

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 28 November 2007

Session 3

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SCOTTISH MINISTERS AND LAW OFFICERS

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MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS—Bruce Crawford MSP

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Finance and Sustainable Growth

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CABINET SECRETARY—Kenny MacAskill MSP
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY—Fergus Ewing MSP

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LORD ADVOCATE—Right hon Elish Angiolini QC
SOLICITOR GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Frank Mulholland QC

PRESIDING OFFICERS

PRESIDING OFFICER—Alex Fergusson MSP
DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICERS—Alasdair Morgan MSP, Trish Godman MSP

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY

PRESIDING OFFICER—Alex Fergusson MSP
MEMBERS—Alex Johnstone MSP, Tricia Marwick MSP, Tom McCabe MSP, Mike Pringle MSP

PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU

PRESIDING OFFICER—Alex Fergusson MSP
MEMBERS—Jackie Baillie MSP, Robert Brown MSP, Bruce Crawford MSP, David McLetchie MSP

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28 November 2007

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 28 November 2007

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Father David Borland, from St Andrew's and St Cuthbert's in Kirkcudbright.

Father David Borland (St Andrew's and St Cuthbert's, Kirkcudbright): Over the past two months, I have been incredibly fortunate in that I have been able to spend some time in Italy, Canada and, of course, our own beautiful country, in particular in bonnie Galloway. Although all those places at first appeared to be very different, I soon realised that, although what I saw was quite unique to each place, what I heard from the people who lived in them was very similar. I do not know whether you, as our Scottish politicians, will find this reassuring or not, but I soon came to realise that the everyday man or woman in the street—wherever they live in the world—seems to love complaining about their politicians. Take heart: it is not just us.

It bothered me that that should be the case, so I asked myself and them why. I was struck by many of the answers. What was brought home to me was the realisation that there is a great perception among many people that he, she or they who shout loudest get everything that they want. One small businessman in Toronto said to me, "I work hard, I raise my kids, I pay my taxes, I don't cause any trouble, so the Government just takes me for granted." There was a tone of resignation in his voice when he said that—a tone that I have heard in our country, too.

As a community leader myself, those conversations forced me to ask myself some serious questions. When I am running around my parish, seeking out those who are most in need of help—an essential and central part of my ministry—do I also take for granted that silent majority? Do I act, deliberately or accidentally, according to the premise that if they are unhappy they will shout? Will they? Am I assuming too much? Perhaps all of us who seek to serve the people of Scotland need to ask ourselves those questions constantly.

As a Christian, I believe that God sent his son into the world for everyone, to remind us that each of us is equal in God's eyes and must, therefore, be equal in each other's eyes. You, as the

servants of the people of Scotland, are called to serve everyone and to be seen to be serving everyone equally. You are the women and men who are entrusted with serving those who are most in need in our society, those who cry out to you for action. At the same time, however, you must remember that there are many, many more within our society who subscribe to the creed, "I don't want to be a bother." We cannot forget them.

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to share my reflections with you. Today, I pray that God will open your hearts to the aspirations of everyone and your hands to meet their needs. God bless you all.

Business Motion

14:34

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-941, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 28 November 2007—

after

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Pension
 Benefits Statements.—[Bruce
 Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Pension Benefits Statements

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on pension benefits statements. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions.

14:35

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Yesterday, business managers requested a ministerial statement on the events of the weekend concerning the issuing of annual benefits statements to members of the national health service superannuation scheme Scotland by the Scottish Public Pensions Agency. I am, of course, happy to come to the Parliament to inform members of precisely what happened, and to consider some of the possible implications for the agency and the wider review of data security that has been initiated by the Scottish Government.

I start with what happened over the weekend. The SPPA dispatched approximately 89,000 pension benefits statements to major NHS employers on 26 October. The packages were dispatched by FedEx, the Scottish Government's approved courier, as 162 packaged items, to 15 separate addresses. The statements contained names of members and national insurance numbers but no personal information relating to addresses or bank accounts. Statements are distributed by employers in the month following receipt.

Following an inquiry to the SPPA from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde on Friday 23 November, it became apparent that an item that had been dispatched to the health board had not been accounted for. At that stage, the agency instigated a search. At the same time, the agency informed the Scottish Government of the potential problem. Ministers were advised on Friday afternoon.

The SPPA responded as follows. It immediately contacted FedEx, which confirmed by Friday evening that one item that had been recorded as being received at its national distribution centre on 27 October did not appear to have been forwarded from the centre. The SPPA requested a search as an immediate response, and the search was initiated by FedEx on Friday evening.

The SPPA, together with NHS health boards, immediately made strenuous efforts to contact all organisations to whom packages had been sent. With the help of NHS colleagues, it was established by Sunday morning that 161 of the

162 packaged items were safely accounted for and that one item was not accounted for.

On Sunday morning, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde undertook a further check of all packages that it had received. When consignment numbers were checked against SPPA and FedEx records, it became clear that the unaccounted-for package had been received by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. The health board undertook a further examination of the packages that had been delivered, and at approximately 1.30 pm on Sunday advised that the missing package had been found at its intended destination of Stobhill hospital.

Following receipt of an inquiry about the issue from *Scotland on Sunday* on Saturday afternoon, I decided to issue a statement making public the details that we had at the time regarding the fact that a package was unaccounted for. I did that because I judged that, in the context of wider public concern about missing data, there was an overriding need to explain the position.

The pension benefits statements were issued using the Scottish Government approved contractor and were received at the correct address. At no time were the data in the wrong hands, and there was no risk to any individual member of the pension scheme. The procedures that had been established by the SPPA demonstrated that the agency was able to track individual packages, even to the extent of identifying the exact content. It is unfortunate that the issue arose at the start of a weekend, which lengthened the time that it took to finalise matters. I appreciate the enormous efforts that members of staff and the management of the SPPA, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and other health boards made over the weekend to satisfy ministers' inquiries.

As a result of the weekend's events, concerns have been identified for immediate action by the SPPA. Action will include: first, pursuing with FedEx the reasons why the agency was not alerted to the fact that the tracker had identified that an item had not been delivered; secondly, examining ways of immediately tightening up mail dispatch procedures within the SPPA and improving mail receiving facilities at organisations; and thirdly, confirming that all 59,000 benefits statements for members of the Scottish teachers superannuation scheme, which were dispatched on 16 November, have arrived safely. That exercise is under way, and I can report to the Parliament that, on the basis of responses from employers to date, no packages are unaccounted for.

In light of the problems that were encountered by HM Revenue and Customs, the Scottish Government is aware that members of the public

will have concerns about the way in which we manage the data that we hold. We take data protection issues extremely seriously, and we have well-established standards in place for storing, accessing and transmitting sensitive data.

On 23 November, we announced that we would conduct a co-ordinated review of information security policies and data handling arrangements in Scotland. The review will consider the procedures that are in place for the protection of data, their consistency with Government-wide standards and policies, and the arrangements for ensuring that policies and procedures are fully and correctly implemented. The review will allow the Scottish Government to establish whether there is a need for further measures to improve the security of sensitive information. Taken alongside the survey of procedures for handling personal information that is under way across all United Kingdom Government departments, the review will enable us consistently to share best practice throughout the wider public sector.

The Scottish Government's strategic board has set up a team, led by the director general justice and communities, to support and co-ordinate the review. All bodies in Scottish central Government, including the NHS, are being asked to confirm compliance with existing information security policies and to offer any practical recommendations for improvements or the better management of risk. In addition, all Scottish Government staff have been reminded of the need to adhere to the standards for the protection of data and of the appropriate care that needs to be taken with data that are received, stored or transmitted to other bodies. We are moving quickly on those issues. The review team will report to me on compliance within the next two weeks.

Presiding Officer, I hope that the chamber will agree that while the weekend's events raise some issues for us to consider, they are a million miles away from a Government putting half the country's bank account details on an unencrypted disk, sticking it in the post and losing it.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will take questions on the issues that he raised in his statement. We have around 20 minutes for questions.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement.

Clearly, it is of great importance to everyone in Scotland that the personal information that public agencies hold on them is protected appropriately, particularly when the information is being shared and transferred. I, too, state my appreciation for the hard work of staff in resolving the situation.

Will the cabinet secretary tell the chamber, with absolute clarity, whether anyone in Government was made aware of any concerns on the matter between 26 October and the issue coming to light in the press? In *The Herald* of 26 November, the cabinet secretary said:

"the correct procedures were followed at all stages".

How can that be the case if files were lost and subsequently retrieved? As he acknowledged in his statement, for some time we had a lost package.

Should not the Government examine procedures to ensure that data transfers take place only if they are absolutely necessary, if written authorisation has been provided by a senior manager, and if clear instruction has been given on the appropriate standard of protection for the transfer?

Will the Scottish Executive introduce new security measures to ensure that all significant data transfers are conducted by automated electronic transfer? If data have to be transferred by removable media, will he also ensure that such media are securely encrypted at the appropriate level?

John Swinney: I thank Mr Kerr for his questions. To my knowledge, no one in the Scottish Government knew of the issue until officials were telephoned at around midday on Friday. I was telephoned at 2 o'clock, at which time I was told of the situation, and action was taken in light of that. The first time that the SPPA knew of the matter was when it received a call from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde at 11.45 am on Friday.

I turn to the comments that I made publicly. All the procedures that the SPPA undertook were followed absolutely. Where procedures were not followed properly was when FedEx did not alert the SPPA to the fact that there was an item for which it did not have a signature to say that it had been received. Obviously, I raised that issue in the statement. The situation is being examined to ensure that it is handled properly.

Mr Kerr asked two questions about data transfer. I have questions in my mind about why exactly we were transporting 89,000 printed pension benefit statements from one end of the country to various other parts. I am examining that issue with the SPPA, because I am not sure that the practice fits with the modern age and the ethos of efficient government, with which I am sure Mr Kerr agrees. We will examine the questions about data transfer.

On Mr Kerr's final point about the encryption of transferred data, as an absolute minimum encryption must be the standard of security when sensitive information about individuals is handled.

The Scottish Government's internal review will consider that. Although we may not have answers to the question in the two weeks within which I expect to receive follow-up information, we certainly will pursue the issue as a matter of course.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement.

When it was announced last week that HMRC had contrived to lose 25 million names, addresses, dates of birth and national insurance numbers in a demonstration of breathtaking incompetence, I dare say that there might have been some hubris in the corridors of the Scottish Government and the feeling that it could not happen here. The disclosure of lost information by the SPPA is certainly not on the same scale, but it is worrying nonetheless. On top of that, we learn today from *The Courier* that the Inland Revenue managed to send to a Dundee company through the post the personal and financial details of more than 50 people, and that the information was intended to be sent to the Inland Revenue's Cumbernauld office. One must wonder whether the reported incidents are simply the tip of the iceberg. All the evidence points to a systemic failure in information handling at all levels of government, which should be of serious concern to us all.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement and his confirmation that an urgent review will be carried out, because public confidence in the Government's handling of personal information must be restored. However, I have a couple of questions. First, does the cabinet secretary think that it is acceptable that, for the four weeks from 26 October to 23 November, the SPPA was unaware that the packet in question had not reached its destination? The SPPA has procedures for tracking packages, but why was no alert system in place? Secondly, does he accept that the public have a right to be informed when sensitive information about them goes missing? Does he accept that that did not happen in the SPPA case, and will he undertake to ensure that, in future, members of the public who may be affected by the loss of information will be made aware of the situation at the earliest possible opportunity?

John Swinney: There is never hubris on the Government benches at any time.

I am happy to answer for the SPPA, which is a good and effective agency with well-motivated staff, but it is not my business to reply for the Inland Revenue or HMRC. However, if that responsibility falls on my shoulders in the passage of years, I will accept it willingly.

Mr Fraser may chart a course of charging HMRC with systemic failure in relation to information, but that is not a fair charge against the SPPA, which has never before experienced a situation in which information has not been accounted for. I assure Mr Fraser about the diligence of staff members and management of the SPPA and their efforts to address the issue during the weekend, which in my eyes was a demonstration of fine public service.

Mr Fraser asked why the SPPA was unaware of the issue for four weeks. The answer was contained in my statement: FedEx did not advise the SPPA that a package was unaccounted for. The FedEx system should have highlighted that. We are examining that issue, because it is a material point.

On informing the public, as I said to Mr Kerr, the issue came to light in the SPPA at quarter to 12 on Friday morning and it was resolved by Sunday at 1.30. It would be stretching the imagination to say that we could have communicated to people within that window of opportunity. In the context of the media inquiry that we received from *Scotland on Sunday* on Saturday afternoon, I made a judgment—which I think was correct—to disclose the information to the public. Obviously, at that time, efforts were under way to resolve the issue.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement and I associate the Liberal Democrats with his appreciation of the hard work done by the SPPA.

