulations would remain reserved matters."

That is the Government's conclusion.

Another option is to change the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. Will the minister indicate how that act could be amended to deal with the issues that Frank Roy has set out in his petition and is pursuing at UK level?

17:23

John Young (West of Scotland) (Con): This has not been my day. First, the rain wiped away all the notes for the speech that I intended to make today. Secondly, I could not find my briefing papers. Finally, my pen gave out, so I was not able to finish my replacement notes.

Shona Robison is to be congratulated on lodging the motion that we are debating today. However, only between 16 and 18 MSPs are present in the chamber, which is little more than 13 per cent of the total.

Shona mentioned the dreaded Black Cat firework, which has the velocity of a mortar bomb. Some years back, following the Dunblane tragedy, gun clubs and their weapons were made subject to stringent restrictions. Some of the fireworks that are now on sale are even more dangerous and can cause more deaths in one act than those weapons.

Westminster jealously retains control of firework regulations at UK level, but I believe that the Scottish Parliament should control such legislation

in Scotland. I do not know whether I am allowed to say that, but I will say it anyway. Seventy per cent of community councils have received complaints about fireworks. Twenty-four per cent reported injury to humans and 20 per cent reported attacks on humans. The SSPCA veterinary survey mentioned that 8,000 animals in 2001 received treatment for firework injuries.

The many dodgy fireworks that are imported from Asia are a problem. HM Customs and Excise have said repeatedly that there are not enough officers to control and investigate traffic of such fireworks. Local authorities tend to take little or no action on complaints and the police have so many additional problems that they tend to downgrade problems with fireworks.

Sylvia Jackson mentioned the Explosives Act 1875, which is totally out of date and should be reviewed tomorrow or next week. To let it drag on as it has done would be ridiculous. In east Renfrewshire fireworks tend to start at the end of August and go on until the end of January. Last year in Mike Watson's constituency of Glasgow Cathcart hooligans set fire with fireworks to garages between two inhabited tenement blocks. They then ambushed the fire officers by firing rockets at them. It was also reported that on the same night hooligans fired rockets at suburban trains. Members can imagine the possible loss of life and damage that could have resulted from that.

Anyone who pays £12 to the trading standards office of the appropriate local authority can get a licence. Storage can be fiddled—this is my last point. A maximum of 1,000 kilos of fireworks are allowed to be stored in a shop, but the shopkeeper can also store 1,000 kilos in his house for his use and can give three friends 1,000 kilos each for their use. That is the sort of abuse that is going on day in, day out.

17:26

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): I welcome Shona Robison's motion and her commitment that this issue will not turn into a constitutional debate. That is important, because the issue affects every constituency throughout Scotland.

I am one of the party-poopers. I support a complete ban on the sale of fireworks, because I believe that it is the only way in which we will be able to deal effectively with the issue. I appreciate many of the points that Shona Robison and others have made about the need to control vendors and the sale of fireworks on the black market. However, if members were to visit the Barras market in the Gallowgate in Glasgow at any time of the year they will find that a black market for

fireworks already exists.

We will deal effectively with the issue only if we put more resources into organised fireworks displays, which many people demand, but which we have failed to deliver effectively in the past. The feeling that I have picked up from many of my constituents is that if we were to invest in fireworks displays on 5 November—Tricia Marwick's birthday—they would not feel the need to provide a fireworks display in their back garden.

Although we have many happy memories of fireworks evening, things have moved on over the years. The ingredients of fireworks are extremely explosive and that is what many complaints are about. We need greater control. I would like to hear from the minister what information we have received from Westminster about how we will control the ingredients of the fireworks.

We have to address the way in which shopkeepers promote fireworks in the elongated period in the run-up to Guy Fawkes night. We can buy fireworks for a small sum of money in comparison with what we would have paid 10 or 15 years ago. We are not necessarily talking about local shopkeepers, but major public limited companies that sell fireworks for extreme profit. We should consider the way in which they control the sale of those items.

I have kept my comments brief. As one of the party-poopers, I have to say that we will never be able to control the situation unless we consider a complete ban on the sale of fireworks. We should ensure that there is maximum investment in providing local displays in a controlled environment. We should ensure that the companies that sell fireworks, such as Asda and other major outlets, invest in local displays some of the profits that they make from the sale of fireworks. Perhaps they could invest in fireworks displays if we go down the road of a complete ban.

