

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 17 March 2004
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 17 March 2004

(Afternoon)

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

Good afternoon. Our time for reflection leader today is Priya Sahi, who is a fifth-year student at Grove Academy in Broughty Ferry.

Priya Sahi (Grove Academy, Broughty Ferry):

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am here with my fellow fair traders from the fifth year at Grove Academy in Dundee. Since September last year, we have been participating in fair-trade co-operation, which ensures that there will be better wages for producers in third-world countries. We have set up a fair-trade stall that sells different types of sweets and chocolate and which is held regularly at our school.

It all started with the world trade game, which was introduced by Sally Romilly and in which each team represented a different country in the world trade union. From the success of some teams and the constraints on others, the effects of uneven representation among countries became apparent. Those inequalities led to increasing concern about and understanding of the third world countries' plight. At the conclusion of Sally's time at Grove Academy, students were provided with samples of the exceptional quality fair-trade chocolate. Inspired by the lessons—not to mention the exceptionally good chocolate—we set about raising money and awareness for people in those countries.

In November last year, there was a parent-teacher association meeting for which Mrs Beaton, our social education teacher, suggested we have a fair-trade stall selling items ranging from coffee and tea to crafts and—of course—chocolate. Gillian Millar very kindly helped us with the stock. As the evening approached, we were nervous. That was not because we would not sell the items—we are natural sales experts and, being chocoholics, we could eat the chocolate—but because of the fear that our efforts spent establishing the stall might fail. However, it was a success and we raised just over £180. We then decided to try to run the stall selling chocolates and cereal bars at school the following week. That was an opportunity to raise awareness of fair trade among young people as well as the teachers and

we raised just over £25. After that success, we continued to hold the stall on a regular basis.

We hope to increase awareness further by talking to the younger year groups and receiving feedback on how we can improve promoting fair trade. We are trying to buy stock for our staff room in order to increase the teachers' awareness and we intend to host a game show and debates and even to have a pyjama day. I know that our ideas seem to be just a little extreme, but it is all for a good cause.

To conclude, we feel that our co-operation with fair trade has already made a difference. We have learned a lot and we hope to continue supporting fair trade both inside and outside the school. We feel that as a nation of prime consumers of commodities such as coffee and chocolate, we should start eating with a clear conscience. By promoting fair trade, long-awaited justice for workers in third-world countries can finally prevail. Thank you. [*Applause.*]

Point of Order

14:35

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Given what we will be discussing in a moment, will you tell us whether any of the Presiding Officers have received any direct written request from Lord Fraser for assistance and, if so, what that request contained?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): I am not sure that that is a point of order. On the request for information, I can tell you only that I am not aware of any such request, but Mr Rumbles should not take that as a definitive response.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-1048, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised programme for this afternoon's business. There are two amendments to the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 17 March 2004—

after,

"2.30 pm

Time for Reflection

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions"

insert,

"followed by Ministerial Statement on vCJD".—
[Patricia Ferguson.]

14:36

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): The purpose of my amendment is quite simple and would not infringe on other debating time. We seek to allow Parliament to debate the BBC's refusal to allow the Fraser inquiry access to taped interviews that were conducted for "The Gathering Place". Those recordings include interviews with the late Donald Dewar and Enric Miralles.

It goes without saying that the fiasco of the Holyrood building is a festering sore that has, rightly or wrongly, done much to reduce the standing of Parliament. In recognition of that damage, on 19 June 2003 the First Minister quite properly announced the setting up of the Fraser inquiry. In his statement to Parliament, Mr McConnell stated:

"The investigation must also have full access to documentary evidence"

and that

"Nothing that the Government or the Parliament has done, either before or after devolution, will be beyond the scrutiny of the investigation."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2003; c 949.]

The First Minister believed that there was no reason why Lord Fraser could not get to the bottom of the matter, provided that he had the co-operation of all concerned. It is painfully apparent, however, that that co-operation has not been forthcoming from the BBC; indeed, Lord Fraser has asked Parliament for help. It occurs to me that Parliament needs to send out a clear and united message to the BBC.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Bill Aitken: I have no time.

Although there might be legal arguments regarding section 23 of the Scotland Act 1998, there can be no argument about the morality of the issue or about the fact that the public interest demands the release of the tapes. The tapes could form important evidence that should be considered by the inquiry—that will be for Lord Fraser to decide. What cannot be disputed is that it is unacceptable for the BBC to refuse to allow sight of the evidence, which would enable the inquiry to decide on its value.

If Parliament accepts my amendment, we can debate a fuller motion tomorrow, which I hope can attract unanimous support. To that end, I will do everything in my power to facilitate matters and to seek agreement between the business managers on wording that is acceptable to everybody. A motion that was agreed along those lines would demonstrate to the BBC that Parliament's unequivocal view is that its failure to co-operate is intolerable.

When we vote today, we will not do so as party politicians but as elected representatives of the people of Scotland. The issue is about the will and credibility of the Parliament. The people of Scotland are firmly of the view that the tapes should be released: I urge members to remember that and to support a motion that would underline Parliament's founding principles of openness and transparency, and our joint and united determination to do everything possible to support an inquiry that was appointed with the unanimous support of Parliament.

My amendment seeks not to divide but to unite the chamber. Lord Fraser has, in effect, asked for Parliament's help. How can we refuse it?

I move amendment S2M-1048.1, to insert at end:

and the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 18 March 2004—

delete from,

"3.00 pm Executive Debate on Action to Promote Women in Scotland"

to end and insert,

"3.00 pm Debate on request from the Parliament to the BBC to release to the Holyrood Inquiry the taped interviews conducted for "The Gathering Place", especially those interviews with the late Donald Dewar and Enric Miralles

3.30 pm Executive Debate on Action to Promote Women in Scotland

followed by

Motion on Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill – UK Legislation

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business – Debate on the subject of S2M-971 Rhona Brankin: World Health Organisation's Bone and Joint Decade 2000 to 2010"

14:38

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): One week after the last time I spoke about them in the chamber, Mokhtar, Farnborz and Farouk are thankfully still alive. In a small way, that is down to the efforts of those around them in convincing them to increase their fluid, salt and mineral intake. That has been my contribution. The fact that they are still alive gives us another opportunity to discuss their grave situation. I hope that members will agree to take half an hour out of today's business to discuss what we can do to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.

I am pleased that Jack McConnell has written to me since I sent him the letter that was written to him by Farouk, Farnborz and Mokhtar last week. However, I had hoped that he would write to them. Where is the letter to Mokhtar, Farnborz and Farouk? I have to say that I am disappointed in the implication in the letter that I have done anything other than encourage them to stop. Why is it okay for Mr McConnell to write to me to ask me to encourage them to stop? Is not he in a position to do what he can to encourage them to stop? What has he done? It is legitimate that we take 30 minutes to discuss what he has done and what he can do. Also, it is easy enough for the letter to me to be copied to the Home Office, so it surely cannot be that difficult to send direct to the Home Office a letter that would make representations on the men's behalf.

I plead again: what will Mr McConnell do? Will he lift a finger? Farouk thought that I was a bit too hard on Mr McConnell last week; I have taken that on board, because the truth is that Farouk, Mokhtar and Farnborz are being persecuted for having the same politics as the Labour Party. They are social democrats who would be members of the Labour Party if they were allowed to be. I appeal to Mr McConnell to do what he can to ensure that the three young men do not die and that they are allowed to stay here and contribute to our society.

Mr McConnell also asked me about the legal process. The Executive knows the legal process well. Why does the Executive know about that? It knows because, as I know, it has been served papers on the national asylum support service and on discrimination against asylum seekers in

Scotland, where hard-case support is not available even though it is available in England. It is therefore the Executive's responsibility to comment because it obviously has input to, and relevance in, the legal process. NASS support is applied differently in Scotland.

As a supplement to that, and to expand on some of the points that I made last week, the accommodation from which the men face eviction is a slum bed-sit that is contracted by Glasgow City Council and which has rotten wiring. Surely Parliament should be interested in the issue; surely it should be concerned about the national health service workers who are being placed in a terrible ethical dilemma by the situation, and about the neighbours, churches and friends who are witnesses to an unfolding tragedy.

Today, I hope that Parliament will display the compassion and humanity that I believe it has. If members take the time to talk to the men, as I and other have done, I am sure that they will not fail to be moved and motivated to help. They came here only after fighting for parliamentary democracy such as we have in Britain—that is why they are being persecuted. We have a duty to do what we can and to take 30 minutes to discuss what we can do to help to avoid three deaths.

I move amendment S2M-1048.2, to leave out from "insert" to end and insert—

"delete,

'followed by Debate on Enterprise and Culture Committee's 3rd Report 2003 (Session 2): Scottish Solutions Inquiry (*for text of motion see S2M-1043 in Section F of the Business Bulletin for Monday 15 March 2004*)

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time'

and insert,

'followed by Ministerial Statement on vCJD

followed by Ministerial Statement on the situation of the three Iranian Kurdish hunger strikers in Glasgow

followed by Debate on Enterprise and Culture Committee's 3rd Report 2003 (Session 2): Scottish Solutions Inquiry (*for text of motion see S2M-1043 in Section F of the Business Bulletin for Monday 15 March 2004*)

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time' ".

14:43

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(SNP): At this stage, it is our intention to oppose the business motion, but we are willing to withdraw that opposition if we can secure an assurance from the Minister for Parliamentary Business with regard to Thursday's business. Our position is also dependent on what view the Government is intent on taking on the Tories' amendment, because that would significantly affect the business that is proposed for Thursday afternoon. I am particularly concerned about how the Tory amendment would impact on the time that is available to discuss the Sewel motion on the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill, which we in the SNP consider to be important.

I have to say that the Tories are guilty of serious misjudgement of tactics. The amendment is a Tory stunt and nothing else; if the Tories were serious about having a constructive debate on the issue, they would have used their own parliamentary time in a couple of weeks to hold such a debate. Parliament may want a debate on the release of the tapes from the BBC, but this is not the way to go about it. To propose only half an hour exposes the lack of forethought and lack of serious intent that is behind the Tory amendment. Also, the Tories are in danger of causing a split vote on the issue about the SNP—I mean the BBC's releasing the tapes. That will be seen—[*Laughter.*] I assure members that if the tapes were in the hands of the SNP, we would release them.

The BBC would see a split vote as showing that Parliament was divided on the issue and in a weak position to demand anything from it. The Tories would be guilty of letting the BBC off the hook when pressure is mounting on it to release the tapes. A more mature step would be to adopt John Swinney's approach—[*Laughter.*] The Tories' laughter about this important matter is certainly not mature.

John Swinney wrote to the Presiding Officer to suggest that he should convene a meeting of party leaders to examine the available options. That is the way to make the BBC release the tapes.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Will the member give way?

Bruce Crawford: I am in my last minute.

Before the SNP decides how it will vote, will the Minister for Parliamentary Business assure us that, no matter the outcome of the vote on the Tory amendment, at least 30 minutes will be made available to debate the important Sewel motion on the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill?

I ask with all sincerity that the Tories seek to withdraw their amendment. To press it would split Parliament, rather than provide the united voice that Bill Aitken says he seeks. That outcome might

not be his intent, but that is what will happen—the BBC will be off the hook, out of the door and away scot free. We should not let that happen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Two other requests to speak have been made, but members are aware that under standing orders, I may call only one speaker for and one speaker against a business motion. I therefore call Patricia Ferguson to respond to the debate.

14:46

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Patricia Ferguson): I will deal first with the points that Carolyn Leckie made. As I said last week, the situation that she outlined is sad and tragic. However, as I did last week, I remind her that the matter is reserved and should be the concern of the local member of the Westminster Parliament, who, as Ms Leckie is no doubt aware, has made a significant intervention in the matter. I also say that it is important that anyone who has contact with the men who are involved should use that contact to encourage them to end their hunger strike as soon as possible.

We had Scottish Socialist Party debates last week on the council tax and nursery nurses. Obviously, it is up to the SSP to decide what its business is and it is not for me to interfere in that; however, I point out that the party decided on and debated its priorities last week.

As for the Conservatives' amendment, I will deal first with Bruce Crawford's points on it. It was clear at the Parliamentary Bureau's meeting yesterday that the Executive parties intend that at least half an hour be reserved for the Sewel motion that we intend to discuss tomorrow afternoon, because of its importance to all of us in Scotland. That was the intent of the business motion that was lodged on the bureau's behalf. However, I cannot make guarantees in circumstances that are out of my hands and those of the bureau. If Mr Aitken's amendment is agreed to, the length of that debate will in part be a matter for the Presiding Officers.

Mr Aitken's amendment is especially interesting, not least because the First Minister has made his position clear and has given the Fraser inquiry his full backing from the start. Indeed, the inquiry is a joint initiative of the Presiding Officer and the First Minister. I cannot help but be somewhat perplexed about the involvement that the Conservatives wish, because they have consistently refused to take any interest in, or responsibility for, the Holyrood project for many years. The question why they have no representative on the Holyrood progress group remains unanswered. I suspect that that question would remain unanswered even if we were to have tomorrow the debate that the amendment proposes.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): Will the minister give way for an answer?

Patricia Ferguson: No. I thank the member but we have heard the excuses before—they did not hold water then and they have not improved with age.

David McLetchie: There are none so deaf as those who will not hear.

Patricia Ferguson: The Executive has no wish to frustrate attempts to debate the issue. However, to seek to disrupt the business programme at this point is not sensible. I also point out that the afternoon of 31 March has been reserved for Conservative business: if the Conservatives want a debate on 31 March, having given members due notice and the opportunity to consider the matter, that might be the sensible time to do it. It might also give the BBC an opportunity to consider its position.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are three questions to be put. The first is, that motion S2M-1048.1, in the name of Bill Aitken, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)

Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)

Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 24, Against 60, Abstentions 30.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S2M-1048.2, in the name of Carolyn Leckie, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 37, Against 77, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that motion S2M-1048, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 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)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (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)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (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)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 86, Against 22, Abstentions 7.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 17 March 2004—

after,

“2.30 pm

Time for Reflection

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions”

insert,

“*followed by*

Ministerial Statement on vCJD”.

Point of Order

14:54

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On 29 October 2003, I raised a point of order in which I asked the Presiding Officer whether he was minded to accept for debate an appropriate motion to require the BBC to hand over the tapes so that Parliament could allow Lord Fraser access to them. In his response, the Presiding Officer said

"If such a motion were lodged, I would consider it at that point in relation to the wider picture."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2003; c 2636.]

There is such a motion now in the business bulletin in the name of Margo MacDonald. It has my support and that of various other members of different parties. Can the Presiding Officer, or you as Deputy Presiding Officer, use any discretionary powers to facilitate a debate on Margo MacDonald's motion or any similar motion?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): The only mechanism that is available to me would be to accept a motion without notice. It would be most remiss of me to do that given that Parliament has just agreed a business motion. All that I can suggest is that Mr Canavan and anyone else who agrees with him might wish to raise the issue with the Parliamentary Bureau, which is the appropriate channel. I think that the Presiding Officer ought not to rule on the matter on his or her own.

Margo MacDonald: Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer. If they are so minded, members can sign the motion that has been lodged, which would commit them to nothing other than having a debate.

Will you rule whether, in your estimation, section 23 of the Scotland Act 1998 empowers the Scottish Parliament to compel witnesses and the production of documents? Section 23 appears on page 10 and is entitled "Power to call for witnesses and documents". If you do not feel happy giving me a ruling now, will you tell me whether the Executive or the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body has sought legal advice on the interpretation of what appears to be a fairly straightforward provision?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I cannot speak for the Executive, but I am happy to repeat the advice that is available to the Presiding Officer and which was given in the chamber previously. We are advised that section 23 of the Scotland Act 1998 can be used by Parliament to require the production of documents in relation to its proceedings. It does not enable a requirement to be made that a third party produce documents. That is why the power is not available to the

Fraser inquiry. We have seen no grounds that lead us to believe that the ruling does not continue to be pertinent.