Given the recent appalling revelations on the inadequate safeguards for data that are held by the United Kingdom Government, it is vital that the Scottish Government does not follow suit. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the public must be confident that the Government is managing personal information efficiently and sensitively? Will he ensure that the Government's review is accountable not only to ministers but to Parliament? Because of the enormous public concern, will he agree to make the review independent of Government? Will the review consider not whether procedures were followed but whether those procedures are sufficiently secure?

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the next stage in data protection should not be to create a superdatabase with citizens' personal information and biometric data? Will he guarantee that there will be no Scottish system of identity cards and no centralised Scottish database of information that would put citizens' privacy at risk? Will he ensure that this Government will not share or provide information for any ID database that is introduced by the Labour Government in London?

John Swinney: We take data management very seriously and we are determined that data should be properly and securely protected. I will be happy to ensure that relevant Government officials and ministers are answerable to Parliament on issues relating to data management.

I do not rule out independent scrutiny of the review at this stage, but I am happy to agree that parliamentary scrutiny is the minimum required.

This Government does not believe in ID cards. As I have said, we have a variety of measures to protect the data that we hold on individuals. Data should be held securely and sensitively. That will be the Government's approach in all such areas.

The Presiding Officer: We now move to questions from back benchers. I ask that those questions be brief.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for clarifying that the data were at no time in the wrong hands and for mentioning the strenuous efforts that were made by the staff at the SPPA offices in Galashiels. Given his warm words, I ask him whether he will visit the SPPA to thank the staff personally. The fault apparently lay with FedEx.

John Swinney: I have already visited the SPPA: I went there over the summer. It is a Government agency and it does important work for us at a very attractive location in Galashiels. SPPA staff put in a lot of effort over the weekend to address the situation, for which I am grateful. I am equally grateful to staff in NHS boards throughout Scotland who had to address the situation. Such situations always seem to happen late on a Friday afternoon or evening, and go on into the weekend. In NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in particular, a lot of effort was put in so that the situation could be resolved as expeditiously as it was.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): The statements of more than 89,000 health service employees were at some point—some of them—missing for four weeks. Many of us who receive child benefit will have received a written explanation from HMRC of the circumstances following 20 November. To pick up on Murdo Fraser's point, will the minister confirm that he will write to the 89,000 employees to clarify the circumstances that surrounded this particular issue?

The minister says that he is absolutely certain that the data did not fall into the wrong hands during the four-week period, but how certain can he be? Many of us have criticised FedEx and its handling of the issue. Has the minister considered requiring Strathclyde Police to examine the documents to ensure that data did not fall into the wrong hands?

John Swinney: At no stage were 89,000 records missing. One package out of 162 was unaccounted for—not missing, unaccounted for. There is absolutely no reason to write to the vast proportion of the 89,000 people, because their statements were entirely accounted for.

The member's second point concerned the one package that was unaccounted for. I can say with absolute certainty that it did not fall into the wrong hands because the package for which FedEx did not have the appropriate signature to say that it had been received in Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board was a different package from the one that was allegedly missing. That assures me that the package that was unaccounted for had been delivered to Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, because it was signed for by the health board. The only problem was that it was not immediately obvious where it was within the health board. However, that issue has been resolved to my satisfaction.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary have any plans to discuss with Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board its procedures for checking on the whereabouts of important documents once they are on its premises?

John Swinney: I had a conversation yesterday with the chief executive of Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, in which I thanked him and his staff for their efforts over the weekend. He indicated to me—as he has said publicly—that he will supply a report on mail handling within the health board to the Scottish Government's director general health, which will address any of the operational issues that remain following my statement.

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I ask the cabinet secretary to clarify one of his previous answers. When he talked about the 162 packages, he said that the one that had gone missing had been accounted for and that there had been a mismatch. Were all packages accounted for, or were any unaccounted for?

John Swinney: I said in my statement that 161 packages were accounted for. One was not accounted for, and when the process of checking in detail was carried out over the weekend, the situation was satisfactorily explained by the merging of data from the SPPA, FedEx and Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board. Once that work had been undertaken over the weekend, the issue was resolved.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the general review that has been commissioned by the cabinet secretary, and I ask him whether it will consider best practice from elsewhere in Scotland and in the UK—best practice that we can learn from—on the transmission of information between different agencies.

John Swinney: We must be alert to best practice in other areas. As I stressed in my statement, the issue was resolved as speedily as it was because of the information tracking systems that are at our disposal. As a consequence of those systems, we have a strong base in the handling of such information, but we must constantly examine those systems to guarantee that they improve. In particular, we must ensure that we meet the high standards that Mr Scott correctly identified as being demanded by the public, on whose behalf we hold information.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I was glad to accompany the cabinet secretary on his visit to the SPPA in Tweedbank in the summer to congratulate it on its hard work. Given the hope of expanding the services from the agency in the Borders, that hard work is important.

I ask him to clarify one aspect of the review. I heard no mention that it will include FedEx and other Government contract holders or preferred suppliers. Will he confirm whether that is the case? If they will not be included, why not?

John Swinney: We will be considering all aspects of the arrangements that were in place in this instance. When the SPPA considers its procedures, it will examine in particular the management of mailroom logs and its relationship with receiving organisations and, specifically, the courier services that it engages. That will be an essential part of work that the SPPA undertakes in reviewing this incident. However, as I said to Mr Kerr, I have questions about the way in which we manage and move information, and we must consider carefully the arrangements for undertaking such activity.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): We have already had some talk about the electronic transfer of data. Given the inherent cost benefits of that method, what tests have taken place on the security of electronic transfer using the Government intranet, for example?

John Swinney: One of the questions that I asked over the weekend was precisely why we were dispatching 89,000 printed benefits statements in this day and age. I understand the answers for that now, which are to do with the fact that a number of elements of the current information technology systems could not be easily adapted to undertake electronic transfer of information on that volume. There is also a logistical argument that, if the pension benefits statements are going out from one place, such as the SPPA, there is every likelihood that they will go out in an organised and systematic fashion, as they habitually do. However, on this one occasion, we have had an issue with the mail handling outwith the SPPA.

I will certainly consider whether the current method is the most appropriate way of handling such a volume of information. I will liaise carefully with the SPPA and other Government organisations on the question and, of course, keep Parliament informed of developments.

Equality and Diversity

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-928, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, on equality and diversity.

15:02

The Minister for Communities and Sport (Stewart Maxwell): I am pleased to speak to and move the motion during the Parliament's equality and diversity week. I begin by making a clear and unambiguous statement about the Government's position. We are committed to an equal and fair Scotland in which we value the diversity of our people and recognise their different needs and aspirations; foster respect for others and challenge prejudice and discriminatory attitudes; and ensure that people's experiences and life chances are not impeded by unjust discrimination and systemic bias on account of their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, belief or age.

We want a Scotland in which every individual has the freedom and opportunity to be all that they can be. Over the years, there has been significant progress to that end in legislation and policy and there have been real shifts in attitudes. For example, men were executed for homosexuality in Britain 200 years ago, and male homosexual relationships were unlawful in Scotland 30 years ago. However, in 2005, civil partnerships were introduced, and I think that we can all agree that that was a serious and welcome step forward.

However, too many people do not yet experience equality or opportunity. One woman in five will experience abuse by a male partner in her lifetime. Women still do not have equal pay with men. People from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to occupy representative positions or to be visible in the leadership roles of civic society. Bigotry and sectarianism unfortunately still pervade parts of our communities. Many disabled people have no qualifications and are too often judged by what they cannot do rather than by what they can do. Older people are not always valued for the contribution that they can make. People are bullied and discriminated against because they are gay or lesbian.

Securing a fairer and more equal Scotland sits squarely with our strategic objectives and is reflected in our national outcomes and our budget. We have allocated £61 million in the budget over three years specifically for equality. That represents an £11 million increase over three years from the 2007-08 actual allocation.

The funding that has been identified for work on equality is for the Scottish Government to allocate. I emphasise that it is not being rolled up into the local government settlement. Hugh O'Donnell's amendment is factually incorrect on that point. It is also not correct to say that the violence against women fund and the children's services-women's aid fund are being rolled into the local government settlement. As I explained in the domestic abuse debate last week, allocation of those funds remains the responsibility of the Scottish Government. Only a small element of the funds, which corresponds to moneys that are currently given to local authorities for the projects that they run, will be passed over in the settlement. The significant increase in the equality budget will be directed primarily at tackling violence against women, including work on women and children who are affected by domestic abuse. We therefore reject the amendment lodged by Hugh O'Donnell.

We will, however, accept the amendment lodged by Johann Lamont. In so doing, we acknowledge the importance of equality impact assessment. We view it as a key driver in delivering on our commitment to ensure that our investment and policies promote equality and do not discriminate or perpetuate inequality.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): Will the minister confirm that the equality impact assessment tool will be used in and applied to all Government policies?

Stewart Maxwell: Clearly, that is our aim. Our ambition is, as far as possible, to use the equality impact assessment tool on all our policies. As I am sure members will appreciate, there can be cases in which that will not be possible—in emergency situations, such as a foot-and-mouth outbreak or terrorist incident, or when an election has taken place and a new party comes into power with a clear mandate on a policy or priority that it has laid out in its manifesto, on the basis of which it was elected to office. Generally, however, our aim is to use the equality impact assessment tool.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The minister mentioned the case of a new Government coming in. What is the Government doing to demonstrate tolerance, understanding, compassion and empathy in relation to people in the Parliament who have other political beliefs, in order to set an example to the rest of Scotland?

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): That is my forte.

Stewart Maxwell: Perhaps I should leave that to Mr Ewing. I am sure that, at the end of the debate, he will give the member a clear and unequivocal answer.

I will move on. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth outlined our approach to mainstreaming equality and the Scottish budget in his letter to the convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee of 21 November. The equality impact assessment tool that we have developed is available for use across the Government. We will keep it under review to ensure that it is fit for purpose, and in so doing we will value the input of the equality proofing the budget and policy advisory group. We view equality impact assessment as a key mechanism for ensuring both that our policies respond to the different needs of people in Scotland and that those needs are reflected in the resources that are allocated to delivery.

Public bodies, including local authorities, are key to delivering change. They, too, are subject to the public sector equality duties, and they have responsibilities to ensure that the impact of their policies on equality is assessed. We very much value our partnership with local government on this agenda, and we are pleased to be working on a joint equality statement with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which we hope to finalise shortly.

Disabled people should be valued and respected and able to participate fully in our society. We will continue to listen to the views of disabled people about what needs to be done. The report of the disability inquiry undertaken by the Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee will help to inform our approach in the period ahead. I am specifically considering how best to advance work on independent living. That is an important issue on which I know Parliament is keen to see progress. I intend to say something further on the matter in the new year.

The number of British Sign Language/English interpreters on the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters register has increased from 39, in March 2003, to 52, with 13 trainee associate members. We will continue that work, as well as developing a detailed plan for improving linguistic access for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people. The Scottish Government has recently produced new guidance on self-directed support and will be undertaking a review of the disabled student allowance. All of those, I believe, are welcome developments for disabled people.

Our demographic is changing. We are an ageing population—I certainly feel that I am ageing today. Age should not be a barrier to the opportunities that are available to people to participate in Scottish society. The spending review contains commitments of particular import to older people, such as the freeze on council tax, the uprating of free personal and nursing care and a commitment to improve support for people who are affected by dementia.

A traditional African saying is that there is no music in a single sound; different sounds are needed to give music harmony. Scotland is an increasingly diverse nation with a growing minority ethnic population. That diversity enriches us, but racism, sectarianism and Islamophobia undermine Scotland's image and reputation as a nation of tolerance and acceptance.

Recent acts of terror have tested attitudes, and it is to Scotland's credit that there has been little scapegoating of communities. We recognise that there has been a heightening of tension and that some fear a shift in attitudes. We are absolutely clear: those acts of terror were criminal acts by individuals, not communities. We value the positive relationship with our communities and are looking to develop further our community engagement work.

Racism is a blight on any nation. We are proud that Scotland has taken a public stand against it through its one Scotland campaign. I acknowledge the work undertaken by previous ministers to build that campaign and I put it on record that we will continue to move the campaign forward.

We will also need to consider how new migration and the linkages between race and faith work should be addressed. We will do that as part of the redrafting of the statement and action plan on race equality on which we will engage with stakeholders early next year.

This Parliament and its committees have rightly taken a keen interest in Gypsy Travellers. The Gypsy Traveller community has been marginalised and excluded for far too long. It is a community that is not understood and about which myths and incorrect assumptions abound. I know that the Parliament is concerned to see progress on that issue and that members want to know how the recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Committee's report on Gypsy Travellers will be advanced. We will consider that as part of the race equality statement and action plan and will report back to Parliament in due course.