17:30

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): Until I became an MP, I did not realise that fireworks were a problem. An active group in Pilton in west Edinburgh pursued the matter vigorously with me. The group is still pursuing the matter, and Margaret Smith and the local MP, John Barrett, are still trying to help it. The group told me frightening stories about the hazard caused by fireworks to humans and animals, stories about kids who threw fireworks from the top of tower blocks on to the people below and through the windows of neighbouring tower blocks, causing great fear and mayhem. People in Falkirk have raised the same sort of problem with me in my role as an MSP.

Previous speakers have covered the point that the issue of fireworks is mainly reserved. However, we can try to take certain steps in Scotland. We should also explore the possibility of a reverse Sewel motion: whether there is a way in which we could co-operate with Westminster and bring together in the same bill areas that are under our powers and those that are under Westminster's powers.

Personally, I support the proposal for much tighter regulation. It is reasonable for people to have well-run local firework parties, but perhaps an arrangement could be established through which they had to register their party with the police or the council, simply in order to say that they were having one. We need to stop the casual misuse of fireworks by young people, which terrifies humans and animals.

Fireworks have become much noisier. In my youth, they sparkled nicely, but now there are big bangs, even in the official fireworks display that is held at the end of the Edinburgh international festival, during which the fireworks are very loud indeed. Loud fireworks terrify people and animals, whereas, on the whole, nice sparkly things do not. We have to regulate the parties at which fireworks are used, and we should enforce much more rigorously the regulations on the sale of fireworks, as retailers should not be able to sell them to young people. It should be an offence, in my view, for an adult to buy fireworks in order to pass them on to young people.

If we can bring together the ideas that have been proposed during the debate and if the minister does what he can and co-operates with Westminster, between us we may be able to solve the problem.

17:33

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Like all the previous speakers, I have been lobbied hard by local groups, such as the Newhouse Residents Association and the East Kilbride crime prevention panel—which was quite vociferous on the issue—on the sale of fireworks. Sale of fireworks is a big issue for individuals and groups. It is not just about high spirits, misguided youngsters and incidents that take place around bonfire night. Shona Robison alluded to the fact that fireworks can also be used in a deliberate and sustained campaign of intimidation and for other extremely offensive purposes.

As Paul Martin said, if fireworks are used properly in appropriate displays, most people can enjoy them. I received a letter from Councillor Diane Williamson of Falkirk Council, who put it better than I could:

“No one wants to be a killjoy or put obstacles in the way

of local firework displays that are organised and supervised. What we need to target is fireworks getting into the hands of irresponsible individuals who glory in creating mayhem and misery for others, usually those who are unable to fight back.”

That is the particularly sad aspect of the problem—those who are targeted are generally “unable to fight back.”

We must consider what we in Scotland can do to help to solve the problem. We cannot ban the public sale of fireworks, because that is a reserved matter, although there is a view that we should lobby Westminster for such powers. We cannot wait for Westminster to act. Two private members' bills are going through Westminster but, because of timing, they are unlikely to come to fruition. However, we can take the action that is suggested in Shona Robison's motion; we can review the powers that are available to local authorities in respect of vendor licensing.

I do not accept the Scottish Retail Consortium's view that the current powers of enforcement are sufficient and merely require better policing. It is absolutely ridiculous that a premises licence costs only £12 per annum. It is also ridiculous that councils cannot refuse to issue a certificate and, as Shona Robison said, are generally powerless to act in cases of overstocking. Overstocking can create a huge problem, although this country has not experienced anything as serious as what has been experienced in other countries. In Peru for example, which I visited last year, special shops are set up for people who make and sell fireworks that are used in a big celebration in Peru. Just after I came back, one of those shops blew up. Hundreds of people in down-town central Lima were killed or injured simply because fireworks are totally unregulated. That is an example of what can happen when things go badly wrong.

In conclusion, fireworks are a public safety issue, which the Parliament can address in some measure. I ask the minister to consider seriously the terms of Shona Robison's motion.

17:36

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): I congratulate Shona Robison on securing this important debate, which I hope will make a valuable contribution to the growing country-wide campaign for the introduction of tighter regulation of sale and use of fireworks. That campaign is run not only by groups such as the SSPCA, local authorities and community councils, but by political parties throughout the country.