Margo MacDonald: Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer. With respect, the act does not refer to the proceedings of the Parliament but to the general responsibility that is exercised by a minister. In this case, the general responsibility is exercised by the Minister for Finance and Public Services, who has to sign the cheques to pay for the project whose costs are the subject of the inquiry. I suggest that there is perhaps a small link there.

Nothing in the motion and nothing in what Mr Canavan and I have said would allow Parliament to dispose of the tapes to a third party. Parliament would be given temporary ownership of the material on the tapes, but it would be up to Parliament to decide how it wanted to dispose of the information.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I hear what the member says, but I have stated the thrust of the legal opinion that is available to the Presiding Officer. As ever, it is open to members to come up with further interpretations and arguments, which the Presiding Officer will consider and take advice on where necessary. I repeat that, given the opinion that we have received, we see no basis on which to change the previous ruling.

Variant CJD

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a statement by Malcolm Chisholm on variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. As normal, the minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions during it.

14:59

The Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm):

Members will recall that on 18 December I drew their attention to a single incident in England in which it appeared that, for the first time anywhere in the world, variant CJD might have been transmitted by blood transfusion. At the time, I said that the advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues—MSBT—had been asked to consider comprehensively whether, in the light of that incident, any further precautionary measures needed to be taken. That request was made with the proviso that such measures should not have an unmanageable adverse impact on the safety or availability of essential blood supplies. The dangers of a shortage of blood will be obvious to all, so we expected the committee's recommendation to take account of the balance of risk involved.

The committee met on 22 January and discussed a number of options for further strengthening protection of the blood supply. On the basis of the evidence available, and taking a precautionary approach, the committee has recommended that UK blood services should cease to accept blood donations from people who can confirm that they have definitely received a blood transfusion in the UK since 1 January 1980—the date after which it is believed people might first have been exposed to variant CJD via the food chain.

As I indicated on 18 December, at that time I asked the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service to anticipate such a recommendation by preparing as a matter of urgency an implementation plan. That has been done and the plan will be put into effect on Monday 5 April—the date recommended by MSBT as being the earliest date that would allow blood services to put in hand all the necessary work.

Preparatory to implementing the plan it has been necessary to undertake a considerable amount of work to ensure its smooth and safe introduction. To reassure members that we have been addressing the issue vigorously, I will outline the most important elements of that work.

Our primary concern has been to take measures to secure the blood supply, so that operations and

essential treatment are not jeopardised by the loss of blood donations from the group of donors who will no longer be able to give blood as a result of our adopting the committee's recommendation. We expect that the new policy will result in the loss of around 4 per cent of current donations, but secondary effects could increase the figure to as high as 10 per cent. To take account of the loss, the SNBTS will need a large number of extra donors to come forward over the next 12 months. There will be a doubling of its normal requirement for new donors.

The SNBTS has already stepped up its existing donor recruitment campaign. In addition, it has conducted new research into the issues that motivate people to become blood donors. Based on that research, it will launch a completely new high-profile media campaign later this year. The SNBTS will write to existing donors who are unaffected by the new policy and will ask them to make a special effort at this time, with particular emphasis on the importance of maintaining the supplies of O negative blood that are so important in emergency situations. Arrangements are in hand to introduce a screening test that will allow an estimated 2,500 donors who are currently prevented from giving blood because travel abroad to certain countries can involve a risk of contracting malaria to resume giving blood.

In addition to the essential work that I have described, it has been necessary to put in place arrangements to explain the new policy to donors and to other people who may be worried about its implications. Those include the provision of counselling where it is appropriate. The SNBTS has prepared three new information leaflets specifically for that purpose and has drafted comprehensive briefing for use in call centres where calls from donors will be handled. It has also set in motion the recruitment process for the additional nurses and donor care staff who are required. In the interim, existing staff will work additional hours to meet the need. It has been necessary to provide comprehensive training for front-line SNBTS staff in both the implementation of the policy and how to inform and support donors who have concerns arising from it.

In outlining the policy and its implications, I emphasise that we are taking this approach on the basis of scientific advice and as a precaution against an uncertain but slight risk. We believe that the risk of any individual having been infected with variant CJD as a result of blood transfusion is extremely small. Nevertheless, I realise that individuals may have concerns about how the new policy affects them and may wish to seek advice. Any patient in that situation can contact the dedicated team on the national helpline number. Any donor who is deferred under the new arrangements should speak to a SNBTS member

of staff at a donor centre or session or should call the SNBTS's 24-hour donor helpline. I urge people to continue to have a blood transfusion when it is really necessary. Any slight risk associated with receiving blood must be balanced against the significant risk of not receiving that blood when it is most needed.

As I explained in January, we already have in place a range of precautionary measures to reduce the possible risk of transmitting variant CJD through blood. Since 1999, those have included the leucodepletion of blood intended for transfusion and the importation from the United States and Germany of all plasma used in the manufacture of blood products. More recently, since September 2003, all the clinical fresh frozen plasma needed for the treatment in Scotland of newborns and of children who were born after 31 December 1995—the date when exposure to BSE via the food chain ceased—has also been imported from the United States and virally inactivated. That latest measure merely augments the existing measures to provide an even greater degree of safety.

In addition, we have a responsibility to donors and patients to ensure that blood is used as effectively as possible and is used only in circumstances in which the essential benefits to the patient outweigh any adverse effects. To that end the SNBTS is collaborating with health professionals in NHS Scotland to implement the better blood transfusion programme, a key initiative endorsed by the chief medical officers of all four United Kingdom Administrations. Three key areas of transfusion practice are being reviewed: blood ordering and administration; efficient management of blood components; and, crucially, clinical effectiveness and the use of the best evidence-based practice in prescribing blood so that it is used only where there is a real need.

In April 2003, we recruited a full-time programme director to implement the programme in Scotland over the next three years. Eighteen transfusion practitioners have also been recruited from various nursing and hospital backgrounds and they are being supported by a designated senior manager in each NHS board. I believe that the programme is important and every effort will be made to ensure its success.

Obviously, we are sad to be losing some of our most loyal blood donors and I thank them for their commitment to saving lives over the years. It is essential that the potential shortfall that arises from the decision is made good and that essential blood supplies are maintained. As I have already mentioned, the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service has embarked on a new initiative to recruit additional donors and, based on new research about potential donors, the initiative

will be accelerated over the coming months. The effectiveness of the new approach will be kept under close review and, if necessary, consideration will be given to other approaches, such as enhanced blood collection arrangements, more donor sessions and the use of automated blood collection equipment that allows the equivalent of more than one donation to be taken from each patient without their being exposed to any adverse health effect.

It is important not to lose sight of the key role that blood donations play in providing essential treatment and in saving lives. The statistics are compelling. Approximately 80,000 patients in Scotland receive a blood transfusion every year. At present, less than 6 per cent of the Scottish population who could give blood do so. It has never been more important for people to come forward to donate blood regularly and I urge them to do so.

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan)

(SNP): I thank the minister for early sight of his statement. He seems to share the general concern that the risks that flow from blood donations from variant CJD sufferers must be tightly managed. Therefore, we welcome his early and appropriate response to managing the potential risks that arise from blood donated by previous recipients of blood and blood products.

Any reduction in the number of blood donors as a result of today's announcement is a cause for concern and a potential threat to public health in a country that has one of the poorest life expectancies in the European Union and where health care is, therefore, one of the most important services that we provide. With the introduction of a new screening test for previously excluded potential donors, I look forward to resuming my own blood donations and to making a small contribution. I hope that other members will do the same.

My questions relate to the continuity of supply of blood products. First, what proportion of donated blood is currently used for clinical purposes and what is that proportion expected to be following implementation of the better blood transfusion programme and the introduction of the new equipment, which will increase the take from donors?

In the longer term, what research to which the NHS in Scotland is party is being undertaken into the potential use of blood substitutes, which have been used for several years in South Africa and in one or two other places around the world?

Finally, in the event that we fall short of recruiting the required figure of 100,000 donors, at what point does the situation become critical and what is the back-up plan?

Malcolm Chisholm: I thank Stewart Stevenson for his opening remarks. He has asked three specific questions, the first of which covered quite a few areas. I think that he was referring to some of the things that I mentioned in my statement, such as automated collection, which would enable more blood to be used from one individual in one session. That is certainly being considered. The other issue that he referred to was the more efficient use of blood, and Scotland certainly leads the way in that regard, although there is still further to go, so that blood is used only where appropriate during operations.

Stewart Stevenson's second point was about blood substitutes. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is doing some work on that, and we obviously listen carefully to the views of NICE and comment on them through NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, as he knows. However, I do not think that we should hold out too much hope for that being a major alternative source of supply.

On Stewart Stevenson's third point, the figure that he quoted would, of course, be a worst-case scenario, but the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service is clearly preparing for that. Basically, we are losing about 6,000 donors a year, so the immediate task is to replace those, but there are all sorts of uncertainties around the situation, so we are obviously aiming for a whole lot more extra donors than that. We should bear it in mind that we currently attract an extra 50,000 new donors each year, so we must have a very big increase on that. As I indicated, we are aiming to attract far in excess of 50,000.

Clearly, we must have contingency arrangements. I know that the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service has been speaking to the Netherlands, for example, and if the worst comes to the worst, we can import blood, although that is certainly not the plan. What we want to do is to ensure that we attract more people to donate blood. In a sense, the key message from today's announcement and over the next few weeks is that we want people who have not donated before to come forward and donate blood. There will be a new advertising campaign, which will try to target some of the messages more effectively.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank the minister for providing an advance copy of his statement. The whole issue is a matter of public confidence and I think that all members in the chamber are united in the perception that infection through transfusion—whether by HIV, hepatitis C or variant CJD—is a risk. I welcome the minister's comments about the precautionary approach and I offer any support that we can give in helping to boost public confidence.

The minister mentioned some new screening tests that will enable certain people who have been exposed to malaria to be screened. Are any other new screening tests being developed for similar conditions? If so, could he update us on those?

With regard to the increase in the requirement for donations of blood, I have recently received a number of comments, rather than complaints, about the user-friendliness of the process of donating blood—partly to do with access, partly to do with comfort and partly to do with waiting times. I know that the minister talked about increasing staffing, but will he comment on which specific aspects of the user-friendliness of the process he expects to be improved?

He also mentioned the existing foreign sources of the United States of America and Germany. What steps has he taken to ensure forward supplies until we can get our own level of blood donations in this country up?

Malcolm Chisholm: I thank David Davidson for his opening remarks and his three questions. In answer to his first question, malaria is certainly the only disease for which I am aware that there is a new screening test, but if there are others I shall write to him about them.

His second question raises an important general point for the health service more widely, with regard to its being more patient focused, user friendly, customer friendly or whatever phrase we wish to use. Obviously that is an important area that the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service should consider as part of its wider work. Since December, its attention has been focused mainly on assessing the situation and developing research and new advertising campaigns, but it needs also to address the area to which David Davidson refers.

I have already answered Mr Davidson's third question in my previous response, in which I highlighted the provisional arrangement with the Netherlands. He mentioned the US and Germany; however, those arrangements relate to the importation of plasma, which will continue.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I know that we have the advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues. Given the problem of patients' being infected with HIV, hepatitis C and now vCJD through blood products, how confident is the minister that the arrangements in Scotland are robust enough to ensure that donated and transfused blood is as safe for our patients as it is humanly possible to be?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am certainly confident that the blood is as safe as possible. As far as HIV and hepatitis C are concerned, those problems are

very much in the past and reliable tests are now available for those diseases. The problem with vCJD is that no such test exists, which is why we have to take this series of other actions. As I have indicated, some actions such as leucodepletion, the importation of plasma and this new measure are already in train. Although it is very unlikely that anyone would contract vCJD in this way, we must follow the precautionary principle and the scientific advice that we have recently received. In other words, in the absence of a test for vCJD in blood, we are taking a series of actions to minimise the risk.

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): What information can be provided to current blood donors to ensure that they check their medical records and find out whether they received blood transfusion or infusion while they were undergoing surgery and therefore were unconscious? I ask the question to ensure that current donors can comply with the new criteria that the minister has announced today.

Malcolm Chisholm: Margaret Jamieson's suggestion that people who are uncertain should check whether that information is available is a good one. The advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues has taken the view that most donors who are unsure whether they have had a transfusion are unlikely to have received one. However, it will review the situation in six months' time. Obviously, we are following the expert committee's current advice in that respect.

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank the minister for his statement, which I welcome and fully support. My question follows on from Margaret Jamieson's question. Do the measures in question apply only to people who have received whole blood or do they include people who have received blood products such as plasma or packed cells?

The minister said that the measures will be effective from 5 April. I take it that that means that they will apply to blood that is donated after 5 April and that there will be no implications for existing stocks of blood and blood products. Will there be any implications for other forms of donation such as bone marrow donation? Furthermore, has any thought been given to relaxing restrictions on becoming a blood donor such as the restriction on age?

Malcolm Chisholm: Phil Gallie raised Eleanor Scott's final point in December and I wrote to him about it. The age limit was raised relatively recently and people can now donate until they are 70. Looking around, I think that that probably includes everyone in the chamber.

The risk posed by plasma derivatives is lower than that posed by transfusions. The CJD incidence panel is calculating the potential risk from individual batches of each plasma product manufactured from suspect plasma pools. It will then be possible to judge whether individuals have received a sufficient dose of that product for the increased risk of exposure to vCJD to be of significance. As a result, the situation is rather more complex and there is no blanket ban on people who have received plasma derivatives.

Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind): I support the minister's statement and welcome the precautionary measures that he has outlined. Will he elaborate on any chats that he has had with his European counterparts? Boundaries are easily crossed and many of us go on holiday abroad, where we might have accidents and find ourselves in hospital being given a blood transfusion. Will more information be given to travellers?

Malcolm Chisholm: I have had no personal chats with European counterparts on that issue, although obviously, as I indicated, the SNBTS has been in contact with other countries.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank the minister for his statement and for his actions to secure an on-going source of blood for the SNBTS.

Will the minister also support on-going research into variant CJD and treatment for its victims? For example, is he aware of the recent confirmation of another case of variant CJD in Scotland, in a young mother with two children? Is he aware that treatment might be offered at the Western general hospital in Edinburgh, which will be the first official treatment centre in the United Kingdom for CJD patients? Is he also aware that the UK Government announced plans in December for a number of such treatment centres? I congratulate the minister on the fact that Scotland is taking the initiative and ask him to draw the matter to the attention of his colleague at Westminster, John Reid, the Secretary of State for Health.

Malcolm Chisholm: I join Ken Macintosh in praising the Western general hospital in Edinburgh for its work in that area and, indeed, in many others. Research into the area is on-going, as I indicated in my previous statement on variant CJD, but there is no new progress to report. It is clear that, in particular because of the uncertainties around the diagnosis, there is a great need for further research.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I remind the minister of the evidence that he gave to the Health Committee on 9 September 2003 in the context of hepatitis C, when he indicated that he would not rule out an inquiry into

blood and blood products if “new evidence” came to light. Therefore, in the context of the new evidence of contamination of blood from new variant CJD, will he undertake to hold an inquiry into the safety of blood and blood products, not only for Scotland’s many haemophiliacs, but for the wider Scottish public?

Malcolm Chisholm: We should not try to roll the issues of hepatitis C and variant CJD into one, as the two issues are quite separate. Obviously, we have not favoured the wider inquiry into hepatitis C to which the member refers, for reasons with which she is familiar—the matter has been considered through various reports and inquiries and fault has not been found. It is not helpful to roll the two issues together.

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Over the years, it has been obvious that restrictions on blood donors have increased quite significantly, partly because of foreign travel and other such matters. Even before the problem with variant CJD, it has been difficult to secure enough donated blood. I welcome the proposals for an intensive media campaign.

Members of the Scottish Parliament are meant to be leaders in the country, but I am told that blood donor sessions are not held in the Parliament. Should we assume some leadership on the issue and instigate such sessions?

Malcolm Chisholm: That is an entirely positive and helpful suggestion and no doubt those who have responsibility for such matters in the Parliament heard it.