On asylum seekers and refugees, we have made clear our principled position on a number of issues, such as our opposition to dawn raids and the detention of families in Dungavel. We believe that those with legacy cases should be given leave to remain if there has been no involvement in criminality or fraud, and that the right to work should be restored. This Government has acted swiftly in an area in which we have jurisdiction: asylum-seeking young people who have been studying in Scottish schools for at least three years will be able to apply for full-time courses at universities and colleges—a move that has been widely welcomed.

This Government welcomes the gender duty and the opportunities that it presents to progress gender equality in Scotland. We will continue to work with others to address violence against women, the pay gap and occupational segregation; challenge stereotypical attitudes about men and women's roles; and support the engagement of women and women's organisations.

Scotland has made great strides in improving legislative rights and policy recognition for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, but, unfortunately, homophobic attitudes remain an underlying barrier to equality. The LGBT hearts and minds group is exploring the prejudice and discrimination experienced by communities in Scotland and I look forward to receiving its report in early 2008.

We welcome the legislative changes and the discrimination law review, with the prospect of a single equality act and a single equality duty. However, we share some of the concerns that have been expressed by equality stakeholders about some of the proposals. We conveyed those concerns to the United Kingdom Government in September 2007.

We look forward to working closely with the new Equality and Human Rights Commission, with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, with the Parliament and with the range of equality interests whose activities have been crucial in the advancement of equality in Scotland to date.

I believe that there is much to do to achieve a fair and equal society, and I hope that members will support us in meeting the challenge.

I move,

That the Parliament is committed to securing equality of opportunity and a fairer Scotland in which diversity of need is recognised, respect for others is fostered, stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours are challenged and people have more control over their lives and welcomes Equality and Diversity Week, the creation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the commitment of the Scottish Government to promoting and mainstreaming equality and to working in partnership with public bodies, the voluntary sector, business interests and communities to tackle disadvantage and the barriers to equality.

15:13

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I also welcome much of what the minister said in his comprehensive capturing of the range of areas in which discrimination and inequality feature in our society. I am particularly proud to lead for the Labour Party in this debate, because, of course, the Labour Party was founded on an understanding of inequality, injustice and

exclusion and a recognition that to tackle those things we need people who are discriminated against to shape the political process. To tackle inequality and respect diversity, we need to open up the political process to those who most need its protection.

My colleagues will address a range of the critical issues that are part of the equality and diversity agenda. In speaking to the amendment in my name, I indicate that we are happy to support the motion. However, we believe that, although the sentiments in the motion are easy to express, the challenge is to ensure that the means are willed to deliver on those aspirations. That is what we seek from the statement to the Parliament that we call for in our amendment. We need properly to assess—and to use the equality impact assessment tool to deliver that assessment—and we need to ensure that rhetoric is matched by resources.

We know that striving for equality and celebrating diversity should be the core of Government business. A society that seeks to release all the talents and abilities in our communities is a safer, more secure and better society for all. That is what we are seeking from the Government in a statement. To state the obvious, for example, a straight budget increase for individual services may, ironically, disproportionately benefit those who are already strong in our communities. We might therefore want to ask how the budget presented by the Executive, driven as it is by tax cuts, can benefit the most vulnerable and excluded in our communities.

Stewart Maxwell: Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: I want to make some progress.

I will focus on disability and, more specifically, on children with disability, both as a means of illustrating the challenge of delivering equality through the budget and to raise with the Executive grave concerns about its budgeting priorities.

I have come to the issue most sharply because of the experience of a number of my constituents who have children with disability and special needs, but the issues that they raise are the common experience of many families. I recognise the courage, persistence and moderation of those parents in pursuing the issues, but the reality for them is that to have a child with a disability is, it seems, always to be engaged in a battle, struggle and fight to secure for their child what they need to thrive. It is harder to access services, child care, after-school care and holiday clubs and to secure for their children their independence and happiness in adult life.

As a small example, we know that three out of four blind or visually impaired people are unemployed. We know, too, that disabled young people make up 8 per cent of all 16 to 34-year-olds, yet in 2005-06 22 per cent of all young Scots who were not in employment, education or training were disabled. We have concerns about the language of the Executive on regulation. I ask the minister to reflect that one person's excessive red tape is another person's job opportunity. When talking about employment, we also have to challenge employers. I hope that the minister can confirm that any benefits to business that come through the budget will be attached to conditions in relation to those whom businesses seek to employ.

We know that supporting disabled children puts pressure on parents; pressure is also put on siblings and on their parents' capacity to give them the attention that they need. Members may be aware of the powerful every disabled child matters campaign, which sought to get the UK Government to understand more fully the challenges faced by families and to engage in creating change for them. As a consequence, a group was set up, chaired by Tom Clarke MP, to review and hear evidence and to make recommendations to the Government. The group took evidence from across the UK, including Scotland, and the report that the group submitted highlights critical issues for families.

The UK Government responded with the document "Aiming high for disabled children: better support for families" in May 2007. This may not come as a huge surprise, but the report highlighted the critical need to empower disabled children and their families, provide more responsive services and support, and improve the quality of support. With the response came a £340 million package, £280 million of which was a grant to cover the cost of delivery of improvements in the provision of short breaks for children, allowing a change of environment for the child and respite for carers and siblings.

As a direct consequential from that funding, the Executive received £34 million. In response to a parliamentary question, the Minister for Children and Early Years, Adam Ingram, confirmed that the money had been received but that it was for the Scottish Government to determine how it was spent. Will the Minister for Communities and Sport confirm today that that £34 million will be spent on meeting the needs of disabled children and their families, as outlined in the UK Government's response, with a particular focus on short breaks and respite? Technically, of course, the Minister for Children and Early Years was correct, but I am sure that the Minister for Communities and Sport will agree that it would be an outrage if families in Scotland did not benefit from the funding, given

the groundbreaking work that was done by the families and campaigning groups to create understanding of the issues and pressure for the funding.

We seek the minister's reassurance that the £34 million is not a windfall that the Government will use to fund its tax-cutting priorities but is recognised as critical funding to change the lives of vulnerable children. It would be a bitter irony if there were no beneficial consequences to vulnerable children of the hard work of families of disabled children and the support of disability groups.

In the summing-up speech, will the minister commit to making a statement to Parliament, as requested in our amendment, on how the budget, shaped by the equality impact assessment tool, will meet the aspirations in the motion? Will he guarantee that that statement will identify how the £34 million will be spent to meet disabled children's needs, as identified in "Aiming high for disabled children"? Will he resist the red-tape argument and ensure that any employability strategy challenges employers as well as employees? Will he consider how business tax cuts can be a means of creating support in the business community for employing people with disabilities?

Further, will the minister confirm the commitment to localised funding for excluded groups, to address their experience? They know the problems, but they also know the answers. Will he meet representatives of disability groups in particular to pursue the agenda of how the fruits of their campaigning labour will be delivered to families with disabled children?

As for local government spending priorities, will the minister guarantee that equality groups will be involved in the development and monitoring of single outcome agreements, to ensure that some of the most vulnerable in our communities do not bear the cost of the new change in funding?

Like all other members, Labour members recognise the broader agenda. We also recognise the progress that has been made by the former Labour-led Executive and—critically—by the current Labour Government, which is willing to take courageous action on the equality agenda. We all like warm words, but the people in our communities who are most sharply aware of inequality and discrimination, which pepper and shape their every day and every waking moment, deserve from all of us the Executive's unequivocal commitment to putting its money where its mouth is.

It is a privilege to participate in the debate. I trust that the minister will respond to some of the sharp points that I have raised.

I move amendment S3M-928.2, to insert at end:

"further recognises that equality impact assessment tools should be used in determining and assessing policy priorities and spending allocations, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward a statement to the Parliament detailing how the above commitments on equality and diversity will be delivered through the Scottish budget."

15:21

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): First, I thank the Minister for Communities and Sport for clarifying the rolled-up funding issue. Having specific figures on that will help the organisations that are involved.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate, particularly during equality and diversity week. We should always have the subject on our radar because, despite the positive steps to which the minister and Johann Lamont referred, there is still a long way to go.

Scotland is undoubtedly a diverse society, no matter how that is defined, and it is a better place for that. The rich panoply of individual, cultural and social contributions that make up society brings social, economic and cultural benefits. The Liberal Democrats welcome that for our country.

It is of course welcome that the motion acknowledges the importance of that equality and diversity, but it is perhaps significant that an attempt was made earlier this week to produce a single consensual motion. I was a little concerned that that was an attempt to avoid the questions that many members have raised and are likely to raise about how the Scottish National Party has approached the issue.

Despite the warm words, the budget and the economic strategy contain clear indications that the mainstreaming of equalities has disappeared off the agenda. Before anybody becomes excited about that, I make it clear that a change in funding and well-meaning words in the spending review document do not represent an equalities policy in any circumstances.

Stewart Maxwell rose—

Hugh O'Donnell: I will take an intervention from the cabinet secretary.

Stewart Maxwell: I thank Hugh O'Donnell for the promotion to cabinet secretary. First, does he accept that the budget for equalities and dealing with violence against women will increase by a substantial sum in the next three years? I laid that out clearly in last week's debate on violence against women.

Secondly, if Hugh O'Donnell checks the budget document, he will see on page 4 a statement about equalities and on page 107 a clear and

unequivocal statement about mainstreaming equalities.

Hugh O'Donnell: I am sure that the minister will merit the promotion in due course. I take his points about those statements, to which I will refer later in my speech. I acknowledge the budget increase, which I have mentioned.

My main concern is that simply saying well-meaning words is not good enough. By the time that documents have been produced, it is almost too late to consider equalities—they are part of the whole process of developing and delivering policy.

There is no trade-off between the economic imperative and equalities generally, and despite the project money to which the minister referred, there is not much to indicate that the Government sees equalities as much more than a bolt-on.

There is a reference to equity in “The Government Economic Strategy”, and the Government followed the same line in the budget, but it is understood that the strategy deals with economic inequalities. However, inequalities go beyond economic inequalities. The clear implication is that policies and resources will be targeted at addressing income inequalities and promoting regional equity, but where is the commitment to equal pay and single status even in that sphere? There are no references to equal pay and single status, although 20,000 cases are waiting to be addressed and £5 million has already been paid out.

It is almost impossible to find any notion, beyond the very narrowly defined notion of equity, of how equalities considerations have informed the Government's economic strategy and budget. What, for example, are the implications for equalities of the Government's pursuit of efficiency savings and the transfer of responsibilities for delivering services and the equalities agenda to the voluntary sector? At first glance, it seems that that sector is getting more money, but there has been no indication of what is expected of it. There is an efficiency drive in the public sector—target savings of 2 per cent have been set—and the inescapable conclusion is that the voluntary sector will be the mechanism by which savings will be levered out of the public sector. However, that approach will work only if the voluntary sector does not get the money that it needs. It has not even been clearly told yet what job it is expected to do.

If the SNP is so committed to equalities and mainstreaming, why do the “Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007” and “The Government Economic Strategy” not refer to gender stereotyping when they discuss skills development? By focusing on that issue, the SNP could encourage women to take up career

opportunities that have the possibility of higher incomes. The issue is particularly important at a time when, to our shame, the gender pay gap is widening. Removing such barriers so that people can make non-traditional career choices is part of what mainstreaming equalities is all about and helps to lift them out of poor pay situations. On the basis of the documents that I have referred to, it is clear that that idea has not occurred to the SNP, although I am sure that the minister will clarify what I have misinterpreted.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Hugh O'Donnell: Certainly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr O'Donnell is just finishing.

Hugh O'Donnell: I am sorry.

We should all be concerned that the budget—in its details and in how it makes people know what is expected of them—pays little more than lip service to equalities. That is disappointing. I hope that the minister will respond to the points that I have raised.

I move amendment S3M-928.1, to insert at end:

“further welcomes the creation of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights with a remit to promote and encourage best practice in human rights including the rights of those groups whose rights are not otherwise sufficiently promoted; regrets the absence of a commitment to the mainstreaming of equality in the Scottish budget document; is concerned at the rolling up into the local government settlement of equalities funding, including the Violence Against Women Fund and the Women's Aid Fund where they will have to compete with other local government delivery priorities, and therefore believes that the Scottish Government should clarify its commitment to mainstreaming equality and how its identified equalities funding will support that objective.”

15:28

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I apologise to the Presiding Officer, the ministers and to everyone else in the chamber for missing the start of the debate.