As Sylvia Jackson rightly said, the Labour party in Dundee has been out in the streets asking people what they think. We used a system whereby we drew up a card that gave four options. The city's two MPs, Ernie Ross and Iain Luke, will

take the cards with them to Westminster and continue their campaign down there. The first of the four options was that only licensed displays of fireworks would be permitted and no private sale or private use would be allowed. Of the more than 600 people who responded, 84 per cent went for that option. The second option, which was for tighter licensing of the sale and use of fireworks, was thought to be the best option by 12 per cent of the people. The third option was for a public inquiry on fireworks, but only 2 per cent went for that. Only 1 per cent wanted no change and opted for the status quo. Although that survey looked only at a small section of the population in Dundee, it gives an indication of the way that the wind is blowing as regards public opinion in that city.

I am not sure what Paul Martin meant when he said that he was in favour of an outright ban—nobody has supported that. Allowing only licensed displays would still allow fireworks to be used for the public's enjoyment. That is important because fireworks are used not only on Guy Fawkes day, but for the Chinese new year, which is celebrated by a significant community in Scotland. The Chinese new year celebrations are almost dependent on the use of fireworks. We cannot outlaw the enjoyment that the Chinese community gets from those traditional fireworks displays. Similarly, many of our councils promote fireworks displays. During Dundee's octocentenary, the council organised a massive fireworks display on the Tay bridge, which was very good. Edinburgh's Hogmanay, which is meant to be one of the ways in which Scotland sells itself, is dependent on fireworks displays. Nobody wants to ban fireworks displays altogether. The question is how we control fireworks displays in the future.

Like Tricia Marwick—although I do not know how old she is—I can remember the days back in the 1950s, when the use and sale of fireworks was almost exclusively private and personal. Families would gather round the back court where there would be a small bonfire and the fireworks were always used under adult supervision. If there were big civic displays in those days, word of them did not get to working class areas such as Springburn—although they probably were not for us anyway.

Back in those days, an important factor was that the local shops were part of the local community. Our local shop was called Duncan's shop. He knew everybody in the community and would not dare to sell fireworks to children who were under age or were not authorised to have them. Nowadays, that is not the case. As Shona Robison said, there are now completely new kinds of fireworks, which shopkeepers are prepared to sell illegally to under-age people. If they have stock left over after Guy Fawkes day, they sell the fireworks

at half price.

Fireworks are powerful instruments and are becoming instruments of street terror against many of the most vulnerable people in society. I do not care whether Westminster or Holyrood takes the credit, but I want action and so do the people of Scotland. We want something to be done now. I hope that the minister will address that in his response.

17:40

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): I congratulate Shona Robison on securing the debate. Scottish ministers are aware of and acknowledge the concerns about inappropriate use of fireworks.

Many of those concerns are expressed in letters that we receive from members of the Scottish Parliament and from members of the public. The effect on animals is a recurring theme in that correspondence. Therefore, I am not surprised that the SSPCA has found that most people who called it about the effect on animals support tighter controls over use of fireworks.

The sale and supply of fireworks is the core of the issue. As has been said, that is a consumer protection matter and is therefore reserved to the UK Government, which ensures a uniform approach throughout Great Britain. Consequently, the Department of Trade and Industry receives even more correspondence than we do. However, the Scottish Executive still plays a role.

Members are aware that the last comprehensive review of controls on fireworks by central Government was undertaken in 1996. It concluded that a total ban on fireworks for private use would be unworkable and that it would lead to a black market in fireworks and to uncontrolled production and sale of home-made devices, which might be more dangerous than some of those that have been described today.

We all recognise the role of fireworks in family and cultural celebrations. I understand Paul Martin's view and it is worth re-emphasising that all fireworks must comply with BS 71124. Part 2 of that standard was updated in 1998 to acknowledge some of the changes in the market. The introduction of the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 aimed to improve the safety of fireworks that are supplied to the public, and to reduce and control the levels of disturbance and noise. Since 1997, there have been new controls on the kinds of large and powerful fireworks that can be sold to the general public and there has been a prohibition on the sale of all fireworks above a small size to anyone under the age of 18. Where there is evidence that a retailer has

breached that requirement, the retailer should be reported to trading standards officers. The supply to the general public of any large fireworks, such as aerial shells and maroons, should be reported.