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I thank the minister for his statement and recognise the reasons for the precautionary steps that he has announced. I also welcome the emphasis that the minister has placed on ensuring that the public have access to the best possible advice and information on a complex and sensitive issue. However, I note that the bulk of our time this afternoon has been spent talking about the provision of information to donors and would-be donors. Will the minister elaborate further on the measures that are being taken to ensure that those who have received blood transfusions are given the information, advice and reassurance that they might need in the light of the most recent developments? Will the minister also elaborate on the steps that are being taken to advise members of the public who might need a transfusion—which could mean any of us—or whose relatives might need a transfusion in the future?

Malcolm Chisholm: It is important to emphasise that side of the issue. In the middle of my statement, I said:

“We believe that the risk of any individual having been infected with variant CJD as a result of blood transfusion is

extremely small. Nevertheless, I realise that individuals may have concerns about how the new policy affects them and may wish to seek advice. Any patient in that situation can contact the dedicated team on the national helpline number.”

That number is the first point of contact for anyone who has received a blood transfusion and who has any concerns. Obviously, they can talk to their doctor as well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions to the minister on his statement.

Scottish Solutions Inquiry

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-1043, in the name of Alasdair Morgan, on behalf of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, on the committee's report on its Scottish solutions inquiry.

15:25

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):

In January last year, the Government at Westminster published its white paper on higher education. The white paper contained, among other things, proposals on how research would be conducted and funded at English universities, and on how greater access could be achieved. It also proposed variable-rate tuition fees.

At the time, there was significant concern in Scotland that the result of the proposals would be to alter significantly the competitive balance between Scottish universities and those south of the border to the detriment of Scotland. After the election last year, when the Enterprise and Culture Committee was formed, its members were willing to undertake an inquiry into some matter of importance as soon as possible. Fortunately, the nature of the committee is such that, although we have a wide remit—perhaps the widest of the parliamentary committees—we have the compensating advantage that we are not heavily burdened by much in the way of legislation.

Another reason for choosing this topic for our inquiry was that all the parties involved in the committee had, in the election that had just taken place, ruled out tuition fees as a method of funding Scottish higher education. We therefore felt that we could approach an inquiry into the topic with at least some measure of policy agreement among the various members of the committee. We reported unanimously last December and the Executive has now responded to our report. In addition, the Executive has published phase 3 of its higher education review.

At this stage, it would be appropriate for me to thank all those who participated in the inquiry—either by submitting written evidence, of which there was a substantial amount, or by giving oral evidence. I would also like to thank the clerks and the researchers from the Scottish Parliament information centre; their assistance in the production of the report was essential and invaluable.

We reached our conclusions against a background of some uncertainty. No one who reads the white paper would disagree that, in some crucial areas, it is fairly short on detail. We delayed the final consideration of our report in the

hope that the Higher Education Bill would be published prior to the publication of our report and could therefore inform our conclusions to some extent. As it turned out, the Government decided to delay publication until January, so we decided to go ahead anyway and publish our report in December. We did so in the hope that it could influence—although perhaps “inform” would be a better word—the debate at Westminster. To that end, I sent copies of our report to all MPs in Scotland.

I will try to cover the most important areas of our conclusions, starting with some issues of process. The white paper, as distinct from the bill, dealt with issues that were clearly English and Welsh but that had the potential to have a significant impact on matters in Scotland that are devolved to this Parliament. The committee felt that the introduction of a white paper with such a material impact on matters within our control, without the Government having engaged in dialogue with the Scottish Executive, reflected badly on the lack of communication between the Administrations north and south of the border.

In its response to our report, the Executive acknowledges the impact of the white paper in Scotland and acknowledges the need for closer and more regular consultation between the two Administrations. I note also that a UK parliamentary liaison team has been set up in the UK Government. We look to see some benefits flowing from that in the form of better communications. Clearly, only time will tell how effective it is, but the need for such an arrangement is clear.

The committee highlighted Scottish research competitiveness as potentially most at risk if there is significant additional funding for higher education in England. We heard about the development of long-term collaboration in research in Scotland, and welcomed that approach and the support offered by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. Good-quality facilities and a critical mass of world-class researchers can only strengthen our international reputation and our ability to attract and retain researchers. However, the recruitment and retention of high-quality research staff will become increasingly difficult if the problem is not addressed.

In addition, there are far too many contract researchers. At 46 per cent, the proportion of contract researchers is higher in Scotland than it is in the rest of the UK, where it is 42 per cent. We recommend that universities explore collaborative approaches to providing career paths for those researchers. The HE review seconds that approach. Only a couple of weeks ago I was talking to a young researcher who is in the third

year of his third three-year contract. Needless to say, much of his attention and energy was focused more on how he could ensure his own future after the termination of his current contract rather than on the business of the contract itself. Surely that is no way to incentivise some of our brightest and best people. We look forward to seeing developments in that area.

We all agree that our universities need to continue to provide high-quality education not only to young Scots but to people from outwith Scotland, who enrich the quality of our education system when they are here. Some stay to make a permanent contribution to this country, and others leave and, we hope, take some good messages about Scotland with them.

Although we now have some evidence on cross-border flows of students from the phase 3 review, the committee's view is still valid. Our view was that the evidence on how student flows will react to what is essentially a proposal for postgraduate payments—it might not be perceived as such—is not at all clear, so it is too early to predict how the flows might change as a result of what happens in England. However, it is clear that they need to be monitored closely.

The report was clear that there is a need for significant additional investment in higher education in Scotland to maintain the competitiveness of the sector and of the nation's economy as a whole. We felt that it would not be appropriate to put numbers on that investment, but we hoped that the work that was being undertaken for the HE review—which has been published—would provide some data to help that calculation.

We acknowledge that the sector itself can contribute to providing some of that investment by increasing its intake of endowment funding, by increasing its links with businesses and by operating more effectively within the sector to achieve economies of scale. Indeed, we acknowledge that the sector is already doing many of those things. However, at the end of the report we concluded that, however well the universities do in that respect, the Executive will have to significantly increase in real terms its investment in higher education.

The Executive's response to our report relied heavily on the outcomes of the third phase of the higher education review. That review gives few figures, but two that stand out are the estimates of the £30 million that is required to modernise pay policies and adequately reward academic staff, and the £450 million that is needed for investment in university buildings and estates. That is a total investment of nearly £500 million, which could certainly be described as significant but, in addition to that, we need much more money to address the effects of the Higher Education Bill.

The committee examined two other issues, which I hope other committee members will pick up on. One of them is the importance of further education colleges, which are a key element in our unique Scottish system and which deliver a significant amount of higher education provision in Scotland. The other issue is the lack of support for part-time students, who still have to pay fees, unless they are on very low incomes indeed. In the context of an aging work force, we need to ensure that as many people as possible are encouraged to use learning as a route to a better standard of living.

Finally, the committee awaits the outcome of the spending review with interest. We are keen to see how the Executive responds to the report in monetary terms. Although we started off our inquiry by optimistically giving it the title "Scottish solutions", I am conscious that in recommending increased funding for the higher education sector from the Executive, we have perhaps not provided the entire solution. The Executive has a challenging task, because its revenue stream is largely predetermined.

The Government proposals south of the border may have short-term Barnett consequentials, as the Government pays top-up fees to English universities prior to the graduate repayment of those fees kicking in some years down the track, but whether those consequentials will have any net effect on the Scottish block will depend on the totality of Government spending in devolved areas and not simply on the higher education budget. Therefore, any increase in funding such as that for which we are calling may well have to be met by decreased funding elsewhere. However, the committee was in no doubt that investment in higher education is not only expenditure but investment in our future.

Investment in higher education will not necessarily bear fruit within the electoral cycles within which almost all politicians of almost every party are too often guilty of working. However, there is no doubt that in the medium to long term, that investment will bear significant fruit for Scotland and its economy. Our report recognised Scotland's strengths, which include

"its wider accessibility; its closer links between the further and higher education sectors; its traditions of excellence and achievement; and its long history of providing useful knowledge to society."

It is vital that those strengths are supported and that we continue to drive for excellence.

I have great pleasure in moving the motion in my name on behalf of the committee.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the 3rd Report 2003 (Session 2) of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, *Report on*

Scottish Solutions Inquiry (SP Paper 67), on the potential impact of the introduction of variable tuition fees in England and recognises the importance of a healthy higher education sector to Scotland's economic development.

15:36

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Mr Jim Wallace): I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the Enterprise and Culture Committee's report on its Scottish solutions inquiry, which was published last December, and to thank Alasdair Morgan, the convener of the committee, for the fair way in which he has represented the report to members this afternoon. In his conclusion, he reminded us of the wider strengths of Scottish higher education.

Alasdair Morgan's speech was a reflection of the committee's report, which was thoughtful and wide ranging. I will say a word in a moment about its detailed findings, but I want to point out that much of what the committee said is shared by all members. I hope that our universities and colleges take heart from that shared commitment to higher education in Scotland. Our higher education is world renowned; I believe that we are capable of competing with the best. We do not underestimate for a moment the serious challenges that lie ahead, but our institutions still provide vibrant intellectual communities and they are excellent places in which to study, learn and work. Above all, the message that needs to come through from the debate is that all of us truly want Scottish higher education to continue to be a magnet for talented people and that we must find a way in which to have a robust debate about the future that does not lead us to undermine that strong starting position.

Let us be clear that we have an excellent track record on funding for higher education, which has increased by a third since devolution. Critically, today's funding announcement by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council has been made possible by our decision in the previous spending review to raise investment in higher education even further.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister confirm that, even given the announcement today, since the Administration came to power in 1997-98, funding per place has fallen from £5,123 in 1998-99 to £5,012?

Mr Wallace: This Administration did not come to power in 1997-98; it came to power in 1999. The number of people who go into higher education has expanded by 50 per cent. It is important that, as SHEFC announced today, its budget will cross the £800 million mark for the first time. That means that funding for research and knowledge transfer will increase by 11.6 per cent. Within that,

SHEFC will raise the funding for knowledge transfer by almost 50 per cent to £9.5 million, which is indicative of our commitment to get research out of laboratories and into the wider economy.

We are also committed to increasing the quality of the learning experience, which is why grants for teaching will increase by 3.4 per cent, which is more than the current rate of inflation. To reflect further on Murdo Fraser's point, I point out that, importantly, that is an increase of 3.4 per cent without an increase in the overall teaching load. Quite properly, we are investing in quality rather than expansion. We are on track to make good our partnership commitment to increase the higher and further education budget by 16 per cent by 2006.

To look further ahead, the First Minister and I have expressed our absolute commitment to maintain Scottish higher education's competitive edge. We have said so on many occasions and I am glad to have the opportunity to say it again today. In responding to the phase 3 review, I highlighted that the Executive had taken the very unusual step of committing to additional resources in the spending review.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Will the Deputy First Minister explain to Parliament in great detail and with great precision exactly what he means by his commitment to maintain the competitive advantage of the higher education sector in Scotland? I have one definition of that, and I am sure that Universities Scotland has another, but I would like to know what the Deputy First Minister's is.

Mr Wallace: We have got it just now and we want to keep it. People recognise that Scotland has a competitive edge. The current increases in research funding from the funding councils perhaps offer the simplest comparison. Many comparisons between England and Scotland can be confused by the use of different formulas. The announcements for 2004-05 show that, in recurrent research funding from the funding councils, the increase in England is 3.9 per cent whereas the increase in Scotland is 10.5 per cent. I am pleased that that commitment to higher education is reflected in the committee's report. There is a great deal of common ground between the committee's work and what the Executive has been saying.

I welcome the committee's measured approach and the recognition that it would be inappropriate to have a knee-jerk response to the developments down south. As Alasdair Morgan fairly pointed out, we waited some time to get the bill from the UK Government. We need to take the Scottish system forward in ways that will meet our needs here in Scotland and which, as the committees said, work

with the grain of Scotland's distinctive traditions and inheritance. As the Executive's response made clear, it agrees with the committee on many points.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the Executive now accept that there is no 20 per cent gap in spending per head between Scotland and the rest of the UK? There is not even a 3.6 per cent gap any longer, as that figure is three years out of date. Does the minister accept that there is now no competitive gap between north and south of the border in spend per head on higher education?

Mr Wallace: What has been made clear is that what the Higher Education Funding Council for England invests in higher education takes into account different factors from those that are taken into account in SHEFC's contribution to higher education in Scotland. We still have an edge over England, but it does not advance the debate to trade statistics in that way. We want recognition that Scotland has a competitive edge—I have mentioned a simple comparison, which is investment in research. We punch above our weight in research in many ways. That is the kind of competitive edge that the Executive wants to maintain, and it is why the work of the higher education phase 3 review allows us to consider those issues in the spending review. It has not helped overmuch to concentrate on statistics, when what we want to ensure is that Scottish higher education continues to thrive and prosper.

Mr Swinney: The point that Mr Neil has just made emphasises the question that I posed. How can we say that we will protect the competitive advantage of Scotland if we do not define what Scotland's competitive advantage happens to be. That is the nub of Mr Neil's point. I wish that the Deputy First Minister would give members a definitive answer so that, in two to three years' time, we can hold him to account on whether he has protected that advantage.

Mr Wallace: One way of considering that competitive edge is the particular importance of research to the future economic growth of Scotland. Scotland receives more in research funding per head of population than is received south of the border.

I can give a range of statistics to show that the relative expenditure in this area in Scotland and England can be calculated in different ways, but that will not help to move the debate forward. If the Parliament had given me more than 12 minutes, I would have been more than happy to make comparisons between the different funding formulas.

It is important to remember that the report of the higher education review concluded:

"This Review has not attempted to settle the detail of this question, beyond stating that there is broad agreement, across the whole HE sector, that for a country of its size Scotland is a relatively larger investor in higher education than England, with the corollary that outputs in terms of numbers of students catered for and levels of research activity are correspondingly higher. The important issue is to understand which elements of the system will be most vulnerable to pressure as funding levels improve in England."

That was the conclusion of a review that involved almost all the stakeholders in Scottish universities. The review found that Scotland has a higher participation rate in higher education and higher investment in research. As those factors are to Scotland's advantage, we are determined to preserve them and, where possible, to enhance them.

We share the committee's views in some areas, such as the fundamental role of higher education in the country's economic success. FE colleges play an important role in delivering higher education in Scotland—some 25 per cent of higher education is delivered in our FE colleges. Collaboration is of great value in the overseas marketing of higher education, in research and in the use of resources generally. We need to ensure that academic careers are attractive and well structured. Sources of funding should be broadened to maximise best value in public funding. The value of increasing further the links between universities and business should be considered.

On the specific issue of attracting overseas students, the Executive has announced significant developments as part of the fresh talent initiative since it responded to the committee's report. We will offer extra funding specifically to help institutions to collaborate more extensively on attracting and supporting overseas students, as the committee recommended. At the same time, we will introduce a new postgraduate scholarship scheme and a two-year visa extension for overseas graduates of Scottish universities from the summer of next year.

The committee said that the Executive must provide new funding as part of the Scottish response. It is clear that the Executive has gone much further on higher education than it has previously done at this stage of a spending review. It will examine the committee's evidence, the phase 3 review and the work of the stakeholder groups. The phase 3 review makes a considered and persuasive case for investment in Scottish higher education.

I acknowledge, as Alasdair Morgan did, the committee's comments on the Executive's relationship with the UK Government. The publication of the white paper highlighted the need to strengthen communications and we have done that.

I am grateful for the committee's endorsement of the open and inclusive approach that we took in conducting the phase 3 review. The review's report provides clear evidence of the challenge that we face in improving the higher education estate, especially the teaching estate. The scale of investment that is required is considerable. Institutions, as well as the Government, will have to be imaginative in considering options. Collaboration, private investment and the release of property holdings may need to be considered.

I wish to highlight a key area in which an early decision is needed: how we manage cross-border student movement from 2006. The convener reiterated today the committee's request for us to monitor data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. We will do that. The phase 3 report mentions that signs of the potential for increased pressure on places in Scotland are clearer than before.

We will always value the fact that our higher education institutions draw to Scotland students from around the UK, the rest of Europe and the rest of the world. That will not change. The Executive's first priority and primary responsibility must be to protect the interests of students domiciled in Scotland, wherever in the UK they choose to study. We are determined that such students should not be disadvantaged as a result of changes in the rest of the UK.