In September, the Minister for Communities and Sport, Stewart Maxwell, attended the Equal Opportunities Committee away day, during which the committee asked whether it would be possible to hold a debate in the Scottish Parliament to mark the European year of equal opportunities for all in 2007. I am grateful to the Scottish Government for setting aside parliamentary time to discuss the many, varied, complex and extremely important issues that relate to raising awareness of rights and equal opportunities and to promoting the benefits that embracing diversity can bring to key stakeholders in European societies, such as the

voluntary sector, local authorities, private companies, communities and individuals.

The first-ever European equality summit was held in Berlin in January 2007. Last week, as convener of the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee, I attended the year's closing conference in Lisbon, where the varied activities that had taken place in different member states to mark the year were highlighted. Those included the issuing of commemorative stamps and coins, organised road shows on the subject, debates similar to this one, awards for best practice and the use of humour to get the message across and help to raise awareness. In Portugal, that was done through cartoons. In the Scottish Parliament, as part of equality and diversity week, we are holding a room 101 event to raise awareness about the issue in a light-hearted way. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Aneela McKenna and her staff for all the excellent events that they have staged for the Scottish Parliament's equality and diversity week.

The use of humour is worth exploring given the fact that, over the years, there has been a tendency to take equal opportunities to extremes so that, in the public perception, it has become primarily associated with negativity. For example, it is perceived to be about political correctness and what one cannot do. That has meant that, all too often, when equal opportunities is raised, the inevitable reaction is to groan or switch off completely. Yet, the fundamental issue of fairness that equal opportunities seeks to address is one that affects everybody. If not directly about ourselves, it is about our son, daughter, wider family, friend, neighbour, colleague or acquaintance. Equal opportunities is about everyone and involves celebrating diversity, breaking down stereotyping and challenging cultural prejudice.

That message was powerfully brought home to me by one speaker at the Lisbon conference who pointed out that, although climate change has dominated political thought in recent years by posing the question, "Can we live without the planet?" a more pressing question—given the international conflict that is almost a permanent feature in the world arena—is perhaps, "Can we live without each other?" Clearly, we cannot. That makes it all the more pertinent to raise awareness of and establish our understanding of diversity and difference as positive rather than negative attributes.

There is encouraging evidence that private companies and multinationals such as L'Oréal are already recognising and promoting diversity as good for competitiveness and for their public image. Their philosophy is that diversity is the mirror of the world and breeds creativity. L'Oréal

therefore not only has diversity as a core value, but has established a diversity laboratory to exchange and promote best practice among other countries. It is interesting to note that more than 50 per cent of the company's managers are women. There is, therefore, a growing recognition in both the public and private sectors that the workplace is a key channel for the promotion of diversity and intercultural dialogue and that there are economic benefits to be reaped from that. There are lessons there to be learned for Scotland.

I will briefly mention some of the valid points that were raised at yesterday's round-table discussion on barriers to mainstreaming equal opportunities in Scotland, which the Equal Opportunities Committee held to celebrate the European year of equal opportunities. At the debate, it was pointed out that mainstreaming is not always clearly understood, and concern was expressed about the lack of sufficient scrutiny and analysis of spending commitments dedicated to tackling barriers to equal opportunities and to promoting diversity.

Very pertinent points were also raised about access to justice being denied in relation to the tribunal system, which militates against individuals taking up complaints on their own. They find it too expensive to do so, they may lack expertise and such actions can often be a death knell for their career prospects. There is therefore definitely a case for exploring the increased use of alternative dispute resolution and mediation to encourage early resolution and to give value for money.

Those and other issues will be pursued more thoroughly with the minister, not least during the weeks and months ahead as we scrutinise the draft budget. For today, the Scottish Conservatives will support the motion in Stewart Maxwell's name.

15:34

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee and its disability reporter, I am grateful to the minister for having lodged the motion for debate today. Parliament must be seen to take a lead for Scotland and beyond in recognising the diversity of our society and, at the same time, raising awareness of the fact that all our diverse elements are of equal value. I am therefore happy to see that the Government's motion contains a commitment to promoting and mainstreaming equality, and to continuing the commitment to tackle disadvantage within our communities. However, I must emphasise that although I know only too well about the need to tackle poverty as an equalities issue, we must not take our eye off the ball with regard to discrimination in all its other insidious forms.

Unbelievably, the Equal Pay Act 1970 still blatantly fails to eradicate the gender imbalance in incomes: 37 years after the act was passed, it is disgraceful that women in Scotland are paid on average 15 per cent less than men for doing the same or an equivalent job. Indeed, that gap has widened inexplicably in Scotland in the past two years, which must be investigated with great haste—otherwise it might continue.

Furthermore, the Scottish Trades Union Congress reports that approximately 1,000 women per year lose their jobs as a result of pregnancy. Discrimination therefore appears to know no joy at all.

Mainstreaming or embedding equalities in society is not yet widely understood as a concept; far less is it a reality. We should therefore hold up as examples organisations that recognise diversities and which implement equalities legislation as intended. Conversely, we must have the courage to focus a light on local authorities, educational establishments and businesses that fail to do that, perhaps by obliging them to publish successful actions that have been raised against them by the people whom they have failed.

Fifty-eight per cent of Scottish disabled people have no formal qualifications, compared with 24 per cent of people who do not have a disability. It is sad, but not surprising, that young disabled Scots are therefore twice as likely to be not in employment, education or training as those without a disability. In further education, the ability to travel independently is still being used as one of the criteria that govern admissions, thereby frequently debarring disabled students from further education.

Johann Lamont: As the member is committed to disability and has a role as a disability reporter, will he join me in encouraging the minister to ensure that the £34 million that was given to the Scottish Executive to support the needs of disabled children and their families will be used to do so?

Bill Kidd: I thank the member for her—I was going to say interruption, but that is not nice—intervention. I am sure that the minister heard the member's full and comprehensive speech earlier, and he is better able than me to make that decision. I hope that the money will be targeted specifically and that the full amount will be given, but that is not for me to do or say.

Because young disabled people are twice as likely to be not in employment, education or training, they lack education and job opportunities. Their prospects are limited and, inevitably, poverty ensues.

For those with learning disabilities and mental health problems, there is often a social stigma with

the added complication that they might be unable to articulate ideas and feelings, which leads to greater risk of heart and other diseases, and a shorter life span. The learning disabled also now face social isolation and reduced job and education prospects because they will lose their travel passes if they are on the lower rate of the disability living allowance. That will be yet another blow to their chances of equality and hopes of more control over their lives. I hope that that will be addressed.

Opportunities in life depend upon the equality that is afforded by society to a diverse range of people. Whether we talk about disability, gender, age, race, faith or sexuality, our words must be a prelude to action. It is the duty of all in the Parliament to embed the mainstreaming of equalities in all our work. I thank the minister for the motion.

15:40

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in today's debate. I congratulate the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body on organising the equality and diversity week here in Parliament as part of the celebrations of the European year of equal opportunities for all. It is important that we are all aware of the progress that has been made towards equality. We can with real pride point to the Parliament as playing a leading role in promoting equality and providing a good example of diversity in practice.

I am also pleased that today's debate follows on from last week's debate, which focused on stopping violence against women and children. In today's *Scotsman*, domestic violence is described as "an epidemic" by Morag Alexander, who is Scotland's commissioner on the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Given that we are debating equality and diversity, does the member recognise that last week's debate was not terribly equal in raising the issue of domestic violence against men? That point is not often raised.

Marlyn Glen: I thank Mike Rumbles for that intervention, which we have heard before. The statistics, which were well rehearsed last week, show that a large proportion of women are victims of domestic violence. We cannot forget that. There is a hidden epidemic of domestic violence. Therefore, I call again on the Government to ensure that the work on providing services is continued. As I said last week, it is important that those services include not just refuges for the victims but means of ensuring that the perpetrators—generally men—change their behaviour.

As well as ensuring the provision of services, the Government should look seriously at the causes of such crimes of hatred. I am delighted that the newly formed EHRC has already spoken out at the beginning of the 16 days of activism against gender violence. However, it cannot be repeated often enough that we need urgently to look at the reasons behind what is, in the words of Kofi Annan,

“the most atrocious manifestation of the systemic discrimination and inequality women continue to face”.

Women are not a homogeneous group and it would be wrong to see them only as victims, but many different women—and, sadly, all people—can be discriminated against for multiple reasons. In the Equal Opportunities Committee, we have identified six strands: gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age and faith and religion. We have strand-specific reporters who facilitate our work both within and outwith Parliament to counter discrimination on any of those grounds.

I have always held to the belief that much can be achieved by positive reinforcement—by wielding a carrot as well as a stick. A great deal of discrimination comes from ignorance, so it is essential that we spend time gathering and facilitating the spread of information about all the different communities and cultures that make Scotland what it is today—one Scotland, many cultures. We need to celebrate the diversity of life.

Of course, we also need legislation to underline how important equality is. The gender equality duty, which came into force in April this year, has been described as the biggest change to sex equality legislation since the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. In the Scottish Executive's gender equality scheme, which was published earlier this year, the then Minister for Communities, Rhona Brankin, outlined a vision that we would all acknowledge as being the Scotland for which we strive: a Scotland in which women do not face discrimination in the workplace because they are pregnant or because they work part-time; a Scotland in which health outcomes for men are improved and men are better able to achieve a work-life balance; a Scotland in which no woman faces the threat of domestic violence; and a Scotland in which young men and young women are able to make choices about their education and careers without being restricted by gender stereotyping.

The gender equality duty requires all public bodies to acknowledge the need to end sex discrimination and harassment and to promote equality of opportunity between women and men. In short, the quality of the service that people receive from a public body should not depend on their gender. In its consultation on its gender equality scheme, the Scottish Executive consulted

on the agenda for women in Scotland. The priority issues included gender stereotyping in education, occupational segregation, equal pay, child care, women's participation in decision making and violence against women. Each of those topics deserves a debate, and the Scottish Government needs to ensure that its budget gives proper consideration to each of them. I look forward to seeing the detail of how the Government will fulfil its commitment to the duty.

I turn now to the budget. A key cause for concern is the possible impact that the proposed spending allocations across the spending review period may have on promotion of equal pay. We are all aware of how pervasive gender segregation is in employment. Efficiency savings cannot be made on the backs of the workers—mainly women—who are involved in delivering services. A focus on efficiency savings should and must not imply a trade-off with the strategic priority that is attached to the promotion of equality, not just equity. The explicit commitment to mainstreaming is integral to sustainable economic development. Although I welcome the minister's statement today, I look forward to his giving evidence to the Equal Opportunities Committee next week, when we can examine the issue in greater detail.

I call on the Government, all members and all citizens of Scotland to commit themselves once and for all to working to eliminate discrimination in all its forms and to celebrate the continuing diversity of Scotland.

15:46

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I welcome today's debate and the varied contributions that have been made. The members who have spoken so far have articulated the scale of the problem that faces our society and have highlighted the range of inequalities that still need to be tackled. Recently, I have been glad to support Patrick Harvie's proposed member's bill on hate crime and Shirley-Anne Somerville's motion supporting the women's coalition's statement of intent, each of which, in its own way, sets out to tackle important areas of inequality.

In the brief time that I have this afternoon, I want to focus on gender inequality—perhaps it is just as well that Mr Rumbles has left the chamber. There is still great gender inequality in Scotland. Men are still paid more than women, thousands of pregnant workers are treated unfairly and thousands of women are sexually harassed at work every year. Although half of us want to work more flexible hours, many of us are denied that. One woman in five faces domestic abuse, conviction rates for rape are at an all-time low and power is still mostly held by men. We will not fix that this afternoon.

In 1975, when the Equal Pay Act 1970 came into force and the Sex Discrimination Bill was passed, I was a student at university. I remember the sense of excitement and the feeling that things were really going to change. Now, more than 30 years on, with my own daughter at university, I have a growing sense of disbelief at the lack of progress. My daughter and her friends face many of the inequalities that my friends and I faced in the 1970s. As the Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland said in its final report, there is an “unfinished revolution”.

In 2028, we will mark the centenary of the Equal Franchise Act 1928, which was passed on 2 July 1928 and gave women the vote on equal terms with men. The Fawcett Society is campaigning to ensure that equality comes of age in the next 21 years. I commend its equal votes, equal power campaign, which seeks to close the gaps between women and men in access to power, money and justice. However, surely we must not wait another 21 years—another generation, with my granddaughter at university—before women gain real equality. The Fawcett Society says that the 21-year target reflects the scale of the current equality gap. At the current rate of change, it will take 200 years to achieve equal representation of women and men in the Westminster Parliament, although we have a better record here, as Marlyn Glen pointed out. It will take 40 years to achieve an equal number of senior women in the judiciary, 60 years to achieve an equal number of female directors of FTSE 100 companies, 80 years before the full-time pay gap closes and 140 years before the part-time gap closes.