A number of other pieces of legislation—including Scottish legislation—are relevant. Section 1 of the Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1912 makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any domestic or captive animal. It has been mentioned that several thousand animals have suffered; it is clear that they would be covered by that legislation. The penalty on conviction of such an offence is a fine of up to £5,000, imprisonment for up to six months, or both. Enforcement of that section rests with trading standards officers, the police and the SSPCA.

John Young: Has the minister received any information from trading standards officers on anyone's being convicted and receiving the maximum penalty of £5,000?

Lewis Macdonald: That is a very good question. I will investigate the conviction rate and write to Mr Young with the information. The point is that the opportunity for enforcement exists. In our view, it should be used.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 provides measures that can be taken to deal with the disturbance that is caused by noise. Environmental health officers should judge whether enforcement action is necessary. The Explosives Act 1875 has been referred to as governing legislation. Again, fines of up to £5,000 can be imposed on people who let off fireworks in a public place.

Tricia Marwick: I have listened to the minister's list of potential penalties but, in reality, nobody has been convicted or fined. It is all very well to say that environmental health officers are responsible for dealing with noise, but the bombs go off, the people who are responsible disappear and there is no way that the legislation can be enforced.

Lewis Macdonald: I acknowledge the difficulties of enforcement, but it is important that the powers that exist be used. This debate gives us the opportunity to encourage those who are responsible for enforcing the legislation to use their powers.

Let me move on to discuss areas of change. It is important to note that under the Explosives Act 1875, retailers must be registered with local authorities in order to store fireworks. As Shona Robison and others said, there is no current requirement that those retailers should be of good character in order to be registered. The Health and Safety Executive has reviewed the application of the 1875 act in that regard. One suggestion is the introduction of a requirement that the award of a

storage licence should require a retailer to be a fit and proper person. That consultation closed only a few days ago. I hope that Scottish councils will have taken the opportunity to make their views known in response to that.

There is a voluntary code and several speakers have mentioned the fact that the code is not observed to the degree that we all wish. The DTI has asked the industry to examine levels of compliance and the overall effectiveness of the agreement. We support that approach.

Marilyn Livingstone: The minister referred to the role of local authorities. The view of Fife Council on the operation of firework regulation is that the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, which is currently under review, allows licensing arrangements to be introduced for certain activities. Fife Council's view is that that act could be amended to address the specific issue in Scotland and that a ban on the sale of fireworks, except for licensed or organised displays, might be possible under the legislation. Will the minister comment on that?

Lewis Macdonald: I intend to address that point in a moment.

Members mentioned a specific firework—the air bomb—which causes particular distress and noise. The industry has agreed to end the supply of air bombs as soon as stocks are used up. I hope that air bombs will no longer be available for public sale or be used by the end of the year. More must be done and that is the message that has been put across from all quarters today.

I welcome the announcement earlier this year by Melanie Johnson, the DTI minister, that she is considering what action can be taken within existing legislation to address the remaining problems. There are a significant number of legislative areas and policies that impact on the sale and use of fireworks. We need to consider what can be done to improve their enforcement and effectiveness. There is a mixture of reserved and devolved measures and local authority trading standards and environmental health officers already have a range of powers at their disposal, as do the police. We need to consider what better use can be made of existing powers.

Shona Robison, Sylvia Jackson and Marilyn Livingstone spoke about the powers that are available to local authorities in respect of vendor licensing under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. The current review of the act deals only with reserved areas and therefore does not include fireworks. However, section 44 of the act provides ministers with the power to introduce additional licensing activities by way of regulations.

We would have to look very carefully at any

proposals to use those powers, but we will consider that in the context of the work that is being undertaken by the DTI and Melanie Johnson.

Dr Jackson: Will the minister give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister must finish.

Lewis Macdonald: I am aware that I have almost run out of time.

We will also take into account the conclusions of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities task group. We will keep in close touch with the work that is being undertaken by DTI and we will ensure that all devolved issues are taken fully into account, including the powers that are available to local authorities.

We acknowledge that there are no simple solutions to the problem, but the Executive will play a full part, working with colleagues at Westminster and in Scottish local government, in finding the right way forward.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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