The phase 3 report makes it clear that as radical changes are implemented in England, all aspects of the arrangements that underpin cross-border movements will need to be re-examined. The assumptions on which the systems are based will no longer hold true from 2006. The picture is much clearer than it was a year ago. Phase 3 of the HE review highlighted that we will have to move quickly on cross-border issues. Therefore, I have asked officials to look closely at this area so that by early summer we can give certainty and reassurance to young people who are making choices about the future. In other words, that will be done well ahead of the spending review.

I wish to discuss the sources of income that are available to institutions, which is an issue that emerged from phase 3 and which was mentioned by the committee. Without being unrealistic, we should work with the sector to help to identify all potential sources of income and to share best practice. We are in the process of commissioning further research into the experience of institutions in the rest of the UK, to identify areas where different types of institution have been particularly successful at growing their external income in recent years. On St Patrick's day, I congratulate the University of Aberdeen on the £1 million endowment that it has received to establish a chair of Irish and Scottish studies, which was a gift from Dr Lewis Glucksman and his wife, from New York.

I welcome the committee's report and the opportunity to debate it. We have a strong track record in higher education, which has enjoyed support not just from the Executive but from the Parliament. We should build on that and ensure that our universities continue to be attractive and successful. We recognise the challenge of competition not only from England but internationally. I know from the many visits that I have paid to universities and higher education institutions that we have talent and a track record here. I hope that we will hear during the debate that Scottish higher education enjoys the support of the whole Parliament and that we can face the challenges ahead with confidence.

15:50

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I, too, pay tribute to the Enterprise and Culture Committee. The debate is important and timely. The committee's report is comprehensive and it is important that it goes wider than just analysing the top-up fees issue. I reiterate the position of the Scottish National Party: regardless of the implications of top-up fees, we must address comprehensively the future of higher education funding.

In the spirit of St Patrick's day, just as the minister acknowledged the University of Aberdeen's endowment, we should acknowledge the honour given to Irishman Bernard King of the University of Abertay Dundee and his contribution to higher education in Scotland.

The committee has served the debate well. It provided a political lead early in the second session of the Parliament and filled the vacuum that the Executive had left. Its report was issued to every Scottish MP before the Westminster debate on the Higher Education Bill. We were led to believe that the phase 3 review report would be key. It turns out that it is a comprehensive collection of data and includes useful information and makes recommendations, although the fact that the participants produced an alternative website is worrying. The problem is that we have not yet had a response to it from the Executive. The Executive bends over backwards to make statements and have debates about other people's reviews, but on the issue of higher education funding we are yet to hear about its own policy and review. I acknowledge the fact that the issues are complex, the challenges are big and the implications are manifold, but hiding from the problem does not help to address it.

The committee acknowledges in its report that top-up fees will have an adverse impact. There has been speculation that a huge Barnett windfall will come to Scotland as a result of what is happening in England. The phase 3 report states

that although £1 billion will be generated in top-up fees income for universities in England, it is likely that we will have only a £30 million Barnett consequential here. It would be useful if in summing up the minister could indicate that at least that amount will be invested and that the Executive will not steal it away to put in another area.

I am rather bemused by the Executive's announcement today of already-announced research money for universities. I understand that SHEFC was due to make the announcement on Friday, but that was delayed in order for the minister to announce the proposals today. I welcome the moneys—which were announced previously. The budget day announcement of a 3.4 per cent increase in funding for higher education teaching might be buried in today's news release, but it is of concern, given that we are in a period of industrial dispute and even the university principals acknowledge the pay problems that university staff face. I doubt whether the 3.4 per cent increase will give universities the room for manoeuvre that they need over the coming year to address the problem. I am concerned that the minister is not addressing the key point.

Today should not be about lulling the public into a false sense of security that something new is happening, because so far today we have heard nothing new from the minister. We acknowledge that resources are going into higher education, but we want to address the pace of investment. How can we ensure that we remain competitive if we do not know from what basis we are starting? The rate of increase in investment in England is double that here. The Scottish Executive spend from the Scottish block is increasing by 23.29 per cent in the current period 2002-03 to 2005-06, yet the SHEFC spend for that same period is increasing by only 14.8 per cent, which is a below-average increase compared with the increases for other departments.

In a sense, the Parliament is as guilty as the Executive is in this regard because, in the previous session, we allowed the issue of tuition fees to overshadow the rest of the debate about higher education funding. It is as if we assumed that, because we had dealt with tuition fees, we could tick the higher education funding box. However, that was not the case.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Can I take Ms Hyslop's words as an admission from the Scottish National Party that we have indeed dealt with tuition fees? If so, that is the first time that that party has admitted that.

Fiona Hyslop: We have always recognised that the Executive dealt with tuition fees. The problem

is that it did so by moving them from the front end to the back end.

I hope that Jamie Stone takes my point seriously. The fact that we focused on tuition fees perhaps meant that, collectively, we ignored the wider issue of higher education funding. If we can get a consensus on that point, we can perhaps move forward. We have to allow the minister to break out of the bunker mentality, because there is a stark choice for the Executive: plan for success in this decade or prepare for crisis management in the next.

The committee report acknowledges that there have been many successes. The points that are made about participation and the role of further and higher education are key and some important recommendations are made. We do not need foundation degrees, which they have down south, because we have a robust and successful further education system.

We have to address the issue of research. If Conservative MSPs want to be taken seriously, they should ask the English Tory MPs to stop attempting to remove provisions from the Higher Education Bill that are relevant to Scottish ministers. That cannot be squared with Peter Duncan MP sitting on his hands. That is hypocrisy.

On research, how much should the minister direct universities and how much autonomy should universities have?

We can make progress on the policy of creating a smart, successful Scotland. Yesterday, I spoke to Norwegians who talked about the policy of giving tax breaks to companies that have fewer than 50 employees and which invest in research and last week, Irish visitors told me that they viewed education as being vital to their economic success. We can reach a consensus on this issue, but we must acknowledge the position that we are starting from. If we want to be competitive, we must tackle this issue seriously and look to the future. Instead of managing higher education as a problem, we should grasp it as an opportunity.

15:57

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I start by echoing the thanks that the convener gave to other members of the Enterprise and Culture Committee for the constructive way in which they approached the report and to the committee clerks for all their hard work and assistance in the inquiry that led to the production of the report.

The committee's inquiry was thorough—we took evidence from all the major stakeholders in Scottish higher education. Furthermore, the report was unanimous, as it was supported on a cross-party basis by all committee members. In light of

those facts, the report must be seen as an authoritative statement of where Scottish higher education stands in relation to the threat of top-up tuition fees south of the border.

The report makes a number of serious criticisms about the relationship between the Scottish Executive and the UK Government. One of the consequences of devolution is that we will have Administrations of different political persuasions north and south of the border that will have to learn to work together. At the moment, we are in what might turn out to be a unique situation, in that the same party is in power north and south of the border, although it is governing in coalition north of the border. If we cannot get the two Administrations to work together in that situation, how much harder will it be when, as will inevitably happen, two different parties are in power? The committee sensibly recommended that new protocols and practices should be developed to address those concerns.

In considering the level of funding of higher and further education in Scotland, the committee recognised that, even if top-up fees were not introduced south of the border, there would be an argument for further investment. As the Deputy First Minister acknowledged, it is worth noting that funding per student has fallen since the advent of this Administration. In 1998-99, funding per student was £5,123 but, last year, it had fallen to £5,024. The figures that have been announced show that funding per student will fall still further to £5,012. That is a continuing decline and the figure is now less than it was under the Conservatives.

I accept that, as a percentage of our gross domestic product, we spend a fair amount on higher education. However, the percentage of students in Scotland is higher than it is in the rest of the UK, which means that the figure per student is not quite as impressive as the headline figure.

Alex Neil: The member makes a point about the spend in relation to the rest of the UK, but when we consider competitiveness we should surely compare ourselves with a much wider range of countries, particularly those in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. We spend about 20 per cent less per student than our OECD competitors. Does the member think that we should increase our spend to be able to compete with those countries?

Murdo Fraser: Alex Neil makes a fair point. The SNP is fond of citing the Irish example as a panacea. Ireland spends much less on higher education than we do, but that does not seem to affect its economic performance. However, the general point is interesting.

The committee is unequivocal on its key point. Paragraph 147 of the report says:

"the proposals in the White Paper, if implemented in their current form, will have an adverse impact on Scottish higher education, particularly on its research sector."

That, in a nutshell, is what the report is about. Top-up fees will result in an additional income stream for higher education in England. If top-up fees down south cannot be halted, we have to find additional funds for Scottish universities to make up the difference.

The Executive has been slow to respond to the concerns of not only the committee but the higher education sector as a whole. In the debate on 22 January, referring to the phase 3 report of the Executive's higher education review, the Deputy First Minister said:

"it would be wrong to prejudge that report or have a knee-jerk reaction to it before we have seen it".—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2004; c 5055.]

At First Minister's question time on 15 January, the First Minister said that the phase 3 review would report in February and added:

"we will act very quickly thereafter."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2004; c 4874.]

We now have the phase 3 report, but we still have no clear proposals from the Executive on what it will do about it. When I asked the First Minister about that at First Minister's question time last week, he replied:

"We are currently considering the report and intend to publish our initial response shortly."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2004; c 6573.]

The dithering on the part of the Executive is not good enough.

Mr Wallace: Will Murdo Fraser acknowledge that I have made it clear on countless occasions that, in relation to additional funding, the substantive response to the introduction of top-up fees down south, and indeed to the phase 3 review, must come as part of the spending review. Would he care to consider how many times he has heard me say that? It is not a question of dithering at all. We are taking a measured approach in the context of the spending review, which is the correct context in which to consider the issues.

Murdo Fraser: The Deputy First Minister may have been consistent in his view, but on 15 January the First Minister said:

"we will act very quickly thereafter."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2004; c 4874.]

We are still waiting.

It is wrong for the Executive to suggest that the Higher Education Bill will have an impact in Scotland only from 2006-07. Academics and lecturers might already be looking at their prospects; they might be tempted to leave posts in Scotland in order to get a sharp pay rise if they go

down south in two years' time. Moreover, students who will begin university in the academic year 2004-05 might be persuaded to apply to English institutions, as those universities might be better funded when those students are in their final years of study. Conversely, there might be increased pressure on places at Scottish universities as students seek to avoid paying top-up fees at English universities. All those things are starting to happen already, which is why the Executive must act quickly to allay the concerns of people in the sector—it must issue its response and deal with those concerns.

We must ensure that Scottish students are not penalised. The First Minister has said that the Executive will rule out fees, but he has not ruled out an increase in the graduate endowment. Whether the graduate endowment is a fee, a contribution, a tax or an endowment, what Scottish students want to know is that they will not be asked to pay more for their education as a result of the First Minister's political colleagues at Westminster.

The problem has been created by a Labour Government at Westminster that did not pay sufficient attention to Scottish higher education and the impact that its actions would have. It is up to the Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive to try to resolve the issues. The report demands a serious and intelligent reply from the Scottish Executive and we are waiting for one.

16:04

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): At least the committee has given a serious and intelligent reply.

When the Enterprise and Culture Committee was considering the impact of top-up fees south of the border, we were talking about a situation that we might have to deal with. Now, however, we are talking about a challenge that we have to rise to. I am pleased that the Executive has made it clear that it will not introduce top-up fees and that it is determined to ensure that our universities are not disadvantaged by the changes down south. I commend to the Executive the recommendations in the report, which, if implemented, would contribute to ensuring that higher education in Scotland maintains its current high standard of being among the best in the world. Whatever the debates are, that should not be a point of discussion.

The whole committee agreed about the importance of maintaining Scotland's excellence in higher education provision in universities and colleges, where we are ahead of the game in giving people access to higher education. The contribution made by colleges must be recognised.

As we have heard, agreement is perhaps not as great over the competitive advantage that Scottish universities have. However, we heard evidence that acknowledged that Government funding for universities in Scotland is better than that in England. The Executive's commitment to increasing higher education sector funding from £600 million in 1999-2000 to more than £800 million in 2005-06 is clear. By any measure, that is a significant investment increase.

We have heard that the rate of participation in higher education in Scotland is higher than that in England. England is following our lead on student funding by providing bursaries for poorer students. We are experiencing success in encouraging people from all backgrounds and parts of society to continue in education. We need to work to preserve those successes.

Alex Neil: Does the member accept that a narrow definition of funding has been used in comparisons of English and Scottish universities? For example, the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency spends nearly £450 million a year on research—£2 million of that comes to Scotland and the rest goes south of the border. When we bring in a wider definition of UK Government spend on research, we are diddled and fiddled right, left and centre.

Richard Baker: I suspect that the diddling and fiddling is in Alex Neil's statistics. I heard his comments about OECD comparisons. Our OECD comparisons on gross domestic product are good, so I will treat his statistics with some dubiety.

The report outlines the concern that the funding advantages that we afford our universities could be eroded. The fear is that higher pay might lure some of our best academic staff south. That discussion takes place while the Association of University Teachers throughout the UK is campaigning for fairer pay and conditions for staff whose rates of pay have not kept up with those of comparable professions.

Fiona Hyslop: Does the member acknowledge that one concern about that dispute is that local pay bargaining may be introduced, which could undermine the pay of lower-paid staff in England? That would necessarily have a knock-on effect in Scotland.

Richard Baker: The report refers to national pay bargaining, which could help to prevent some staff from going down south. I commend to the Executive the committee's recommendations on staff recruitment and retention and particularly its recommendations on short-term contractors, to which Alasdair Morgan referred. Dealing with that issue could keep some of those staff here.

I was encouraged by what the minister said about examining cross-border student flows. I am

especially interested in what we will do to address the impact on students from Scotland who wish to study in England, because they could face costs, too.

During the inquiry, we heard that what stands Scotland in good stead for keeping excellent research in Scotland are the research communities that we have developed. Biomedicine research at the University of Dundee is an example of our success. Moreover, the University of Aberdeen today announced plans for a new state-of-the-art health research facility. If we want to have a knowledge economy and to capitalise on innovation, we must allow universities to keep that research in Scotland. That is why the report calls for increased funding and why it says that any Barnett consequentials that flow from the new investment down south should be prioritised for higher education.

The minister referred to communication. I regard devolution in the UK as the best and the right constitutional settlement, but it has become clear to me from what has happened that each Government in the UK should consider the impact of its decisions on the rest of the UK and not take decisions in isolation. Ministers should consult their colleagues in other Administrations fully when such decisions are being made. I am pleased that progress is being made on that.

The Executive has every right to be proud of its record on funding higher education and on expanding access. The goal is to maintain Scotland's competitive advantage. I have heard today about stark choices and a supposed delay in response, but the unrealistic, knee-jerk, impractical and unworkable responses from some are in stark contrast to the considered response in the committee's report. Not until 2006 will even some of the top-up fee income be received in universities down south.

The First Minister has made it clear that Scottish Labour is the party of enterprise and that an enterprising economy needs a successful higher education sector. We are at an important juncture in determining higher education funding for the future. We must maintain high participation and equality of access must be key. Most of all, we must ensure that our universities have the right funds to deliver high-quality education and research. I hope that the recommendations in the report will play a key part in determining future policy. I commend them and the motion in the convener's name to Parliament.

16:10

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate the committee on taking up the recommendation in the Enterprise and Lifelong

Learning Committee's legacy paper to make this issue a high priority. The committee's report is of a high quality, unlike the Executive's, which was one of the poorest that I have ever seen and one of the biggest damp squibs, although there have been a few damp squibs from the Executive during the past four or five years.

The Executive's phase 3 report is called "The Competitiveness of Higher Education in Scotland" and it purports to consider the competitiveness of our university sector. The words "Europe", "European Union" and "OECD" do not appear in it, however; the report makes only a parochial comparison with what is happening south of Hadrian's wall. Does the Executive live in a little parochial kailyard and think that our universities relate only to what happens south of the border? Does it not realise that our universities must compete internationally and globally?