We must still mind the gap—the UK has the biggest pay gap of all European Union countries. Women working part-time earn on average 36 per cent less an hour than men working full-time. Women working full-time earn on average 17 per cent less an hour than men working full-time. That is a disgrace. As Unison says, it is the equivalent of men getting paid all year and women working for free from 30 October. The problem affects us throughout our lives, because lower pay means that women also face a pensions gap—their retirement income is 53 per cent of men's.

Although I know that there is a need to tackle all inequalities, I am concerned about the umbrella nature of the new Equality and Human Rights Commission. There is the potential for a loss of focus on gender equality issues. The Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland's final report outlined the changes that are needed here to bring about greater equality and which should be used as the blueprint for action. Gender equality is not just good for individuals—it is good for business and for social well-being. The report said:

“Change is about doing what makes sense for our social health and financial wealth, as well as doing what is right.

Whilst our own lives are made more difficult by these inequalities, Scotland will also lose out economically if we don't tackle them. A country that doesn't use its full potential by channelling women into low paid work, forcing families to struggle to cope and losing the skills of those who cannot work and care will fall behind.”

I note that the Government has increased the budget for equalities, but what will it do to ensure that the money is properly targeted and effective? The UK still works longer hours than other developed countries and has a culture that views the hours that someone puts in as a measure of a person's commitment to their job. Our long-hours working culture means that those who want to balance work and home life find it hard to get on in the workplace and can face discrimination. That is despite the fact that there is clear evidence that, when an employer offers flexibility in respect of working hours, everyone—female employees, male employees and the employer—benefits. In such circumstances, men get to spend more time with their families, which is important as we know that seven out of 10 dads are concerned that they do not spend enough time with their families. For women, greater sharing of caring and work enables them to thrive in the workplace. Furthermore, employers who implement such policies report higher morale, lower turnover of staff and greater productivity.

We need practical measures to ensure that everyone can benefit from such flexible working. Why is it that, in 2007, having children or becoming a carer means economic inequality for women? Why is it that flexible working is not available in all types of work, including senior roles? Why is it that pregnancy discrimination, sexual harassment and other forms of workplace discrimination are not yet eliminated? Until we transform Scotland's workplaces, our choices will remain limited. Men and women will not be able to lead family lives in a way that works for them, older women will continue to be less independent than men and our country will become less productive.

The problem is not with the limits that people have but with the limits that society places on them. We need action now and society needs to catch up. We need to close the income gap, give better support to families, modernise public services and work to deliver equal power. The EOC has spoken of an “unfinished revolution”. I call on the Government to do all that it can to help complete that revolution.

15:53

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I am proud to be able to speak in this debate in equality and diversity week and I congratulate the minister on his positive contribution. I welcome in particular what he said about the mainstreaming of equalities, which was raised at yesterday's

meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee, and the impact of the equality impact assessments, which are at the core of ensuring that equality is delivered by Parliament.

Tomorrow will see the appointment of the first ever Scottish commissioner for human rights. That person will lead on human rights issues relating to devolved matters and, with the other members of the commission, will be charged with promoting widespread awareness, understanding of and respect for human rights; reviewing and recommending changes to any policies or practices of Scottish public authorities; and providing advice and guidance. I am sure that everyone in the chamber will welcome that appointment as further evidence that the Government is committed to equality and justice for all.

I believe that we are moving in the right direction and that the profile and importance of equalities and diversity have grown over the years and will continue to do so. I want to give everyone their due and say that all parties have played a role in that, but we must not be complacent. There will always be new challenges to overcome and there are some challenges that have been going on for a long time without having been resolved.

I want to concentrate on equal pay, which other members have talked about. The Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970, but today many people are still fighting for the right to equal pay. Bill Kidd mentioned that the pay gap between men and women has increased since then. The situation that exists 37 years after passing the act is unacceptable and must be tackled. For far too long, women have been employed in low-paid part-time jobs. I agree with Hugh O'Donnell's words about stereotyping in employment and I assure him that the SNP Government is committed to challenging that serious issue. Equality of pay, conditions and opportunities must be at the forefront of any skills strategy, so that we can ensure, for example, that as many women as men take up apprenticeships and that the drop-out rate for women, which is greater than it is for men, after a couple of months, is examined. I ask the minister to ensure that that is looked at.

In 2001, Wendy Alexander, in answer to a parliamentary question on equal pay in the further education sector, referred to a guidance letter in which she had written:

"staff are the key resource ... and we must continually strive to improve people management, staff development and succession planning."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 15 November 2001; S1W-19620.]

I will avoid commenting on Ms Alexander's powers of people management, staff development and succession planning, but I agree with her remark. I hope that the historic agreement between local

government and the national Government, which the Government has delivered, will provide a firm foundation for future agreements and allow both parties to work together to tackle the problem, after years of failure.

Hugh O'Donnell: On the pressures on and value of staff, does Sandra White agree that given how funds are being allocated for the third sector—the voluntary sector—and the transfer of funds, opportunities for staff in that sector to receive equal and proper pay are potentially threatened?

Sandra White: I do not agree with Hugh O'Donnell. If he reads the *Official Report* of yesterday's Equal Opportunities Committee meeting, he will find that Morag Alexander told the committee that many voluntary organisations have a good approach to equal opportunities and that the public and private sectors can learn from the voluntary sector.

Day care workers in Glasgow are on strike over downgrading of their jobs. Those workers support vulnerable people and do not have the support or opportunities that other members of society enjoy, as members have said. Women in such situations are the very people we are talking about, because low-paid jobs that are done by women are constantly targeted for regrading.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, I do not have time. I would have liked to have given way to Margaret Curran.

I am the Equal Opportunities Committee's reporter on older people and I am the convener of Parliament's cross-party group on older people, age and ageing. The population is ageing and many older people express concern that they are excluded from society, denied opportunities for employment and discriminated against because of their age. Such discrimination is against the law, but it happens and the Government must address it.

I encourage the minister to consider how the Government can work with relevant stakeholders—I hate that word but it is the only one that I could find—to raise awareness of the growing problem of age discrimination and to implement the many recommendations of reports such as the excellent "All Our Futures: Planning for a Scotland with an Ageing Population". That report calls for the planning and delivery of "age-friendly services" and employment opportunities, the establishment of a national forum on ageing—this is a wish list, but I might as well carry on—the development of indicators to monitor success and the production of regular reports to Parliament from 2008.

I hate to say it, but we are all getting older, although we should not fear ageing or run away from the issue. There is much to celebrate about getting older. Older people's experience and the contribution that they can—and do—make to society should be embraced.

15:58

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Like other members, I am pleased to speak in the debate, in the middle of a week of awareness raising in the Parliament about equality and diversity. I thank the Government for bringing the debate.

The debate also takes place during the United Nations 16 days of activism against gender violence. Marlyn Glen mentioned that campaign, the theme of which this year is challenging obstacles. I am pleased that the Minister for Communities and Sport is wearing the white ribbon for men who want to observe the 16 days of action.

The previous Executive put much effort into the promotion of equality and into tackling the most extreme manifestation of gender inequality: violence against women. The Executive built on the work done by women in the Labour and trade union movements over many years.

There can be little doubt that male violence against women is premised on women's inequality and subordination in society. This week, Trevor Phillips described such violence as

"an undeclared war on women".

Therefore it is vital to focus on challenging and changing attitudes, which are supported and encouraged by social structures and cultural messages. All-pervasive messages portray women's needs and rights as less significant than those of men, suggest that it is normal or natural for men to disrespect women, and continue to advocate rigid models of what it means to be a man or a woman in society.

On the continuum of male violence against women and children are domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking, prostitution and pornography. The harm that is caused by some forms of male violence has been recognised, and attempts have been to tackle it, one example of that being the attempts to tackle domestic abuse. I note the good and successful debate in the chamber on that subject.

Today, I will talk specifically about pornography, which is a major obstacle to tackling gender discrimination. In 2004, Malcolm Chisholm, who was the Minister for Communities at the time, stated in the chamber:

"Pornography is predicated on abuse".—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2004; c 12350.]

That statement was an important one for a minister to make.

Over the years, the Equal Opportunities Committee has tried to look into the harm that pornography causes. The task is not easy because of the lack of research. Consideration of pornography tends to attract unhelpful and, at times, hysterical media attention. The debate needs to be around common sense and the evidence that we can find of harm.

In 1990, the Home Office published a review of existing research evidence of the effects of pornography. At the time, owing to the difficulty of getting appropriate control groups for research purposes, it was not possible to conclude whether pornography causes sexual violence. However, the report acknowledged that many women find pornography distressing and that it is frequently the case that women who suffer domestic violence have partners who use pornography heavily. It also showed that some sexual offenders use pornography, including in preparation for committing an offence.

Just last month, two American academics gave evidence to me, as the Equal Opportunities Committee gender reporter, and MSP colleagues. They showed us the results of more recent studies, which found that exposure to violent pornography directly affects aggressive attitudes and behaviours.

The images that are of concern are not only the most extreme. The Home Office report to which I referred stated:

"it might be that sexually violent pornography is the most dangerous but that newspaper nudity is still to a small degree harmful & because newspapers are more everyday than extreme pornography their aggregate effects might be greater. The research evidence is silent on this."

The many women who have been involved in pornography have not been silent on the harm that it has caused them. Some of their stories can be found in reports of the civil rights hearings in the United States of America in the 1980s and 1990s. One of the women who gave evidence was Linda Marchiano, who is otherwise known as Linda Lovelace. Referring to her appearance in a particular pornographic film, she said:

"every time someone watches that film, they are watching me being raped".

Despite protests, the film was shown recently in Edinburgh. That is outrageous.

I will not spend further time saying what pornography is. We all know that. We can all see the reality of the pictures and other images that are often accepted as harmless, but which

dehumanise women, are regularly associated with violence, and are usually accompanied by crude and derogatory captions. They should all simply be captioned "Women for Sale". The images are predicated on women's subordination and objectification, which means that they are predicated on inequality.

Some people argue that pornography is okay because some women make the choice to participate voluntarily in pornography for money. We need to make it clear today that pornography does not exist because of the choices that women make; it exists because men use it at the expense of women for sexual gratification. Pornography is big business.

The last statement helps to explain the pervasive nature of pornography. It is everywhere, from the violent hardcore images that can be accessed in minutes via the worldwide web to T-shirts with insidious slogans, and the Playboy merchandise that is now aimed specifically at our children. Indeed, the BBC is even associated with pornography, courtesy of the Spice Girls video that accompanied the children in need theme song this year. It is simply wrong to give out those kinds of message to our children. The message that we must continually reinforce is the one that says, "Women and children are not for sale."

Does the minister have plans to tackle the normalisation of pornography that is aimed specifically at children? Will he agree, and put on the record today, that pornography is premised on inequality and that it is part of the continuum of male violence against women? Will he indicate whether there will be further consultation on the proposal to create an offence in Scotland of the possession of extreme pornography?

I conclude with the UN declaration on the elimination of violence against women, which acknowledges and confirms the basic tenet that

"violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men".

16:05

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): Throughout east Africa, English and Kiswahili are widely spoken, alongside 100 or more native languages. It is now the aim of at least some east African Governments to modernise, to cease all teaching of regional native languages and to restrict all communication, including radio and television communication, to English or Swahili. Some groups have even argued for the removal of Swahili—if everybody speaks English, Swahili is not needed. I will read one response from one of those countries' Government websites: "Why

continue with native languages? How many people cannot speak either Swahili or English? Native languages are redundant. How much money is wasted on producing documents that people can easily read in another language?"

I ask members and people in Scotland whether they would support such a programme of language eradication and discrimination in Africa. If the answer is no, we must ask why not. Let me read comments on a similar matter that were made on another website:

"How many monoglot Scots-speakers (who can't read English) are there in Scotland? And how much Scottish taxpayers' money is spent on translating public documents, such as this website, into Scots?"

I am confident that most people would be horrified to hear of plans to eradicate native African languages—plans that, for the record, I invented. All the Africans whom I know are proud of their rich linguistic heritage. Nonetheless, it is clear from the second comment that I quoted, which I did not invent, that some people in Scotland take exactly that view of native Scottish languages. They may be horrified by discrimination against native African languages, but Scots is clearly different.

Here is an excerpt from another comment that was sent to the Scottish Parliament website:

"can I ask why there is any need to offer a translation in Scots? Are we trying to promote this ludicrous form of bastardised English ... Will Scots be promoted as a language through television and other media, and taught at school?"

Would not Franco have been proud of such a quote? Following the Spanish civil war, Catalan teaching was forbidden and Catalan cultural institutions were closed down. For Franco, Catalan was a bastardised Castilian that was not to be promoted through the media or taught at school. I have yet to hear of any support for Franco's Catalan eradication programme yet, oddly, many have no difficulty adopting a similar view of Scots—the discrimination is not acceptable abroad, but it is fine at home.