We should compare ourselves not just with what happens south of the border, but with what happens in Europe, North America and particularly the far east and Asia. If we are to be competitive in teaching or in research, we must acknowledge that much of the competition is not south of the border, but in those other parts of the world. A serious, well-researched report would have pointed out that our competitiveness in teaching and research is under serious threat and has been chronically underfunded by successive Tory and Labour Governments, as a result of which many other countries have caught up and are exceeding our performance.

We need only consider the average OECD figures. It is not just Scotland that is lagging behind; I admit that England has lagged behind even further in terms of spend per head or percentage of gross domestic product spent on universities. In order to catch up, let alone get ahead of the game, we will have to invest substantially more—both north and south of the border—in our education system. If we do not, universities in countries such as Singapore, Indonesia and Australia will continue to overtake us, as will universities in North America and our European counterparts. Let us forget the kailyard, get rid of the parochialism and consider the issues in a proper global and international context.

Once and for all, let us agree to put an end to the kidology that Scotland's universities are still getting more money per head than their counterparts south of the border. The committee stated that the Executive's claims of a 20 per cent differential are factually untrue. It estimated a differential in Scotland's favour of 3.6 per cent in the year 2000-01, which was three financial years ago. That competitive advantage no longer exists.

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Lewis Macdonald): Will Alex

Neil accept that the OECD ranks Scotland at number 3 in expenditure on tertiary education?

Alex Neil: No, it does not, especially in relation to the universities. I will have to debate that point with the member when I have more time.

As I said in intervening on Richard Baker, we must consider the total Government spend on research. For example, Scotland gets £2 million for defence research when our proportionate share should be closer to £40 million to £45 million. I ask the Executive to stop fiddling the figures and face up to the reality that we are not spending nearly enough on our education system.

Mr Stone rose—

Alex Neil: I am prepared to give way to Jamie Stone.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you are in your last minute.

Alex Neil: Sorry about that, Jamie.

There is no room for complacency. Every member present believes in creating a smart, successful Scotland, but we also need an ambitious Scotland. Our ambition should be not just to equal our neighbours south of the border, but to be among the best in Europe and the OECD countries. To achieve that, our universities and colleges will need real money. When we get the results of the spending review, I hope that we will see that money being made available.

16:15

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in today's debate and to have been able to take part in the Enterprise and Culture Committee's deliberations on its report. I welcome the constructive contribution to the debate that was made by our committee convener, whose speech was somewhat more measured than that of the predecessor committee convener. I hope that some balance can now return to the debate.

Both the committee report and the Executive's higher education review have helped to move the debate on. We have developed a shared understanding of many of the issues and we have demonstrated a shared commitment to our universities and colleges. Equally, some very big issues remain to be addressed. I would go as far as to agree with Fiona Hyslop, who made the valid point that, in investing a great deal of time, energy and money in student finance, the Parliament has collectively taken its eye off the ball over the past few years because we have not considered the wider question of higher education funding. I hope that we can redress that balance in the period to come.

As Alasdair Morgan said in his opening speech, the backdrop to the committee's inquiry was the fact that, in the run-up to the Scottish Parliament elections, all major parties said that they were against top-up fees. I am pleased about that, but, although people have been quick to say what they are against, they must now be quicker in saying what they are for. We need to be specific about our proposals and how they will be paid for.

I found much of the Executive's response to the committee report disappointing. I absolutely appreciate that the specifics of funding must be determined in the context of the spending review, but I believe that ministers could have gone a little further—if not a great deal further—in engaging with some of the points that the committee made in its report. The Executive could have made some statements of principle and policy intent, even if it could not put precise numbers to such commitments at this stage.

Equally, I agree entirely with the minister that, in any area of policy, it would be quite wrong if we were to have a knee-jerk response to developments south of the border. However, there is a balance to be struck between giving a knee-jerk reaction and providing the kind of delayed reaction that we are now in danger of having. It is important that the Executive and the Parliament move quickly to develop and refine our thinking on, and funding plans for, the future of our universities and colleges.

Although there are immediate issues to be addressed, I hope that we can also raise our heads and look to the future. There is a danger that we will be locked into an ever more sterile exchange of statistics on funding at the expense of discussing some of the wider questions and challenges that face higher education.

Just last week, I was privileged to take part in an event hosted by the University of St Andrews, which brought together a range of people, including representatives from the Executive, to look forward to the next 20 years and to ask what higher education should look like then. I cannot begin to touch on the range of issues that came up, but I subscribe to some of the thoughts that were expressed about lifelong learning, for example.

I hope that we will move to a situation in which lifelong learning is not just the stuff of strategy documents and the rhetoric of policy makers, as is all too often the case at the moment. We have still not really begun to break out of the silos into which we box the learning packages that have been delivered in the past and that are still being delivered now.

In the future, lifelong learning will be a reality. People will move in and out of education right

through life to a far greater extent than they do at present. There will be a far higher premium on things such as people skills, the capacity to think creatively and critically and the ability to engage in the complexity of the world in which we live. There will be a crying need for flexibility at every level to enable people to balance all the different aspects of their lives, such as family responsibilities—which might involve children or elderly relatives, of which there will be a growing number—and to fulfil the desire simply for a better quality of life.

Moreover, economic imperatives will increase and, I suspect, stand in the way of people participating in education on a full-time basis. I was disappointed by the comments on the issue of part-time students in the Executive's response to the committee's report. The Executive is still pondering the question and saying:

"We ... need to identify whether there are significant numbers or groups of such people and, if so, what type of additional support they need."

We know that significant numbers of people want to study on a part-time basis, using different models and modes of delivery. We must move beyond the analysis and get down to some of the practicalities that need to be delivered now and planned for tomorrow.

I urge the Executive to move quickly to firm up its position on some of the substantive issues that have been raised today and to give us the substantive response that the minister has promised. I urge ministers and all members of the Parliament when addressing the short-term issues also to think to the longer term—to the kind of education system, students and society that we want in the future. I hope that we can move on to that debate quickly.

16:21

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I express my thanks to my colleagues on the committee, the committee clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre for the invaluable work that they have put into producing the committee's report.

Plainly, we should encourage and support the Scottish Executive in its endeavours to maintain the competitive edge that our universities enjoy. I am glad that Fiona Hyslop has joined us in that. When we last debated the issue—in January—she accused Jim Wallace

"of sleepwalking through the issue and of exhibiting complacency and arrogance".

I presume that my good friend Fiona was unaware of the existence of the phase 3 higher education review, which was instigated by Jim Wallace seven months previously. When he reminded her of that, she replied:

"I welcome the fact that the Executive has set up a private and secret review group."—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2004; c 5051.]

Presumably she was referring to such bodies as the Association of University Teachers, Universities Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Association of Scottish Colleges, the National Union of Students and many others.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): MI5.

Mr Stone: Not MI5.

The committee's report is a useful and balanced contribution to the debate. I reiterate the point that I made in January: the position of the Scottish Executive as outlined in the partnership agreement is crystal clear. Read my lips: we will not introduce tuition fees in Scotland, as we oppose them in principle. That principle led us to abolish tuition fees in Scotland and has served Scottish students well since it was implemented.

I welcome the school council of Peebles High School to the gallery. All eight of our friends in the gallery are shortly to go to Scottish universities.

I say to some of the more negative contributors to the debate that we must not talk down Scottish universities. The world will not end if top-up fees are introduced in England. That is especially true if we consider the fact that in Scotland we are coming from a position of strength. Figures for spending on research from the funding councils clearly show English funding increasing by 3.9 per cent, while Scotland's funding will increase by 10.5 per cent. Facts are chieftains that winna ding.

Unlike England, Scotland has achieved the target of getting 50 per cent of young people into further and higher education. It is clear that a significant proportion of the moneys that may be raised in England by top-up fees will go towards expanding provision, but in Scotland we have the ability to target future resources on quality, rather than quantity. I know that we are all knocking and pushing at an open door when we ask the minister to ensure that that persuasive case is made as strongly as possible during the forthcoming spending review.

Because of our support for higher education, spending has increased by a third since devolution. We are continuing to deliver on our promise to increase funding for higher and further education by 16 per cent by 2006.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The member is right to point out that all the parties represented in the Parliament—not just the Executive parties—are opposed to the introduction of top-up fees, but can he assure us that the Liberal Democrats will not be party to an increase in the endowment? The Executive parties and the

First Minister have not yet made a commitment on that issue.

Mr Stone: I can give that assurance most emphatically.

We must be responsible and consider how best to deal with the £430 million that the review identifies as necessary to modernise our university estates. There would be benefit in considering the option of initiating a form of estates review for the university sector to consider how best to deliver the teaching, research and learning environment that we all want for our students and academics. The review would have to take account of the independence of our universities while recognising that innovative solutions, including increased collaboration among universities, will be needed to bring the estate up to scratch.

An estates review could consider such issues as whether savings could be made by restructuring back-office functions. It could also consider opportunities to share the best practice that is already undertaken in the sector. For example, further education colleges have made great strides to put themselves at the heart of their local communities and there might be similar opportunities for universities. I am talking about thinking outside the box while not threatening the independence of the institutions.

The committee's report is to be commended. We are now in the fortunate position of having the data that we need from the phase 3 review to ensure that the committee's recommendation of increased funding for the sector is backed up with hard evidence. We should support and encourage our ministers in their endeavours.

16:26

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): As time is short, I begin with what I was going to say at the end of my speech. As the Deputy First Minister knows, institutions that are closest to the border always come under the most pressure from differential funding arrangements. He is aware of the concerns raised across the parties that funding in England will put pressure on the Crichton university campus in Dumfries to increase its funding, given the possibility of increased development in Carlisle. I make a specific plea to the minister in relation to the proposals that have been made for the library and learning resource centre on the campus. I repeat again the direct plea that, if any end-year flexibility funding is available, it should go into that project to assist it further. I know that the Deputy First Minister has taken a positive attitude to the project, which has been welcomed across the parties. The additional half million pounds of funding would be particularly welcome.

It is not for me to defend Alex Neil, although when he was convener of the previous Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, he took the same reasoned approach that Mr Morgan conveyed today. It concerns me slightly when I find myself agreeing not only with Mr Neil, but with Susan Deacon, as I do today.

Mr Stone: Will Mr Mundell reflect with me on Mr Neil's comments on defence research? If Scotland were to become independent, there would be precious little more than two Cessna aircraft in the Scottish air force.

David Mundell: I am sure that Mr Neil has said many things with which I do not agree, although when he was convener of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, I always found that he kept such views to himself.

My concern about the current report is reflected in the year-long report that the previous committee carried out. The remit of the Parliament is to discuss a subject only when such lengthy committee reports have been produced. However, despite the length of time and the body of evidence that was taken that supported what Susan Deacon said about the need to support part-time education and to put further focus on further education, the previous committee's report seems to have disappeared off the map. Rather than focus on the big issues of how we see the future of further and higher education, we get diverted into the sole issue of funding or, as Susan Deacon said, into bandying about statistics.

We need to have a big debate rather than a conversation about what we see as the role of further and higher education. I am on the record as stating the need to encourage more people into vocational training and to take up the opportunities that exist in society, rather than being locked into the mindset that everybody should aspire to go into higher education on leaving school. That debate has begun to a larger extent in England. It is quite a different discussion from the discussion about access. There is quite widespread consensus, both in this Parliament and in the UK Parliament, that everyone who wants it should have access to higher education. However, the question remains as to whether higher education is the right choice for everybody. We should not continue to focus on the idea that everybody should go into higher education when a range of life choices is available—not least the choice as to when, during a truly lifelong learning system, people take the opportunity to have that education.

That is the sort of debate that we have to move on to if we are to meet everybody's aspiration not only of having a world-leading higher education system but of having an education system that meets Scotland's social and economic needs. If the debate focuses only on statistics, it will be a

sterile debate and we will not have the economic basis that our country will need in 20 years' time or the range of talented young, middle-aged and older people. Let us not forget what is in the report, but let us not forget either what was in the previous committee's report. An enormous amount of good work was done on the previous committee's report and it would be a great shame if it were simply put on the shelf and forgotten.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I express my regrets to the one member whom I still had to call in the open debate, but I now have to go to the closing speeches. I call Christine May to close for the Labour party.

16:32

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I join my committee colleagues in acknowledging the work of the committee and the stewardship of Alasdair Morgan. I also thank those who gave evidence and all support staff.

In the truncated time that is available to me, I want to say a little about the role of the further education sector in delivering our lifelong learning objectives. The sector's role was referred to in the committee report, a key recommendation of which said that

"the strategic importance of the further education sector should also be addressed."

Fifty per cent of young people may be going to university, but lifelong learning is about more than young people, and we also need to consider access for older, under-represented and more disadvantaged groups. That is why I want to concentrate on the further education sector.

About a third of places for full-time higher education in Scotland are accounted for by higher national courses, and that is the main route of access to higher education for many people from disadvantaged communities and for many vocational specialisations that are vital to the growth of the economy. We heard that in the evidence that the committee took. If we include part-time students, more than 50 per cent of Scots entering higher education for the first time now do so through an FE college. That is not matched in England—we have heard comments about that. Fifty-five per cent of those enrolments are on part-time courses, and I shall come back to that if time permits. Twenty-five per cent of HE students in colleges come from areas of high deprivation and 30 per cent of all HE graduates are from FE colleges.

That is a strong reason for examining all parts of the tertiary sector as a whole. Not only do the FE colleges support our universities, but they complement them in delivering courses locally to people who may not have the opportunity to travel

to take up education. I look at the articulation agreements between universities and colleges and at the proportion of students going forward into universities, and I think of Glenrothes College in my constituency, which has a strong care faculty with links not just with local employers but with nursing and teacher training colleges. I look at the centre that it is developing for creative industries, and I think of the importance that that will have in relation to the Scotland's future economic needs. Glenrothes College also has a partnership with Fife College in Kirkcaldy to develop thinking and courses on information technology and engineering at the Institute of Applied Technology. Industry is also involved in that partnership.

The committee's report makes a number of recommendations. At this point, I must confess that I share other members' disappointment at the lack of developing thinking that seems evident from the Executive's responses to date. Although I acknowledge that the minister has to wait for the spending review before he can come forward with definitive proposals and numbers, I urge him to recognise that the chamber is anxious to know how thinking is developing and to find out about the conversations and discussions that are taking place with the trade unions, the universities, the colleges, the funding councils and so on. We seek reassurance that whatever comes forward will meet the need for additional resources that the committee report identifies.

I want to make two final points. The first is that, regardless of the issue of tuition fees down south, the recruitment and retention of staff, staff pay and conditions and so on must be dealt with and will require resources. Secondly—and finally—as a former lecturer in the FE sector and a former chair of the lowland Scotland objective 3 partnership, I remain passionately committed to the key role of lifelong learning in achieving the economic growth that Scotland needs. I am happy to work with ministers, universities and colleges to develop solutions that are affordable and implementable and that meet the needs of the sector—and, by implication, the Scottish economy. I make a plea to ministers to take us along with them as they have these discussions and to make regular reports back to us. If the minister assures us this afternoon that he will undertake to make those reports, I in turn assure him that he will receive my full co-operation. I am happy to support Alasdair Morgan's motion.

16:37

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I thank the Enterprise and Culture Committee for producing its excellent report on the Scottish solutions inquiry. The report sets out the current situation in Scotland and the rest of the UK

and details the impact of the proposed implementation of top-up fees in England. Its recommendations are realistic, factual and up to date.

I must say that I sensed that a number of MSPs, including Christine May, Susan Deacon and Murdo Fraser, were uneasy at the lack of response to these matters. Perhaps of even more concern is the committee's conclusion that there was a lack of communication between the UK Government and the Executive on the impact of the white paper in Scotland. For example, paragraph 41 suggests that there has been

"a lack of communication ... with Scottish ministers"

and goes on to say:

"The Committee considers that it is essential that in future the UK Government takes account of the potential consequences for Scotland of its proposals."

Obviously, we have to make devolution work and I hope that ministers in Scotland and at Westminster will take heed of that statement. When important changes such as those that the Prime Minister envisages are introduced, he must consider the impact that they will have in Scotland. After all, we are an integral part of the UK and our university sector is a truly integrated market with cross-border flows and exchanges of ideas. A good working relationship is essential and must not be forgotten.

Alex Neil: If perchance the Tories were to win the UK general election in 2005, would they be committed to scrapping top-up fees before they are implemented in 2006?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have made it absolutely clear that we are against top-up fees and that we are very much in favour of Scotland maintaining its competitive edge. That is the position of the Conservative group in this Parliament.

Incidentally, the Deputy First Minister mentioned funding. In that respect, I must repeat the figures that Murdo Fraser highlighted. In 1998-99, funding for each place was £5,123; however, that figure will drop in 2004-05 to £5,012. As a result, we are right to be seriously concerned about funding issues.

Mr Wallace: Does the member accept that the Scottish committee of the national committee of inquiry into higher education—the Dearing committee—which considered funding in the late 1990s, found that, between 1976 and 1995, the unit of resource for teaching in higher education institutions fell in real terms by 40 per cent? The Conservatives were in power for 16 of those 19 years. That was the Tory party's record: a 40 per cent real-terms reduction in the unit of resource for teaching.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am most amused that the Deputy First Minister included the years from 1976 to 1979, when a Lib-Lab pact existed and the Liberal Party, as well as the Labour Party, had a good deal more responsibility for funding than the Conservatives had.

The Deputy First Minister must face his own responsibility for the fact that funding per place has deteriorated and sunk in the past two years, which is why we are right to be extremely concerned.

The Enterprise and Culture Committee's recommendation in paragraph 146, which was supported by Alex Neil, Susan Deacon, Murdo Fraser and David Mundell, says:

"it will be essential to lever additional funds into the sector ... we believe that significant Executive funding will also be necessary."

I support that recommendation and I believe that Alasdair Morgan and Murdo Fraser are right to stress the great importance of research in Scotland in order to retain markets of the future and jobs.

I return to what the Deputy First Minister and Susan Deacon said about avoiding a knee-jerk reaction to changes in England. We agree, but it is false to say that the Higher Education Bill will have an impact on Scotland only from 2006-07 and that its full impact will not be felt until 2010. The fact is that academics and lecturers could be enticed to leave posts in Scotland now, with the prospect of a sharp pay rise in England in two years' time, and it is conceivable that such a pay rise might not be available in Scotland. The Deputy First Minister must address that serious matter.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have given way twice and I want to make one or two more points.

Top-up fees in England are likely to resolve the funding problem south of the border, but lecturers and academics in Scotland might not necessarily feel that they are in such a strong position. The First Minister said that the Executive would act very quickly when it received the report. Can the Deputy First Minister say what very quickly means?

Of course, I strongly echo the points that Alasdair Morgan, David Mundell and Christine May made about how further education must not be left behind. That is tremendously important.

To sum up, we strongly believe in advancement on merit rather than on the ability to pay, that Scotland should not be subjected to a brain drain, that Scottish universities should be independent of the state, but that those universities also need

very strong state funding. I express my party's gratitude to the Enterprise and Culture Committee and I look forward to hearing what the Deputy First Minister has to say.

16:43

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I echo the remarks that others have made about the contribution that the clerks made to the report's production. I also echo the remarks that my colleagues on the Enterprise and Culture Committee made about the nature of the report. I fully endorse the report, both as an individual member and on behalf of my party.

A range of comments has been made on matters across the breadth of the report. I will concentrate my remarks on the key recommendations in paragraphs 15, 16 and 17, to some of which other members have referred.

Paragraph 15 says:

"The Committee recommends that, if the aspiration is to grow the Scottish economy, the Executive should significantly increase its investment in higher education in real terms."

I believe that the sentiments that Susan Deacon and Christine May expressed are very much in line with that recommendation. Although those members did not say as much, there is disappointment that the Executive has not yet even endorsed that recommendation, and has not given the exact figures—or details of how it might arrive at them—in relation to what might be a significant increase.

Paragraph 16 suggests that, although increases in funding

"can in part be achieved by various measures",

the Executive will have to meet the bulk of those increases. The point in recommendation 17, on the research sector, has been well made by others.

I would like to go back to discuss how we might measure the success or otherwise of the Executive's contribution. John Swinney asked the key question: how are we going to do that? Others such as Alex Neil have made similar points.

Figures are chieftains that winna ding, as another member pointed out. That was in relation to a rather narrow area of research funding, without considering the totality. The figures that we have, as Fiona Hyslop rightly pointed out, show that the share of Scottish Executive funding that this sector will get over the next three years will increase by 14.8 per cent. That has to be set against the overall Scottish Executive budget increase of 23.6 per cent. Those figures are very much paralleled in reverse by what is going to happen south of the

border. I know that we should not simply concentrate on what might or might not happen south of the border but, nevertheless, those are the figures. Our relative share is decreasing while south of the border the share is increasing. While we are a unitary state, there is undoubtedly the possibility of distortion of what is supposed to be a unitary internal market. That does not appear to have been specifically addressed by the Executive so far.

Murdo Fraser: Does Mr Adam agree that, even if we were not a unitary state, the problems would still be there? Because of our geography, we would still have cross-border flow between Scotland and England of academics and students. Brian Adam would like Scotland to be an independent country, but that would not solve the problems of Scottish higher education.

Brian Adam: I agree that, if we were not a unitary state, the problems would still exist. However, the difference would be that we could address the problems directly without looking over our shoulder all the time to see whether we had approval from elsewhere for our course of action.

I was delighted to hear that the assertions made earlier by ministers—with regard to Scotland receiving 20 per cent higher funding per capita—have been dropped. I welcome that, although I note that none of the Labour members referred to it. However, we still have to have appropriate comparators and I hope that, at some point, we can agree what those comparators might be.

Lewis Macdonald: Does Mr Adam accept that phase 3 of the higher education review has sought to establish an agreed baseline, and does he agree that it is welcome that all the stakeholders in the higher education sector have joined together to reach that established baseline?

Brian Adam: There is still a lack of clarity. Most of the people who participated in the review have decided to take matters into their own hands by launching their own website. That shows that significant concerns remain.

I welcome today's commitment by the Liberal Democrats' higher education spokesperson that they will completely rule out any increase to the endowment. I look forward with interest to the response from the minister to hear whether that is Executive policy or just the policy of the Liberal Democrats.

It is true that we do not exist only as a collection of different countries in an island state, and it is true that we have to compete globally. It is a pity that we have not been able to focus our attention on making ourselves as globally competitive as we should be. However, when one partner in the existing United Kingdom is taking a course of action that does not take into consideration the

effect of that action elsewhere, we have to address the situation. I wish that we could move the debate on to a more global sphere, as Alex Neil and others have said. I support the report that is before us today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: For members' benefit, I should explain that the minister decided to use his allocation of time at the beginning of the debate. I therefore ask Mike Watson to respond to the debate on behalf of the committee.

Murdo Fraser: Aw.

16:49

Mike Watson (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I am sorry that, even as I rise to my feet, Murdo Fraser is disappointed. Perhaps there is nothing new there. I suppose that by this stage in his political life, he should have learned to come to terms with disappointment.

This has been a stimulating debate in many ways. I echo the comments that have been made by many of my colleagues about the support that we had in putting together the report, not just from all those who took the time to give evidence orally and by other means, but from our clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre. Committee members, too, did quite a bit of work in ensuring that the report drew heavily on the comments that we heard in evidence.

We state in the report:

"The Committee supports the principle that higher education is fundamental to Scotland's economic development and success. Highly skilled and educated people, world-class pure and applied research, and the cultural, economic and social benefits of universities to individuals and their wider communities are and will continue to be key elements in Scotland's growth."

That may seem to be self-evident, but it is more important than ever that we state that and act in line with those beliefs.

I think that it was Richard Baker who described the introduction of university top-up fees south of the border as a challenge to which we in Scotland would need to rise. He also said that the evidence to the committee confirmed Scotland's advantages over England and Wales. We have had some exchanges about that across the chamber this afternoon. Although the figures may be the source of some dispute, the evidence that we received from Universities Scotland, individual universities and many other organisations cannot be gainsaid simply on the basis of political expediency. There is considerable substance to the figures, which is the basis on which we began our inquiry.

The committee rose to the challenge. The work of all colleagues on the committee reflects that.

To some extent, I share the disappointment that was outlined by Susan Deacon and Christine May

about the Executive's response thus far. Although it is not for me to defend the Executive, it must be said that the report came out a month before the publication of the phase 3 report, which—*notwithstanding* Alex Neil's remarks—has added considerably to our knowledge of the Scottish higher education sector and how it relates directly to south of the border, which is the item of the moment, as far as top-up fees are concerned.

Our report was published a month before the phase 3 report, and six months before the spending review. On hearing the remarks of colleagues in the debate, I examined the figures and, by my calculations, of the 17 recommendations that we made, 10 were accepted. One of those recommendations was on cross-border flows, which we advocated had to be monitored immediately; coincidentally, the phase 3 report, too, advocated that. I was pleased that the minister said that that will be done, because that will be an important aspect in framing our response to the introduction of top-up fees in 2006.

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): Having not been able to speak in my committee's debate, I am grateful to Mike Watson for allowing me to intervene. Will Mike Watson draw attention to recommendation 9, which urges the Executive to encourage research collaboration between the universities, and ask the Executive how it plans to respond to that recommendation?

Mike Watson: I thank Chris Ballance for that. By my reading, the Executive has acknowledged recommendation 9 and will encourage collaboration largely through the task force that was set up by the Department for Education and Skills to bring universities and businesses closer together, rather than just to bring universities together. Both those links are important.

As I said, that was one of the 10 recommendations that were accepted. One recommendation was ignored, four were delayed pending the phase 3 report, and two were delayed pending the outcome of this year's spending review. Of course, the last two recommendations are the most important, because they ask the Executive to put in what we term significant funding for the sector, to respond to events south of the border. Those are the key issues, and if we do not have the basic funding for higher education, some of the less important issues will not matter, because we will be in considerable difficulty in the years to come.

I say to Murdo Fraser that it is unrealistic to expect an immediate response, which would be nothing more than a knee-jerk reaction. It is important that the issues are properly considered, and that we get a response of substance, rather than a response right away. We await what the

Executive will say, and while the noises about the spending review have been positive, if we see no result from the spending review, those of us who have to an extent adopted a wait-and-see policy will say so firmly. I would not hesitate to do that.

The report contains a number of recommendations that respond to the considerable evidence that we received. Although the matter is not directly related to higher education, James Douglas-Hamilton mentioned relations with Whitehall departments and the fact that the report was critical of the way in which the white paper was put together. One organisation—I think that it might have been the National Union of Students Scotland—told the committee that there is not a single mention of Scotland in the white paper and I have not been able to disprove that remark. If the point is true, it is at best unfortunate and at worst downright shameful, because the relationships that the various Scottish Executive departments have with their counterparts south of the border are important to the way in which devolution develops. That situation should not have been allowed to happen. The matter has been drawn to the attention of ministers here and south of the border, so I hope that the situation will not be repeated.

Mr Wallace: My experience since taking over the portfolio has been one of good co-operation. I have had meetings with Charles Clarke and telephone calls with Charles Clarke and Alan Johnson, as and when issues develop. The relationships among officials are certainly better than before. The committee was right to highlight the problem that clearly existed when the white paper was published, but while we do not necessarily agree with the policy of top-up fees, there have been good working relationships with Whitehall in working through some of the consequences of that policy in the past nine or 10 months.

Mike Watson: I hear what the minister says. I emphasise that joined-up government is important not just within Scotland, but within the various parts of the United Kingdom.

Alasdair Morgan and Christine May talked of the need to give more emphasis to the pay of teaching and research staff, and our report stressed that point. I was pleased that the phase 3 report on the competitiveness of higher education, which was published recently, made the point that the issue is important and advocated pay modernisation. That report echoed the committee's belief that we need to reduce the number of contract staff, particularly in research, and thereby increase job security. To some extent, such a move might be a response to the attractions that could emerge south of the border if top-up fees are introduced there in their proposed form.

Fiona Hyslop: The report was right to talk about pay modernisation, but today's announcement of an increase of 3.4 per cent for teaching staff does not augur well for modernisation in the coming year. What timescale would be appropriate for modernisation?

Mike Watson: That is a matter for the staff, their unions and the employers to thrash out. Our report makes it clear that modernisation is important. The time to start preparing for the introduction of top-up fees, which is only two years away, is now. The sooner that that gets under way, the better.

I agree with those who talked about the need to take a strategic approach to the higher education sector by linking it with a policy of developing Scotland as a thriving economy. If we do not have a vibrant and highly competitive higher education sector, that will not happen. Research is a vital component of such a sector. In some senses, although not in others, I was slightly surprised to hear Alex Neil's comments about what he termed, with characteristic flourish, "fiddling". Of course, he picked an example—defence research—that suited his case. I have no way of knowing whether the figures that he quoted are accurate—they may be, but they may just as well not be. However, the point is that Scotland's universities punch above their weight in grant-funded research. We get 13.2 per cent of all grant-funded research in the UK, which is about 50 per cent more than our proportion of the population. Scottish universities should be proud of that. If we are not doing well in one sector, the clear implication is that we are doing even better than the figure that I quoted in other sectors. That must be borne in mind. We should all be proud of Scottish universities' success in attracting funding for research.

When reports of committees of the Parliament come before the Executive, they must be taken seriously and given rather more import than, in my experience, is often the case at Westminster. That is why I was pleased that the committee, for the first time, took the step of sending our report to all Scottish members of Parliament to allow them to see what we are doing and how the Executive responds in a way that gives a bit more importance to committees' work than is the case in Westminster.

I started with a quotation from the committee's report and I shall finish with another. The report states:

"The Committee is of the view that, whatever the detail of the final proposals, the introduction of top-up fees will result in an additional income stream to higher education in England."

That will affect the competitiveness of the sector in Scotland. On maintaining competitive advantage in Scotland, the report continues:

"While this can in part be achieved by various measures which can be taken by institutions themselves, we believe that significant Executive funding will also be necessary."

Ultimately, whatever we do, all the aspects of the report will contribute to the strengthening of higher education in Scotland. There will have to be additional funding—that point has been well made not only by the committee, but in the debate—and I hope that the Executive will bear that in mind as it deliberates on the phase 3 report and its spending review throughout the rest of the year.

Business Motion

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-1049, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Wednesday 24 March 2004

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 1 Debate on the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution in respect of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 25 March 2004

9.30 am Scottish Green Party Business

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.00 pm Question Time –
Environment and Rural Development;
Health and Community Care;
General Questions

3.00 pm Executive Debate on Protecting
Communities – Reforming the Role of
Non-Jury Courts

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 31 March 2004

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist
Party Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 1 April 2004

9.30 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 3 of the Education (Additional
Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.00 pm Question Time –
Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and
Transport;
Justice and the Law Officers;
General Questions

3.00 pm Continuation of Stage 3 of the Education
(Additional Support for Learning)
(Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

and (b) that consideration of the
Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Bill
at Stage 2 be completed by 4 June
2004.—[*Patricia Ferguson.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S2M-1047, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Renewables Obligation (Scotland) Order 2004 be approved.—[*Patricia Ferguson.*]

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S2M-1043, in the name of Alasdair Morgan, on the Scottish solutions inquiry, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the 3rd Report 2003 (Session 2) of the Enterprise and Culture Committee, *Report on Scottish Solutions Inquiry* (SP Paper 67), on the potential impact of the introduction of variable tuition fees in England and recognises the importance of a healthy higher education sector to Scotland's economic development.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S2M-1047, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Renewables Obligation (Scotland) Order 2004 be approved.

St Andrew's Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-754, in the name of Donald Gorrie, on national celebrations on St Andrew's day. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament believes that many aspects of Scottish life would benefit from the adoption of St Andrew's Day as a focus for national celebration; recognises the value that similar national days, such as Thanksgiving Day in the United States of America, bring to other countries, and considers that the Parliament and the Scottish Executive should work with all relevant bodies to make St Andrew's Day, or the weekend nearest to it, a basis for educational, cultural and sporting activity, family reunions, community events, the promotion of tourism and Scottish products abroad and for developing existing celebrations of Scottish life held abroad.