Many similar comments were received by those who were responsible for the first tentative attempts to put Scots on the Scottish Parliament website. For example, one stated:

"Is there a tradition of written as compared to oral use of 'Scots'? Are there any written examples of this 'language' other than your website?"

What an incredible question. Scots language literature is studied in Japanese and German universities, yet some individuals who are the products of a Scottish education remain ignorant of names from the past such as Dunbar, Lyndsay, Fergusson, Burns and MacDiarmid, and of today's Blackhall, Fitt and Flett. Franco would have been

proud of such results—complete cultural ignorance.

Is there discrimination against the Scots language? Given my earlier quotes, one would be surprised if there was not. I will give a few small samples of discrimination, starting with that great institution the BBC. The BBC states that it should represent the United Kingdom, its nations, regions and communities. It boldly declares that its output should support the UK's indigenous minority languages,

"such as Gaelic, Welsh, Irish and Ulster Scots".

That is pretty blatant discrimination. If somebody speaks Scots in Ulster, their rights are recognised, but if they are a Scots speaker in Scotland—they might be a Doric speaker or from Shetland or the west coast—according to the BBC, they have no rights, no recognition and no acceptance.

The recent language at Letham project threw up the admission by some teachers that they had been discriminating against Scots-speaking pupils. To be fair, those teachers were genuinely horrified when they realised that they were guilty of discrimination. Nonetheless, discrimination, however inadvertent, existed and if it existed in that school, it almost certainly exists elsewhere.

Do Scots-speaking adults face discrimination? That is unknown. However, given the attitude of organisations such as the BBC, the nature of the comments that were received on the Scottish Parliament website and the evidence of discrimination in schools, it is, to say the least, highly unlikely that Scots-speaking adults are not discriminated against. After eight years of a Scottish Parliament, Scots speakers might well—to quote an English author to show that I have no bias—echo Shakespeare's Macduff and ask:

"Stands Scotland where it did?"

Sadly, Ross's reply might still be all too true:

"Alas, poor country! Almost afraid to know itself."

Endless excuses have been made for why the rights of Scots speakers have not been recognised. "There is no standard written Scots." Nonsense. That is simply not true; it is an excuse. Shetlandic Scots speakers are just as capable as Doric Scots speakers or Borders Scots speakers of reading Dunbar, Lyndsay or Fergusson.

A related argument is, "We cannot teach Scots because there are various dialects." Another excuse—what language does not have dialects? Should we stop teaching English because the inhabitants of Glasgow and Lewis, or the inhabitants of London and Newcastle for that matter, have different dialects?

Another popular excuse is, "We should not be teaching Scots; we should be teaching a more

useful foreign language." I refer members to my earlier comments regarding the native languages of Kenya. If people do not agree with those comments, they cannot agree with that comment about Scots.

The Catalan experience shows that teaching children in Castilian and Catalan actually makes it easier for the children to learn a third language. Furthermore, the Letham project has revealed considerable spin-offs from the teaching of Scots.

It is time for the excuses to end, it is time for the discrimination to end, and it is time for the rights of Scots speakers to be recognised, not ignored. The motion makes it clear that discrimination on any grounds is wrong. We all recognise that. It has been eight years since this Parliament was formed. How much longer must Scots speakers wait, not only for their rights to be acknowledged but for real action to be taken?

16:11

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): Ah'm gey tempted to do my speech in Scots—perhaps another day.

Bill Wilson: No, no—go on!

Cathy Peattie: We would, of course, all like a world where bodies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission are not necessary. Although we have made substantial progress over the years—fighting discrimination, changing attitudes and enhancing rights—barriers persist and opportunities are certainly not equal.

One million Scots are disabled or affected by long-term illness. Towards the end of the previous session of Parliament, the Equal Opportunities Committee held a major inquiry into the barriers facing disabled people. The inquiry resulted in the report "Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities". I hope that, in this session, we will see progress on some of the suggestions made in that report.

One issue already raised in this session, through a petition from one of my constituents, is the difficulties encountered by disabled people seeking to work from home. My constituent felt that addressing the issue would address the problems that he and many disabled people face. We have to be more flexible. For example, some people working from home should be able to work for shorter times. I say to the minister that we have to find ways to help people to work. We have a real resource of people in Scotland, but many are unable to work even when they want to.

Women have less access than men to political power and decision-making across a range of public bodies. In spite of the high level of women active in their communities, they are

underrepresented in local government. Only one party in this Parliament has equal numbers of men and women. However, to be fair, since 1999 the percentage of women among Tory MSPs has improved, overtaking the SNP, which is going in the opposite direction, on a downwards slide towards the Liberals' poor percentage of women. There have been some damn good Liberal women in this Parliament and I would like to see some more.

In Scotland, we still have a large pay gap between men and women. In full-time work, women earn on average £172.80 for every £200 earned by men. In part-time work, it is £130 for every £200. Women tend to have less access to incomes, earnings, pensions and resources such as cars or housing.

Women are the main users of public transport. Despite that, buses are often not user friendly. Try getting on a bus wi twa bairns and a pram. Ah'll tell ye—it is damn hard. Or try getting on a bus with a wheelchair.

Women have a one in five chance of experiencing domestic abuse during their lives; and there are many similar observations that I could make about barriers and discrimination on other grounds. In addressing those issues, I am sure that the Scottish Executive will use fine words with which we will all agree. However, it is by its actions that it should be judged.

The Parliament has a good record on equal opportunities. We have promoted mainstreaming and gender proofing of budgets, and have worked with the voluntary sector, businesses, trade unions and campaigning organisations to improve the lives of women, older people, younger people, black and ethnic minority people, LGBT groups, people with disabilities, and people with a wide range of religious and other beliefs. It is vital for the Parliament to do that. I want that record to be maintained, and for equal opportunities to be advanced within the Parliament. Equalities underpin the work of the Parliament. The Equal Opportunities Committee was set up right at the start because people felt that equalities were important. We must continue to promote them. That is a challenge not just to the Scottish Executive, but to the Parliament. We must scrutinise the Executive and hold it to account. We must all work to make Scotland a better place in which to live, a Scotland in which people can be proud to be part of a country that promotes equal opportunities for all.

16:16

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): In this debate on equality and diversity, many members have rightly focused on a number of groups in society,

including females, ethnic minorities, the physically disabled, the visually impaired and the learning disabled. I had not included Scots speakers in that list, but I will now. Those are specific groups with particular equality issues that the motion rightly takes seriously. However, I will focus on an issue that cuts across all those groups, which is regional or area-specific equality, or the correlation of poverty with where someone lives.

The motion talks about equality of opportunity and a fairer Scotland. Hard work and talent should be rewarded within society, but unless the conditions are right, many hard-working, talented people will struggle to flourish. Why is it that only 22 per cent of Glasgow's youngsters in fourth year received five credit level qualifications or equivalent this summer, while the figure was 57 per cent in East Renfrewshire? As a representative of Glasgow, I find such disparities deeply worrying.

Glasgow is not alone—other areas show similar inequalities. Dundee and West Dunbartonshire deserve special mention. Youngsters in those areas are no less intelligent than those in East Renfrewshire. I suggest that while the reasons for poorer performance may be complex, when the complexities are stripped away, poverty becomes central to equalities in terms of regional equality and educational attainment. Education is at the core of equality of opportunity, and it is a crucial stepping stone to finding a route out of poverty. For many youngsters, such stepping stones do not exist or are more difficult to navigate. Consequently, it is not just in education that inequality of opportunity by location is a reality.

Margaret Curran: I welcome the tenor of Bob Doris's contribution. Does he think that grant-aided expenditure, local government funding and health funding should reflect regional inequality, as he describes it?

Bob Doris: There has to be some form of correlation there. At today's meeting of the Local Government and Communities Committee, the Minister for Communities and Sport talked about how that would work.

We are talking about regional inequality by location for educational attainment, but of course when talking about equality in education, it would be remiss not to mention visually impaired students, who struggle to get the necessary software and laptops, both at school and at home for homework; learning-disabled students who do not always get the correct support; or students for whom English is a second language, who struggle to get the necessary support.

As well as equality of opportunity, there is equality of condition. It is a central human rights issue that not only should everyone have a real

opportunity to improve their lot, but that we all have a right to have certain basic needs met. For instance, to what extent can different groups—or, in my example, people from different locations—get access to a decent standard of housing, be able to walk down the street safely, or have basic leisure and recreational amenities close at hand? The poverty statistics for parts of Glasgow make woeful reading. One fifth of Scotland's poverty is based in Glasgow, and Glasgow has a disproportionate share of Scotland's poorest areas. With that comes environmental poverty. Something that brought home to me the qualitative aspect of equality was the fact that, while in Eastwood 23.1 per cent of the population stays within 500m of a derelict site, in Springburn the figure is 86.3 per cent. Those figures clearly demonstrate the poverty of environment as well as of income.

I should mention a couple of other groups in connection with equality of condition. We must ensure access to decent local amenities. It is my understanding that, in the whole of Glasgow, there is only one hoist suitable for adults with physical disabilities who want to access a swimming pool. That is surely unacceptable. It is also unacceptable that, if two people who are in a same-sex relationship walk down the street in parts of the city, they are more likely to be attacked simply because they are in such a relationship. Those situations are unacceptable as part of the human experience.

It would be wrong not to mention life expectancy when discussing regional equality. The projected life expectancy of babies born in Glasgow in 2004 to 2006 is 73.7 years, whereas the national average is 77.2. That leaves Glasgow 32nd out of 32 local authorities. International comparisons do not look good either, particularly for those who live in Glasgow's Calton area, where male life expectancy is an appalling 53.9 years, compared with more than 70 years in the Gaza strip. If Mike Rumbles had hung around to talk about inequalities with regard to male life expectancy in Scotland, that would perhaps have been constructive.

I was going to talk in a genuinely non-partisan way about the new Government's early years strategy, which I believe to be based on an equalities agenda. However, I do not have time for that, so I will point out one aspect of it of which I am proud: the extension of allowances for foster parents to the kinship carers of looked-after children. That is incredibly important in equality terms.

I have been talking about putting poverty at the centre of the equalities agenda because poverty bites. It does not distinguish colour, creed, sexual orientation or disability, it just bites. There are

regional inequalities in where it bites, and we must accept that. Many people face not only inferior life chances because of where they live, but stigma because they come from a certain part of the country or even a certain housing scheme. I am sure that there is room in equality and diversity week for them and for the Equality and Human Rights Commission to acknowledge the scale of poverty and inequality.

With that in mind, it gives me great pleasure to support the motion.

16:22

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): I thank the minister for responding to the Equal Opportunities Committee's request for a debate by lodging the motion for us to discuss. The various parties that are represented in the Parliament may have different visions for the future of the country, but a Scotland in which each person is provided with the equality of opportunity to reach their potential and fulfil their aims must be common to them all. To aspire towards anything less will only ensure that history records us as having failed to dismantle the institutionalised discrimination that prevents marginalised communities from realising their potential for themselves and for Scotland.

To get consensus on that is the easy bit—the motherhood and apple pie of any equality debate. However, it is no longer good enough or acceptable merely to work towards equality of opportunity and the removal of discrimination. It is time to insist that measurable, person-centred delivery of equality becomes part of today's working culture and does not remain something that always seems to hover on the threshold of tomorrow.

Scotland's public sector is awash with action plans on the delivery of race equality, disability equality, gender equality and plans to deliver equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Particularly in the case of race equality, some of the action plans have been around for a few years, but what is being delivered? The Government's own effort to define its workforce in terms of ethnicity is two years out of date and cannot tell us—as is required by law—how well people from minority ethnic communities are making career progress compared with everyone else. I ask the minister to give the Parliament clear evidence in his closing speech that the Government is aware of that and to say what its plans are to take us forward.

One of the targets in the Government's disability equality scheme is to increase the number of job applications from disabled people, but is that really the best that we can do for disabled people as we

reach the end of 2007? VisitScotland, which has a major role to play in persuading the rest of the world to visit Glasgow for the Commonwealth games, does not even have a race equality scheme, in spite of that being a legal requirement for all public bodies.

Equality impact assessments of all functions and policies of public bodies, which are required by law to meet race, disability and gender equality duties, are a powerful tool for identifying and removing barriers to a person's equality of access to, and experience of, public services, as well as for accessing work opportunities within those services. Unfortunately, however, such assessments are as scarce as the Government's equality commitments in its budget, as the evidence that was provided by the equality organisations that were represented at yesterday's meeting of the Equal Opportunities Committee clearly outlined.