17:03

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I am very happy to speak to my motion. First, the motion does not ask for a holiday. I originally asked for a holiday, but the Executive—for whatever reason—does not seem to be keen on instituting another holiday, so I have dropped that idea. That is an issue to pursue on another day. Secondly, I wish Scotland to promote Scottishness vigorously, and if the general consensus—either in the Parliament or in the country as a whole—is that we should develop Burns day instead of St Andrew's day, I am quite relaxed about that. Nevertheless, I am here to argue the case for developing the time round about St Andrew's day—what in old Scots would have been known as St Andrewstide—as a time of celebration.

St Andrew became the patron saint of Scotland in a slightly dubious way. Relics were brought back to St Andrews by St Regulus, and in those days relics of that sort were a very valuable thing. A tourist trade was developed—the Fife tourist board was obviously doing good work—at a time when the main form of travel was the pilgrimage. A lot of pilgrims were attracted to St Andrews to see the relics and, as part of that, St Andrew was promoted as the great Scottish figure. Although it was a spin, it was a spin about 800 years ago and the passage of time gives St Andrew a good degree of credibility.

My proposal has many aspects, which relate to our past, present and future. Many Scots are woefully ignorant about their history and culture. There are many good things in Scotland's past, although there are some bad things in our history too.

We should organise a big programme of events on or around St Andrew's day, involving schools and colleges. Many clubs and societies in Scotland that have lectures and discussions could promote Scottish subjects. National and local museums could arrange exhibitions relating to Scottishness and the contribution that is made by local people to a particular activity. Theatres could stage old and new Scottish plays and concerts could feature Scottish music. Above all, there could be events in communities to celebrate the history of the town, village or city in question, the good things that happened in the past and how we got where we are today.

We could celebrate the present by having lots of high-quality sports activities in Scotland and abroad. We could focus on family reunions, just as American people do on thanksgiving day, which is a feature of life in the United States. Local reunions could also take place.

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Allan Wilson): I am interested in the concept of Scottishness, which might otherwise be described as nationality. Does Donald Gorrie agree that for contemporary Scots, the concept of Scottishness is essentially a cultural phenomenon?

Donald Gorrie: Yes, I think that that is right. The promotion of this sort of national celebration would help to tease out the many different concepts of Scottishness.

We have many immigrants, as we have had throughout our history. The Flemings taught us to develop towns and the Vikings did many good things, as well as burning things down. The influence of Jews, Italians and other groups has meant that we are a mixed lot. We have a varied history and culture. Scottishness is like an elephant—one knows it when one sees it, even if one cannot describe it.

A reunion of people from Auchtermuchty, for example, would attract people who have gone to England or abroad from Auchtermuchty to come back for a big hooley. Such an event could be very constructive.

I would like us to focus, in particular, on the contribution of Scots to other countries. We have made a huge contribution that is often not recognised, although many books about emigration from Scotland have been published in recent times. Scotland's big contribution to the Commonwealth did not just involve conquering other countries because we have good soldiers. Scottish people have been involved in the development of the Commonwealth at all levels. Many Canadian Prime Ministers have been of Scottish descent, for example, as have many Canadian small grade farmers. We have made a

huge contribution to Commonwealth countries at all levels.

Many Scots went to various parts of Europe to develop all sorts of things in Russia, Poland, France and Germany. Scots have made a big contribution to the development of engineering, gardens, architecture and fighting in such countries. We could have parties with Russian people to celebrate the contribution we have made in Russia. Other events could be promoted in Russia to celebrate the contribution that we have made there.

I suggest that we concentrate those things on the weekend nearest to St Andrew's day and on the days leading up to it. The Executive and the Parliament could consider establishing a committee of non-politicians—people who are leading lights in various spheres—to promote and co-ordinate this sort of activity. Many people would give time and energy to that. As a result of that, we could be proud of being Scots, because we have a lot to celebrate. We could look forward to a better Scotland and we could enjoy ourselves. Those are all pluses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask for speeches to be kept to four minutes. Given that I could not call Chris Ballance in the previous debate, I will call him first now. Did I catch you out, Mr Ballance?

17:10

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): Entirely.

I am happy to support the motion and I thank Mr Gorrie for introducing it for debate. What he is proposing would put us in a win-win situation: it is all benefits and no downside. The benefits are clear for tourism and culture and there would also be benefits in having community activities that focus on St Andrew's day and on Scotland and are about getting people involved in their communities, which is a cornerstone of democracy that we must encourage. There would also be benefits in holidays—the benefits of useful positive leisure time cannot be overstated. We need extra quality time with our families and time to pursue our hobbies, interests and research.

Life is not just about work and earning money. We heard this morning about a report from the New Economics Foundation, which talks about the benefits of using alternatives to gross domestic product and measuring the success of society in terms of not just economic performance but well-being—how we fit into our society, how we work as a community and how happy we feel. Cultural and leisure-time activity has a real bearing on that. We must focus not just on economic life and our working week but on what we do when we are not

working. Although many MSPs are guilty of seeing our job as infinite, it is important for us all to ensure that we take holidays and encourage holidays in general.

We should encourage people to take short-break holidays that can stimulate the local Scottish tourism economy and encourage us to go out and see more of the world immediately around us rather than fly off to the sun for a week. Points have been made about the importance of an iconic holiday such as St Andrew's day in promoting Scotland around the world in the same way that thanksgiving is used to promote the United States and Bastille day is used to promote France. The motion is correct to call for St Andrew's day as a time to promote Scotland. I might prefer to have an extra day's holiday in May when the weather is better, but St Andrew's day is fixed and what Donald Gorrie proposes is an excellent target for us.

17:14

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Donald Gorrie on introducing the subject for debate, as it is important. I apologise for somehow having forgotten to sign up to the motion, as I agree thoroughly with everything that it says. Two years ago, I lodged a St Andrew's day motion, which unfortunately was not selected for debate. I was prompted to lodge the motion after I attended a Children in Scotland event in Glasgow called "Equal Futures" on St Andrew's day, 2001. The event was attended by schoolchildren from throughout Scotland and was held with a view to building racial equality. At the time, it struck me that it would be great to designate our national day—which, like Chris Ballance, I would like to be a holiday—as a day of celebration of Scotland's cultural diversity.

As Allan Wilson said, that is something that should be embraced. I thought that it would be great if everyone could participate in that and if we had a specific time when we could say, "Scotland is very diverse." We have a wonderful indigenous culture, but we can also embrace all the other cultures that are now in our country. I do not think that that view is very different from the meaning behind Donald Gorrie's motion.

Donald Gorrie mentioned Scottishness. Most of us feel that and I would hope that people whose families have not lived here for generations can share that feeling because they live here and take part in society.

Two or three weeks ago, I was in Wales on St David's day. I cannot remember what date that is—

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): It is 1 March.

Linda Fabiani: I thank Margaret Ewing.

I was struck by how evident people's sense of Welshness is on their national day. I was in south Wales and I understand that the feeling is much stronger in north Wales. Practically every child I saw that day, from babies upwards—apart from the adolescents, who are at that difficult stage when youngsters do not want to do anything anyway and so completely ignore such things—was walking about either in full Welsh national costume or at least with a cap, for the boys, or a hat, for the girls. All the local shops were selling the costumes, both cheap and expensive versions. I thought that it was wonderful. There was a real sense of Welshness. Schoolchildren were going to school in their national dress and talking about St David and other things that promote their Welshness. I thought to myself, "There's a campaign for this coming St Andrew's day."

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): We could all wear kilts.

Linda Fabiani: It would be great if our kids could do even as small a thing as that in recognition of what their country is and could promote their Scottishness in such a way.

I hope that I have given people something to talk about. We should be promoting Scottishness and Scotland in the period around St Andrew's day but we should also be aware of the wonderful cultural diversity that we have in this country and should be trying to find a way to make absolutely everyone feel that their participation is valid.

17:17

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): There are worse places to be born and brought up than in St Andrews, the old Fife town that gives Scotland its patron saint and national day. Sadly, this week's health statistics suggest that St Andrews natives are likely to live 13 years longer than people who are brought up in Shettleston. St Andreans can use those bonus years to potter around the ruins of the old cathedral that was built on the site where the bones of the Apostle Andrew were allegedly brought from Patras in Greece. Thanks largely to a few ancient finger bones, St Andrews was already the ecclesiastical capital of Scotland when Edinburgh was still a rick of mud huts beside a swamp under the castle hill.

However, what does all that have to do with commemorating St Andrew's day and what does 30 November have to do with St Andrew? The short answer is nothing. Andrew is the patron saint of a number of countries and, more than 1,000 years ago, the Catholic Church simply chose 30 November as an appropriate day on which to celebrate him. Because of such an arbitrary

reason, we find ourselves with a national day that makes little sense either historically or commercially.

For several years before coming to the Scottish Parliament, I served on the St Andrew's week committee of the city of St Andrews. A number of local business people, councillors and others worked tirelessly to translate the week leading up to 30 November into a true commemoration of Scotland's patron saint and our national day. That committee still does excellent work and many artistic and cultural events are attracted to the town. However, in terms of visitor numbers and extra business for St Andrews, the problem is that 30 November is simply too close to Christmas. In a national context, the same problem would arise. It is on the date, rather than the principle, that I question Donald Gorrie's motion. Three weeks before Christmas is simply the wrong time of year to have a national day.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Has the St Andrew's week committee approached the Catholic Church to find out what would be involved in changing the date?

Mr Brocklebank: I am afraid that it has not. I do not know the answer to the problem, but our experience was that the day is a little too close to Christmas. Of course, that does not mean that the town of St Andrews should not continue to celebrate on 30 November, as it has done in the past. I would not have thought that we could persuade the Vatican to change the apostle's commemorative date.

The luck of the Irish has given them today, 17 March, as St Patrick's day. That date, which comes a month before Easter, would have been an excellent national day for Scotland. I imagine that the Executive might see 6 April, the date of the declaration of Scottish independence at Arbroath in 1320, as too political to be a national day.

Despite Donald Gorrie's desire for a consensus, I am certainly not against another day's holiday. Compared with many European countries, Scotland is badly served with holidays. There is an obvious alternative, which retains the link with a national saint. I favour 9 June, which is St Columba's day. It was St Columba who brought Christianity to this pagan place called Scotland in 564, a couple of centuries before St Regulus allegedly brought Andrew's bones to what became St Andrews; it is more than a month after May day and a month before Scots kids go on holiday. It seems to me to be an ideal day on every count for the early summer celebration that members have requested. I commend 9 June as a twin national saints' day to commemorate St Andrew and St Columba.

17:21

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Donald Gorrie on securing this debate and on having two Cabinet ministers come to listen to his speech, particularly as they are both Labour members. They are obviously back in love with Donald.

I agree with Ted Brocklebank about the time of year. It would be much better for tourism and for the international marketing of Scotland if the day was at a time of year when we could encourage people to come and enjoy some Scottish sunshine rather than some winter weather.

The important point is demonstrated by what happens on 25 January each year. Burns night has no official recognition, although I am sure that the Executive is putting money into the new centre in Alloway in Ayrshire. Burns suppers are a good example of how something can grow from nothing into an international phenomenon. Many people who have been to Burns suppers in Scotland seem to be under the impression that they are held only in Scotland, but I am told that more Burns suppers are held in Russia than in Scotland. They are held the world over, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, in parts of Asia and in parts of the middle east. They are held not just to commemorate the bard and everything that he stood for—his philosophy, his poetry and his music; they also promote Scotland effectively.

St Andrew's day, whenever it is during the year, is an opportunity for us to market Scotland, but it is not properly seized upon. Unlike Burns suppers and hogmanay, most people in Scotland do not celebrate St Andrew's day. I dare say that many people do not know when it is, and that is a matter for regret. It is an ideal opportunity for us to celebrate what happens in Scotland but, more important, it is an opportunity to market Scotland abroad.

Last week, the minister announced the rejigging of the area tourist boards and the additional money that is being allocated to VisitScotland. As we know, and as Ted Brocklebank said, St Andrew is the patron saint not only of Scotland but of many other countries. There might be opportunities for us to twin with some of those countries and to undertake joint initiatives to encourage tourism between those countries and Scotland. Tourism and marketing initiatives are often held on pegs such as that. Chris Ballance said that we should encourage people to take weekend breaks in Scotland—I say to him that I hope that they will come on low-cost flights—which could significantly boost tourism.

After the debate, most members in the chamber are off to the Signet library to celebrate St Patrick's day. We could learn much from how the

Irish have turned that day into an international day to promote Ireland. I used to live in Boston, where St Patrick's day is a great day for everybody, as is thanksgiving. Today, we will go to the Signet library, whose ceiling and internal architecture compare to those of other halls such as the Sistine chapel, albeit on a much smaller scale. We have much to show people—not only those from abroad, but people from Scotland. Great national treasures such as the Signet library are open to too few people—often to the elite of Edinburgh and its surrounding area.

I hope that Donald Gorrie's idea of celebrating St Andrew's day is taken up and that the day becomes a national holiday. I hope that the Parliament takes the holiday on a Wednesday or Thursday every year. We should use that opportunity. Many people might laugh at the debate, but it is worth while. The idea is worth while, because it provides yet another opportunity to promote Scotland. The more we promote Scotland, the more we generate economic activity, jobs, wealth and all the rest of it. I hope that the minister will follow up last week's initiative with a new initiative this week.

17:26

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): No one can be in any doubt but that today is St Patrick's day. We need only walk down the streets not of Dublin, but of Edinburgh, to know that—we can see people celebrating Ireland's national day here. We can learn lessons from that, as Alex Neil said. Throughout the world, everybody knows St Patrick's day. It is used greatly to promote Ireland and it is used internally in Ireland to bring great economic benefit. It is estimated that in Dublin alone, last year's St Patrick's day celebrations were worth €80 million of additional tourism business. That sum is not to be sneezed at. It is significantly higher than the amount of money that we received from the MTV celebrations in Edinburgh, although that sum is not to be sneezed at either. I will return to the great tourism opportunities that are available.

This year, it is estimated that the St Patrick's day celebrations will last for seven days, but I suspect that because of events on the rugby field 10 days ago, the celebrations probably started then. St Patrick's day is a big celebration that is worth a great deal. As I said, we can learn much from that.

As has been said, we must bear it in mind that St Andrew is the patron saint not only of Scotland, but of Greece and Russia. He is also the patron saint of several interesting combinations, such as burgundy and gout—I do not know whether they are meant to be linked—fishmongers and fishermen and singers and sore throats. He is the patron saint of some strange linkages, but we can

learn from that because we, too, can create linkages to promote St Andrews and Scotland.

I disagree with many of Ted Brocklebank's and Alex Neil's comments about the date of 30 November. That is not a bad time to do something to boost Scotland's tourism industry, because it is not a good time of the year for the tourism industry. We do not need to boost tourism in the peak season, but we do need to consider boosting off-peak tourism. For much of Europe, the first weekend in December is a holiday period. It is not a holiday in Scotland or the rest of the United Kingdom, but there is no reason why we should not promote that time as a holiday or celebration period.

Fiona Hyslop: Are the member and the minister aware of the proposal to start celebrating festivals for tourism with St Andrew's day on 30 November and to take that through to Burns day on 25 January? That would place the Hogmanay celebrations in the middle of two months which ordinarily have poor tourism activity. That is a great opportunity.

Iain Smith: Absolutely. We should use 30 November as the gateway to the festive season and we should start those celebrations in St Andrews and elsewhere in Scotland. We have great opportunities to do that, which we should consider.

Some times of the year have too many holidays and other times do not have enough. By the end of November, I desperately need a holiday and would love the opportunity that St Andrew's day would provide. I would be happy to exchange another holiday for that, as the Scottish Parliament has done. It has moved a holiday for its staff to provide a holiday on St Andrew's day or the Friday nearest to it. I would like the Scottish Executive to consider bringing its practice into line with that. I suggest that a Friday holiday rather than a Monday holiday should be considered, because whether the holiday is on a Friday or a Monday might make a difference to the type of holiday.