The Government has published on its website the outcomes of just two equality impact assessments. Is that really the sum total of the policies and functions that are available to the Scottish Government, or is it another comment on just how poorly committed it is to using the tools that the major equality communities agree will significantly dismantle the barriers to equality?

As I have said, we must move on—and quickly—from merely working towards delivering equality to starting to deliver measurable, person-centred changes that will enable people from all the equality communities to reach their potential. Despite changing attitudes and improvements in some areas, Scotland has not moved far or fast enough in eliminating discrimination and building a model of equality that is meaningful to everyone in the country.

The minister spoke about the report by the Equal Opportunities Committee on the Gypsy Traveller community. I was proud to play a role in that in the first session of the Parliament. I was disappointed that previous Executives did not go as far as we would have liked in delivering on that report's recommendations. However, that was not because of a lack of effort—I know the former ministers who were involved in considering and developing those issues. The reality was that that could not simply be done by the Scottish Executive, and it could not be done by diktat. It required buy-in. It required targets. It required public bodies, such as the national health service, social services and education authorities, to commit to achieving what was set out in the Equal Opportunities Committee's recommendations.

I am concerned that the Government's budget proposals do not contain targets. There are no firm budgets. Ring fencing has been removed from the very things that we asked to be established to

ensure that delivery could be achieved for the Gypsy Traveller community, and to ensure that it could be measured.

Stewart Maxwell: In many ways, I accept what the member says. However, does he accept that there is a statutory duty on public bodies, including local authorities and central Government, as far as equalities are concerned? Does he accept that that statutory duty is in place and should be adhered to?

Michael McMahon: That just reiterates my point about all the equalities strategies that we have. There are requirements and commitments, but there has to be a driving force and there has to be a way of measuring whether those aims are being achieved. We need to tackle persistent inequalities in new ways. As Johann Lamont outlined, we need much better than the Government is currently offering before we can fully approve and be confident of its equality and diversity agenda. That is what the organisations that came to the Equal Opportunities Committee said yesterday. One of those organisations said that the progress that had been made under previous Executives had been faltering, but at least it was progress. The concern is that, without proper targeting and the proper standards being set, the budget as it is outlined contains a huge hole. We need to know where the money is coming from, and we need to know where it is directed. That has to be specified.

My colleague Marlyn Glen said that she looked forward to discussing those issues with the Minister for Communities and Sport when he comes before the Equal Opportunities Committee next week. I said earlier that much of the talk that we might have about this issue is apple pie. I recommend that the minister does not come along to the committee with apple pie next week—he should bring the meat dish.

16:29

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This is an important debate, the roots of which go deep into the Parliament's founding principles, and indeed its psyche. Some important speeches have been made, not least that last one, from Michael McMahon, with his committee experience. There is a broad welcome across the chamber for the main principles of the motion. I sincerely welcome the minister's comments on making progress on independent living, as well as what he said on university fees for asylum seekers; that issue is close to my heart.

However, the SNP Government must address a number of issues. It is passing strange that a nationalist Government whose *raison d'être* is to throw off the purported shackles of Westminster finds it possible to refer in its motion to the Great

Britain Commission for Equality and Human Rights, whose remit in key respects is limited to reserved matters, but to ignore completely the Scottish Commission for Human Rights, which was established by this Parliament, whose remit is commensurate with our responsibilities and whose chair will be approved by the Parliament tomorrow. I accept that the Scottish Commission for Human Rights does not have a formal role in the equalities field; nevertheless, it will have a significant role in promoting best practice in human rights and, not least, the interests of the groups that tend to be left out. Given Michael McMahon's comments on the lack of targets and drivers, that is an important point.

Then there is the matter of the budget. Partly because of its opaqueness and lack of transparency, the SNP budget is assuming central importance as a litmus test of the SNP's commitment across a series of policy areas. We already know that it is incoherent in that it does not match the importance of growing the economy with a commitment to the necessary funding for our universities. We know that the promises on class sizes and student debt have been dumped. Michael McMahon was right to talk about targets, drivers and standards across the equalities strands. It is becoming increasingly clear that there are significant question marks over the effect of the budget on the equalities agenda.

To be fair, there is a complex debate about how best to deliver equal opportunities for all our citizens across the board in employment, public services and protection against discrimination. The approach that was taken by Westminster in establishing a single equalities commission and harmonising its powers has not been universally welcomed. Most of us would support the idea that the rights of one group should not be elevated above the rights of another, but there is the worry that a generic body with generic duties might lose the focus and the expertise that came from having separate commissions charged with specific duties for racial equality, disability rights, and equal opportunities.

In truth, the worry is more about what happens on the ground, because councils, health boards and other public bodies have moved in the same direction. I am told that that is happening in the NHS, with a move away from equality-strand-specific support to NHS boards through the fair for all projects, which have had some success in an area where there are different and specific health and employment challenges, which are not so easily wrapped up in one generic approach. That raises questions about the future of well-regarded projects such as the national resource centre for ethnic minority health. In Glasgow, there seems to be a move away from city-wide projects such as the big step, which offers expertise on the

problems of young carers, towards more generic area-based projects that do not bring to bear the same expertise. We must be careful about those developments, because there are fashions in the public sector that can sometimes result in our throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Despite the member's concerns about generic legislation and planning, does he agree that Patrick Harvie's bill, which will give solace to almost all groups who are routinely discriminated against and suffer violence, is important and that members should be paying attention to it?

Robert Brown: It is certainly one of the panoply of things to be taken forward. I, along with other colleagues, have signed up to support it.

There are similar dilemmas for the Government to tease out with regard to where it places its funding support. Johann Lamont referred to the £34 million funding for disabled children. The central issue is the way in which the funds are rolled up into the rather flexible embrace of the local government settlement. According to the information that was put in the public domain, the violence against women fund of £3 million will now have to compete with schools, housing and long-term care for the elderly as part of local government priorities. The concordat with local authorities states specifically that the violence against women fund and the children's services-women's aid fund are both being rolled up into the local government settlement in 2008-09. Clarity is needed on those matters in the public documents that are produced on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Debates in this area can easily become clichéd and jargon ridden. It is worth remembering that, at their heart, the issues are about real people: elderly people; young people; and people who have particular challenges because of their particular characteristics. Real problems can lead to real inequality and a diminution of people's human rights.

As the Equality and Human Rights Commission points out,

"An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society recognises people's different needs, situations and goals and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be."

That may not be a perfect definition, but it is a pretty good one that I commend to members. The test of the Government's policies should be whether they advance towards that goal. It is a marker of what the modern Scotland should be, and it is built into our founding documents. We should not fall short of what we should be.

16:35

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

This has been a good debate, with many considered contributions from members throughout the chamber. Many issues could be highlighted in such a debate, and I commend the minister for covering such a broad section of views. However, other topics such as single status, equal pay and the agenda for change could perhaps have been given more prominence.

I acknowledge Mike Rumbles's point about female-on-male violence, which is undoubtedly underreported. It takes nothing away from the problem of domestic violence that many women suffer to acknowledge that point.

I think that it was inappropriate for Sandra White to comment on staffing issues relating to another MSP. It was out of kilter with the mood of, and other contributions to, the debate. However, I celebrate the diverse speech from Bill Wilson, whom I now see as the main challenger to Stewart Stevenson.

I will concentrate on three issues: mental health, age and disability. We have a long way still to go in Scotland on mental health. In any year, one in four people will experience a mental health problem, including stress, depression and anxiety. Around one third of general practitioner consultations, one third of sick leave and one third of incapacity benefit claims are due to mental health problems. The cost is high: the cost of care, lost output and the human cost are estimated at 9 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product.

Too often, it is difficult for people with mental health problems to return to the work environment, so we need to find ways to get those people gradually back into the workplace. In our current scrutiny of the budget, mental health is a difficult issue. As Howat stated, there are no or very few measurable outcomes in mental health—as opposed to the measurement of surgery outcomes in the normal health service, for example. However, that is no reason for not making mental health a priority.

It is difficult for people to talk about suffering from depression, particularly in the workplace, not just because they are judged or labelled but because many fear that it may affect their future career progression. Some of the mental health services and attitudes must be modernised and given a more positive approach, and people must be helped at an early stage before depression becomes severe, chronic and enduring. In fact, many mental health patients get support and treatment only when their condition is chronic. That must change.

On a more positive note, I heard about the new facility that was opened in Glasgow this week,

which seems to address many of the issues that I am raising today. I hope that such an approach, which is more open and positive, with early interventions and better surroundings, will be replicated throughout Scotland.

There is no doubt that there is workplace discrimination in relation to age. A clear signal that age discrimination in the workplace is unacceptable would be the abandonment of a mandatory retirement age. I understand that many employment tribunal cases on that issue are on hold, but they will certainly set the precedent for the future.

Employment law has progressed significantly in equality and diversity, but I am not sure that everyone is aware of their own rights as an employee. Less favourable treatment and discrimination are undoubtedly difficult to prove, but I understand that the burden has now shifted to the employer to prove that employees have not been treated less favourably on the ground of age, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or beliefs, which I think include political beliefs.

I was shocked to read in Help the Aged's briefing paper that a 60-year-old widow who wanted to sue an NHS board after her husband died from contracting MRSA in hospital was told that she would have to foot a bill of more than £1,000 in legal aid costs because she receives pension credit. That situation must be examined.

I acknowledge the excellent points that Johann Lamont, Bill Kidd and Michael McMahon made about disability. I recently visited Drummond school in Inverness, which people with physical and learning disabilities attend. I commend the school's excellent work, but when school education ends, there is nothing. The briefing from Inclusion Scotland, which highlights that issue, says that many young people with learning disabilities are excluded from mainstream pathways and that further education offers little provision. FE colleges are described as being at risk of becoming "the new day centres" because of segregated provision and a narrow curriculum that focuses on basic numeracy and literacy; students continue to go through a revolving door of repeated courses without any progression. That subject requires more joined-up thinking and I ask the minister to address it.

I have been unable to come up with the right word to replace "tolerance", which almost suggests grudging acceptance. I hope that the minister will come up with a better word.

16:42

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab):

Mary Scanlon has laid down quite a challenge for the minister, on which I wish him good luck.

Like everyone else, I welcome the debate. I associate the Labour Party with the comments that the Conservatives made about the work that has been done to create equality and diversity week, which is important. We support all those who did that work.

I recognised the challenge that the minister faced in his opening speech—how to introduce an equality debate and grasp the range of issues. I appreciate his recognition of the work that was done before and what he said about how the SNP plans to continue it.

In a previous life, I was a minister with a strong association with equality, so I put on record the work that the Executive and many others did on the one Scotland, many cultures campaign, on lesbian, gay and transgender issues and on prostitution—that work was beginning to grapple with the challenges and details.

Bob Doris made an interesting speech. We must of course recognise the economic dimensions of equality and inequality. That is critical to dealing with poverty and other forms of social inequality, such as the experience of women and, as the minister said, the impact that coming from an ethnic minority background often has on people's economic status. Understanding the connections and interrelationships between those experiences is vital.

If anything, the debate's theme has been that warm words are not enough. Paying attention to that is a challenge to us all, but perhaps especially to the Government. Speaking from my ministerial experience—I would never want to be patronising and I sincerely hope that I will not be—I think that the challenge is grasping the theory of equality and inequality and the direction that is being taken. Ministers must understand equality and inequality and their causes and consequences. They must know why that matters and how the subject should be prioritised. Hugh O'Donnell made an interesting speech about that. If ministers grasp those issues, they see equality in its full dimension and they do not make mistakes such as having a skills strategy that does not embrace other dimensions.

However, as we know, understanding the issues is not enough. That must go hand in hand with practical actions, resources and meaningful change. Given the spark that has been around this afternoon, I refer members to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's important report, which has been published today. I know that some people have issues with the commission, but its comments on Scotland in the report are pleasing. It says that Scotland has set the benchmark for work on violence against women and that the rest of the United Kingdom should follow suit. Such important issues have to be flagged up, although

those of us who have been immensely involved in addressing such matters in a ministerial capacity in particular should not want to pat ourselves on the back, as we have much more to do.

There has been another theme in the debate. Parliament must be vigilant in progressing our equalities strategy, and we will be. As Robert Brown said, it is somehow in the Parliament's psyche that equality is one of its main priorities. Cathy Peattie illustrated that point significantly, particularly with respect to the debate on mainstreaming. Perhaps our discussions on ring fencing and mainstreaming do not resonate particularly with the vast majority of the Scottish public, as terms such as ring fencing and mainstreaming are technical, but they mean a great deal in the light of what has been achieved.

I ask the minister to consider the points that are made in the Equality and Human Rights Commission report. It pinpoints ring fencing and the creation of national programmes and priorities as a way of driving matters. That is not to diminish in any way the work of local authorities, which have had a significant role in developing resources. They will say that moneys such as supporting people moneys are essential. It is disappointing that the concordat has not so far picked up on issues that have been raised in relation to supporting people moneys.