I end by calling for the town of St Andrews to be the focus of the new national celebration. As Ted Brocklebank said, St Andrews already does a great deal to promote and celebrate St Andrew's day with the St Andrew's week celebrations. I believe that St Andrews could be an international focus for those celebrations. It is a place that we could promote internationally and somewhere for the public to come to enjoy St Andrew's day. We should be considering how we can develop the St Andrew's week into a national celebration. Tourism could benefit greatly from developing St Andrew's day as a national celebration and I hope also as a national holiday.

17:30

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I will be brief. I say to my friend Alex Neil that I certainly know when St Andrew's day is because Fergus and I got married on St Andrew's day 20 years ago. I was not sure whether we did that to remind him that it was St Andrew's day or in the hope that he would remember our wedding anniversary—we all know what men are like. I agree with comments that have been made about the weather: I remember standing chattering outside the church after my wedding service. However, I do not think that the weather in Scotland should mean that we move any of our important festivals. We cannot rely on the weather in Scotland; that is the reality. If we moved St Andrew's day to June, rain could be coming down in buckets. We have to take that on board and be courageous enough to mark that particular day.

There are many myths associated with St Andrew, our patron saint, and they have been around for 800 years. Having a patron saint is important for any nation; it is part of the identity of the nation. There is the story about the saltire appearing at Bannockburn and there are others. That is an important part of our history and we should be proud of that history.

Allan Wilson talked about museums and libraries. Our having pride in our history does no damage whatever to the concept of a multicultural society. We are talking about attracting people to Scotland: those people will want to understand what Scotland is, so we should be proud of our history, although there are some events that I would prefer were not in the history books.

We have been discussing promoting Scotland worldwide through the St Andrew's day celebrations. The European and External Relations Committee is considering that closely at the moment. A great deal of emphasis has been placed on tartan day, which seems to have expanded into tartan week; no doubt it will turn into tartan month at some point. We have not done enough to promote the concept of our patron. Greece and Russia have been mentioned by other members—those countries have genuine festivals to celebrate St Andrew.

I am not so sure about Donald Gorrie's proposal that a committee be set up. Committees sometimes sit in ivory towers and do not get on with the work. However, there should be some co-ordination with well-established organisations such as the Saltire Society, the National Trust for Scotland and other Caledonian societies throughout the world. We could do a great deal more by using such existing organisations.

Chris Ballance struck the right note when he spoke about the need to involve communities. In

my constituency we have effective museums that hold pageants every so often because, when Robert the Bruce became King of Scots, the only title he would take was Earl of Elgin. We have well-supported and promoted museums in our area, to which youngsters come along with great enthusiasm.

During the European and External Relations Committee's investigations into the promotion of Scotland worldwide, people kept talking about the tartan-and-shortbread-tin image. I find that irritating because a shortbread factory happens to employ a large number of people in my constituency and in Nora Radcliffe's constituency. We should not be ashamed of wearing our kilts, of learning Scottish Highland dancing or of learning all about our history. We should promote all that.

Linda Fabiani spoke about St David's day. Today is St Patrick's day and if we buy five pints of Guinness, we get a free funny hat. Also, England has St George's day, which is on 23 April—people will now understand that I know that. Indeed, the Scottish National Party's previous vice-convenor, the sadly missed Dr Allan Macartney, managed to persuade a flag company to start producing English flags for football fans and for those who wanted to celebrate St George's day.

17:35

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): As a graduate of the University of St Andrews, I naturally support Donald Gorrie's excellent motion and I congratulate him on lodging it for debate. I am sure that my tutors at my alma mater would have described me as being on a permanent holiday when I was a student there.

I am glad to hear that Margaret Ewing was married on 30 November. That is the date on which my brother got married last year, so it is a big date in our calendar, too. On the subject of my brother, I am reliably informed by Iain Smith that there is a St Andrews cheese, which I am told is of very high quality. Donald Gorrie's suggestion that the day should be a celebration of food and drink is therefore music to my ears.

If I may correct Donald Gorrie on one thing, he said that St Regulus brought the relics to St Andrews. According to the myth, St Regulus is supposed to have brought the relics and to have given them to King Oengus mac Fergus, who reigned from 731 to 761. The only trouble with that is that St Regulus lived circa 150 to 200 years earlier.

Donald Gorrie: Perhaps he was long lived.

Mr Stone: I doubt that he was that long lived.

I suggest that the correct history is that the relics were originally in the collection of St Acca, who was bishop of Hexham, and that he took them into Pictland when he was driven from Hexham in 732. However, I am sure that Donald Gorrie and I could entertain ourselves with that debate for some time.

St Columba and other saints have been mentioned quite correctly and interestingly, but I add to those St Ninian. As an aside, I want to mention that, although Donald Gorrie's suggestion is a wholly good idea—I back the date of 30 November—I think that we should also remember our weir saints. For example, St Nicholas, or Santa Claus, is the patron saint of Aberdeen. Santa Claus was a very generous man, so it figures that he should be that city's patron. St Duthus, or St Duthac, is the patron saint of my home town of Tain. John Farquhar Munro has whispered in my ear that a certain St Maelrubha is the patron saint of Applecross. The saint lived in that part of the world, which is why the Gaelic name for Applecross is "A' Chomraich"—"the sanctuary". We could do something to promote those saints on the back of Donald Gorrie's suggestion.

Donald Gorrie and others have mentioned that St Andrew is also connected with Russia, but St Andrew is the patron saint of a long list of countries, including Romania. I like that international context; it is a lovely idea that we could celebrate our national saint by raising our glasses at the same time as people in Romania, Greece and Russia. If it promotes exchanges between countries, I say amen to that.

Finally, we are all aware of the sometimes Byzantine difficulties in ensuring that our constituents and hard-working citizens are recognised and rewarded. I have felt for some time that it would be appropriate to have a system whereby awards or gongs were handed out not by the Scottish Executive but by the Scottish Parliament. At the moment, such awards are given on new year's day or on the Queen's birthday, but we could hand out the awards on 30 November, which is the day of our patron saint. Why cannot we have a wee committee of the Scottish Parliament that could hand out awards in a more open, fair-minded and more accurately targeted system? The awards need not be expensive medals, but we must give some form of public recognition to those hard-working citizens who work quietly behind the scenes. We could fill that great gap by connecting the awards to St Andrew's day.

17:38

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I congratulate Donald Gorrie and thank him for lodging the motion for debate. I apologise for not

having made it to the chamber for the start of his speech.

From the speeches that I have heard, I conclude that Donald Gorrie is quite right to say that the Parliament's role is to act as a catalyst to pull together the many organisations to which Margaret Ewing referred. If it is true—I believe that it is—that most Scots have only a hazy idea of their national saint and when his saint's day is, those Caledonian societies cannot have been very successful in promoting St Andrew. The activities of such societies might have a defined focus, so the Parliament should take the lead in doing something to boost the confidence of Scots and to make them better informed about Scottishness. We have a role in that.

I agree with Margaret Ewing's comments: this is not just a marketing tool and our aim is not just to sell ourselves to all the newly emerging economies of the world. We have a great deal to do to persuade our own people that this is a country that is worth staying in. The Executive has policies to try to keep them here and to welcome other folk. We must re-examine what Scottishness means. Does it mean "One Scotland. Many Cultures"? Do we have a diluted culture or do people buy into an existing one? We need to plumb a huge amount of self-knowledge. We should do so in the way in which the Americans approach both thanksgiving day and independence day. Often the school calendar is geared towards those two days in terms of class projects. There would be nothing wrong with our having two national days in Scotland—we might choose Victoria day. Donald Gorrie and I are not quite old enough to remember Victoria and when that day was relevant, but other members will realise that somewhere it is still celebrated. Why does that happen?

Fiona Hyslop: It is celebrated only in Edinburgh.

Margo MacDonald: We get things right in Edinburgh. There is nothing wrong with our having two national days, as the Americans have.

I hope that the minister will concentrate on what we can get out of St Andrew's day as a community, rather than on using it as a marketing tool for Scotland the brand or Scotland the venue. It is much more than that. Inevitably, if we are successful in promoting Scotland, things Scottish and Scottish history and culture in the way that has been described, we will attract more visitors, but in my book that is not the reason for celebrating St Andrew's day. I refer to the new Scots who went through a parody of a ceremony in Glasgow, at which they learned to be British and self-consciously Scottish at the edges. I would prefer that we had the confidence to say to those people that they are Scots who are equal partners with folk who are English, Welsh, Irish and so on.

We have a great deal of fundamental thinking to do. Now that we have a Scottish Parliament, folks should relax a wee bit in their Scottishness. They should not always seek to put a political dimension on Scottishness or to use it as a marketing tool. I thank Donald Gorrie for bringing the issue to our attention. If he cares to lodge a motion suggesting that there should be a committee of the Parliament that pulls together all the strands that would enable us to meet the objectives that are set out in his motion, I will sign up to that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite Frank McAveety to respond to the debate and—doubtless—to introduce St Mungo to it.

17:42

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Mr Frank McAveety): Perhaps only Donald Gorrie would examine a calendar that is predicated on the Gregorian model in order to identify a Gorrian model under which he can request a debate about St Andrew's day on St Patrick's night. That is a contradiction in terms, but I am happy to respond to the debate.

One key theme that has emerged is how the Irish have recognised and celebrated their patron saint—so effectively that at this time last year the Minister for Finance and Public Services, whose birthday happens to fall on St Patrick's day, and I were at the St Patrick's night concert of Stiff Little Fingers at the Barrowlands. I mention that because the Irish are very good at colonising an issue and marketing it cleverly.

One reason why historically Scots have been less aware of St Andrew is that when Scots advanced, especially internationally, they often penetrated and moved through the echelons of other societies very quickly. As Tom Devine has written in his recent book about Scots and the empire, they did not need to hold on to characteristics of their Scottishness, other than their aspirations and capacity to work effectively in those societies. The experience of the Irish was very different. The Irish were a more downtrodden and less aspirational community, although recent generations have redefined themselves.

Ted Brocklebank mentioned the rule of papal infallibility. Given that I have Irish parents, I would not want to question that on St Patrick's night, in case I am excommunicated. I will be very cautious on that issue.

A common theme ran through most, if not all, of the speeches that have been made. There may be disagreements about how best and when to celebrate—arguments can be made on either side of that debate. Personally, I think that it would be better if Scotland's national day was at a more

appropriate seasonal time than the end of November. Equally, there is a body of thought that the capacity to have a run of events from 30 November through Christmas, hogmanay and on to Burns night is perhaps not unattractive to many promoters. I hope that what members have said will generate views about that.

Mr Brocklebank: Our committee in St Andrews thought long and hard about those matters some five years ago and put a lot of effort into working out how to make St Andrew's day the focus that Iain Smith described. For all the aspirational and cultural reasons that have been described, we found it enormously difficult to attract visitors to the town at that time of year. People were saving up for, and their thoughts were on, Christmas. Somehow it was impossible to convince them that they should start to celebrate at the end of November and celebrate right through to Burns night. I am afraid that that did not work.

Mr McAveety: Perhaps we should have such a debate and discuss how to celebrate.

The key theme in the debate has been the difficult definition of Scottishness. The induction ceremony in St Mungo's city—members might want me to make such a reference in this debate—was essentially a combination of elements. Each of us has a political view about it. The saltire was involved in the ceremony as much as the national anthem, "God Save the Queen". I know that folk have different perspectives, but people often try to polarise the sense of Scottishness and Britishness. However, the two can be matched quite effectively, irrespective of the model of governance that people feel strongly about. I respect the views of those who have different ideas from mine on how Scotland should be governed over the next period.

How can we use St Andrew's day? If it is not currently an Executive priority to declare the day a public holiday, as Donald Gorrie suggested, how should we use St Andrew's day more effectively? How does it connect with wider developments and the contribution that Scotland can make in respect of culture, identity and heritage?

I stress that, at the First Minister's most recent St Andrew's day speech, for the first time ever in Scotland a political leader identified culture as one of the key ways through which we can have a sense of commonality of what we are as Scots, whether new Scots, traditional Scots or Scots who have different views of how we should organise ourselves politically. The essential point is what binds us together. The First Minister argued that one way in which we are bound effectively together is through the traditions that old and new Scottish culture can bring.

I agree with what members have said in exploring such issues. There is a constant battle over what might be called an old-fashioned view of Scotland, which is an important entry point for us in the nations of the world. Let us consider a situation in which a person is desperately searching for the defining characteristics of a Scot—as opposed to those of a person from England, for example—for an international audience. It would be hard for an English person easily to tie into iconic symbols, whereas we have at least three or four iconic symbols—those symbols can sometimes be bowdlerised in terms of shortbread tins, but essentially they are still important elements.

Margo MacDonald: Will the minister give way?

Mr McAveety: I would never caricature Margo MacDonald as a person who is part of the shortbread-tin mentality in Scotland.

Margo MacDonald: I am partial to a wee bit of shortbread, Presiding Officer.

The minister has outlined the contradiction at the heart of things, which I discussed. There is no proper appreciation of what it is to be Scottish and there is a lack of confidence in what we sometimes feel we are. The minister has pointed out the value in marketing terms of our icons, such as shortbread tins. If we had a committee such as Donald Gorrie mentioned, an investigation of the whole issue should start from a much more practical and less esoteric point of view than that which some academics who have probed the matter have had. We must get our act together so that we are not ashamed of the fact that we make the best sweet biscuits in the world.

Mr McAveety: I stress that there cannot be a properly nailed-down definition of what Scottishness is. There is a multiplicity of definitions. What were meant to be the symbols of Scottishness relating to the political and historic development of the nation meant nothing to the community from which I came but, as I evolved as a young person and as I have evolved as an adult, I have become much more sympathetic towards and understanding about Scottishness. It is much more about values than about institutions. We must at least try to explore options. A strong sense of that has emerged in the debate.

As I said, the First Minister used the St Andrew's day speech to talk about culture, because he thought that that was an important development. We are now at the stage where we hope very shortly to make progress on our commitment to a cultural review. One or two of the key themes that have emerged tonight might be good contributions to a discussion of how we can utilise our national agencies at different times of the year. We can try to find ways in which VisitScotland, Historic

Scotland, the Scottish Arts Council, local authorities and other agencies can buy into such a process. In that sense, the issue would not be kept to a single day; we must recognise that we need a continuous programme of development.

I agree with Alex Neil that the issue is partly to do with how we promote and market ourselves. It is not intrinsically or solely about that, but marketing is an important tool to develop. There is no doubt that the Irish have managed that process effectively, because they have nailed down two or three important messages and have kept them consistent. One of the key points arising in our tourism evaluation over the past few years has been that we need a single, consistent message that we can hammer home to ensure that we break through and penetrate.

I am happy to take back some of the ideas that have been mentioned this evening in looking at the strengths that exist in Scottish culture. There is no doubt that traditional Scottish music is a major element that has been developing in the past few years, particularly with the growth of the fèisean movement right across the Highlands. One of the key issues that the cultural advisers working with me will focus on in the next consultation round of the cultural review is how traditional Scottish music can feature more prominently in the review—we want to link in with some of our major agencies on that.

I hope that the integration of the tourism strategy over the next year or two will provide an opportunity to combine some of the strengths that have been mentioned. One of the key messages was that people had a strong understanding of what Scotland's products were. Some of those products were old and traditional and some of us may have thought that we really did not want that and that our image needed to be modern. I think that we can both have a traditional image and articulate a modern definition of Scotland. It is important that we try to combine the best elements of the old and the new.

Another key message that we must stress is that local authorities already have the capacity to identify a local holiday based around St Andrew's day. None has done that so far and I think that that is partly because, as Margo MacDonald said, there has not been a strong public view in favour of such a holiday or a major demand for one. We need to take that on board.

A number of good ideas have been raised tonight and I am happy to take them back and explore with Donald Gorrie how agencies can work together more effectively. In the cultural review process, there may be one or two issues that members can develop and submit their views on.

I hope that from that process we can pull together something that is more coherent and more meaningful, with the one caveat that it should be about celebrating the diversity of Scottish culture and tradition throughout the year rather than just on one day.

I hope that members recognise that the Executive is aware of the issues and happy to explore the points that have been raised.

Meeting closed at 17:53.

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