I am pleased that the Government has accepted Labour's amendment and has agreed to make a statement on how equality impact assessment tools inform the budget process. John Swinney has just arrived—his timing is perfect. I will try to persuade him, as I was about to try to persuade Fergus Ewing and Stewart Maxwell, that it is vital that a statement be made soon. If Parliament is truly to be involved in guaranteeing that the budget is a budget for equality, it is vital that members have information on how equality impact assessment tools inform the budget process. Significant details on the matter have been flagged up during the debate. I hope that, when he replies to the debate, the minister will say that a statement will be made soon. If he does not give a date, I hope that he will say that the issue will be brought to Parliament so that the various avenues in Parliament can ensure that the issues are addressed.

Johann Lamont raised a pertinent issue when she spoke about the budget seeming so far to have failed to address equality issues. That is not simply a party-political point, although it may become one. I am pleased that Bill Kidd recognised the importance of funding for services for disabled children. The £34 million really matters to disabled children. I give members fair warning that we will want to discuss how equality

impact assessment tools are used in the budget process.

There is always a challenge in debates such as this. We should not simply provide a shopping list of experiences of equality and talk about them. Many members have, of course, spoken about their experiences and interests, which is to be expected and is welcome. Indeed, Alison McInnes made an interesting speech about her experience of discrimination against women. We wish her granddaughters well—I hope that their experience will be slightly better than ours. What she said illustrates the depth of work that still requires to be done. We must always be cautious about thinking that, just because we have more women in our legislature and gender has been on our agenda more often, we have ticked the gender box. That is certainly not the case. We must consider the scale and depth of the challenge of gender discrimination.

The previous Executive tried to move beyond the traditional definitions of equality and inequality. That was one of the big pushes that it tried to make. We tried to grasp other experiences coherently and strategically, particularly experiences of age discrimination, but also issues to do with faith and how and why people are attacked for their faiths. Some of our work was on Islamophobia and sectarianism. Those were important avenues to develop in Scotland.

Much is determined by where money is put. We should put our money where our mouth is. Our funding of Stonewall Scotland's work with lesbian and gay young people was significant. It illustrated what we thought about issues to do with lesbian and gay young people and the significance of those issues.

We will pursue equalities ministers, as it is vital that the issue is driven politically and given leadership. We will pursue them on the roll-out of domestic abuse courts, as they will be judged on whether they take domestic abuse seriously. We will also pursue them on how they tackle institutionalised racism. However, the best demonstration of what they can do would be to open up the budget to debate around equality. I hope that Fergus Ewing will give us answers on the £34 million for disabled children and tell us when we will be able to roll our sleeves up, get into the detail of the budget and test it against equalities criteria.

16:50

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): I rise to the challenge that Mary Scanlon set early on. She asked the Scottish Government to demonstrate that it exemplifies political consensus and tolerance. In that spirit, I

congratulate Margaret Curran on her closing speech and echo the sentiments that she expressed. We have heard largely a commonality of view, almost free from partisan party politics, and that has been welcome.

The debate has been extremely wide ranging because the motion permitted it to be so in addressing all forms of discrimination. However, it is right that many members have focused on one particular topic. I pay tribute to the work that is done throughout Scotland by disability access panels. I visited one of the panels in my constituency, in Lochaber, just over a week ago. The panels are run by volunteers who have great knowledge of the nitty-gritty of the discrimination that is faced by people with disabilities of all kinds. They made the excellent suggestion that, although the Equality and Human Rights Commission does not have a locus to investigate claims that a building does not comply with the DDA, it might be useful if the commission were to send out a pro forma letter when it receives an allegation of non-compliance from the public. In that way, although the commission could not investigate every case, bodies such as reputable banks that received such a pro forma letter from the commission would feel obliged to investigate the matter.

I was also pleased to hear Johann Lamont focus on the needs of children with a disability. On behalf of the Scottish Government, I say that the issue transcends politics and that we want to do everything we can for those children. We all know from our constituency work that the parents of children with a disability often face great difficulty obtaining appropriate provision for their child, especially in education. Mary Scanlon rightly paid tribute to the work that is done at Drummond school. She was also correct in stating that it is often when children leave school that there is an almost complete lack of further provision. It is difficult to tackle that problem, which is no doubt a matter of resources. However, I hope that we all recognise the problem that Mary Scanlon identified. I know that it exists in my constituency.

I will tackle head on the issue that Johann Lamont and Margaret Curran raised about the £34 million. It is known, from a parliamentary question that was only recently posed and answered, that that £34 million is consequential that are available to the Scottish Government. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop, is considering the matter carefully.

Johann Lamont: The parliamentary question stated that John Swinney would respond in mid-November. Can the minister confirm that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will consider using the £34 million not to meet the generality of the needs of people with disabilities but to implement the recommendations

in the report on changing services and meeting the need for short breaks?

Fergus Ewing: I confirm that the Government is absolutely determined to meet the needs of children with a disability. Currently, we are engaged in a range of positive activity to support disabled children and their families. That includes sponsorship of the Scottish portion of the Family Fund, which is the key provider of short breaks and other necessary non-statutory support through flexible small grants to families. I know how important that is because I have many constituents who cannot get any respite from spending their whole lives—24/7—looking after a disabled child.

The Badaguish centre, which is in my constituency, is an excellent facility that John Swinney visited recently. It is a long-established facility that provides outstanding opportunities for young people with special needs or a disability to participate in and experience the pleasures of the outdoors. I hope that it will continue to be supported by other councils as it is supported, I am pleased to say, by Highland Council.

Many members made wide-ranging speeches. All were interesting and some were valuable. I want to reply specifically to Elaine Smith, who has campaigned long and hard on violence against women. I apologise to other members who, quite rightly, raised issues on the same theme. Elaine Smith pointed out that pornography is part of the continuum of violence against women. We in the Scottish Government agree, and we share the concerns about the impact of pornography, especially on the young. Many measures are in place at present—I will spare the chamber my reading them out—but we are currently considering proposals to create a Scottish offence of possession of extreme pornographic material, in light of the joint consultation that was undertaken with the Home Office in 2005. Today's debate was useful in that Elaine Smith rightly raised the issue once again.

Albeit in passing, reference was made to sectarianism and religious intolerance. I am charged with portfolio responsibility for tackling sectarianism. Today's debate has been another useful opportunity to reiterate that the work on tackling sectarianism was led by the former First Minister and Cathy Jamieson. I always make that point when I am making speeches on this theme, and I took the opportunity to do so on Monday this week at a useful conference in Glasgow, which sought to explore how the churches can contribute towards tackling sectarianism. I am also pleased that the First Minister recently attended an event at Hampden for the signing up of Scottish Premier League clubs to the kick out bigotry pledge, which sends out a strong message that religious hatred

is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated in football grounds or anywhere else in Scotland.

I hoped that the motion and today's debate would provide us with the opportunity to unite as one Parliament behind one motion.

Margaret Curran: Will Fergus Ewing answer my specific point about the statement on the equality impact assessment tools and how they will impact on the budget?

The Presiding Officer: The minister is now in his final minute.

Fergus Ewing: We will certainly support the amendment tonight and business managers will discuss ways to implement it. I hope that that is clear.

I hope that the Liberal Democrats will unite and speak with one voice from the Parliament. In his opening remarks, Mr Maxwell pointed out that the Liberal Democrat amendment is factually incorrect.

Robert Brown: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: The minister is in his final minute.

Fergus Ewing: I am sorry; I do not think that I can take an intervention.

The Liberal Democrat amendment says that there is an

"absence of a commitment to the mainstreaming of equality in the Scottish budget",

but as Mr Maxwell pointed out it is on pages 4 and 107 of the document. The amendment then goes on to say that equalities funding is rolled up into the local government settlement, but it is not.

Robert Brown: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sorry to be difficult about this. I do not want to make an unnecessary challenge, but the fact is that the concordat with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities specifically says that those funds will be rolled up into the settlement. Perhaps the minister would care to respond to that point.

The Presiding Officer: That is up to the minister, but it is not a point of order.

The minister should be winding up now.

Fergus Ewing: I get the sense that my plea for unity will not be favourably received by my Liberal Democrat friends. That is unfortunate. Not only have they no leader at the present time, they seem to have no positive alternatives by way of policies. The amendment is perhaps just another exemplification of that.

I am happy to second Mr Maxwell in calling for a fairer Scotland that is free from discrimination.

Business Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-942, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 5 December 2007

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Health

followed by Ministerial Statement: Class Sizes

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
National Fostering and Kinship Care

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.15 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 December 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Health and Wellbeing

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate:
Summary Justice Reform

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 12 December 2007

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 13 December 2007

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Liberal Democrats Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Rural Affairs and the Environment;
Justice and Law Officers

2.55 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business.—[Bruce
Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-940, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 29 February 2008.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-938, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Budget (Scotland) Act 2007 Amendment Order 2007 be approved.—[Bruce Crawford.]

The Presiding Officer: Tavish Scott wishes to speak against the motion. Mr Scott, you have up to three minutes.

17:01

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): The Liberal Democrats seek clarification from the Government following the Finance Committee's consideration of the draft Budget (Scotland) Act 2007 Amendment Order 2007.

The budget revision order provides that £100 million of additional capital for colleges and universities must be committed in the 2007-08 financial year. That was first announced by Fiona Hyslop on 26 October and it was confirmed on 9 November in a Government circular to colleges, which stated that the allocation was for 2007-08. Last Tuesday, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth told the Finance Committee that the money was for this year.

However, after question time last Thursday, the Scottish National Party Government's special advisers distributed a table to journalists that showed that £100 million was to be delayed until 2011 and that not a single penny would be allocated for this financial year. That table, which was issued by civil servants who work for the First Minister, casts serious doubt on the budget revision on which the Parliament is asked to vote tonight.

Parliament needs some straight answers. What is the status of the document that the special advisers issued? Will any additional capital spending in colleges and universities take place this financial year, or will it be delayed until the following three years? Can the cabinet secretary tell Parliament why Government special advisers showed journalists figures in which the allocation was delayed until 2011 whereas the Finance Committee was given different information?

Inside a week, the Government has given two different stories on the additional money for higher education. Will the cabinet secretary tell Parliament which document is correct—the budget revision order or the table that was issued to journalists? It cannot be both.

The Presiding Officer: I call on the cabinet secretary to respond. Mr Swinney, you also have up to three minutes.

17:03

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I make it clear to Tavish Scott and his colleagues that what I told the Finance Committee, which has been reiterated by my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, is absolutely correct. The money will go to institutions in this financial year.

Quite clearly, putting in such a generous accelerated financial commitment to universities and colleges at this stage will have the consequence of freeing up money for capital budgets in all the years of the spending review that would otherwise need to be invested at that time. The Government's wise, early and imaginative decision to use the resources at our disposal to ensure that we accelerate the capital investment in our further and higher education institutions is to be broadly welcomed.

Mr Scott should rest assured that the Government will ensure that the resource is put in place as we have promised in the financial settlement for this financial year. To ensure that the Liberal Democrats properly understand the financial impact of the Government's proposals, we have made clear how, if the allocation was smoothed over the three years, it would have rebutted all the rubbish that we have heard from this lot—the Opposition parties—over the past few weeks.

If we followed Mr Scott by voting against the autumn budget revision, we would be turning our backs on £641 million of additional resources for teachers' and national health service pension liabilities. If we followed the Liberal Democrats tonight, we would be turning our backs on nearly £50 million of investment in enterprise and renewable energy projects. If we did not approve the draft order tonight, there would be no money for abolishing the bridge tolls on the Forth and the Tay, which the Liberal Democrats apparently support. There would be no accelerated investment in housing initiatives—£36 million for affordable housing, £10 million for modernising private sector housing and £14 million for central heating and the warm deal.

The Liberal Democrats must understand that we will remind the public the length and breadth of Scotland that they want to stop expenditure on the warm deal, universities and renewable energy. The Liberal Democrats must think carefully before they come to the Parliament to nit-pick, as they have been doing repeatedly for months.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S3M-939, on approval of an SSI.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Act 2007 (Incidental, Supplemental and Consequential Provisions) Order 2007 be approved.—[Bruce Crawford.]

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S3M-937, on a committee remit and duration.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to amend the remit and duration of the Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme Committee as follows:

Remit: To inquire into and report with recommendations for a Committee Bill on a replacement for the Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme rules and the Grants to Members and Officeholders Order;

Duration: Until the Parliament has completed its consideration of the committee's report and any ensuing Bill.—[Bruce Crawford.]

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

Decision Time

17:06

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-928.2, in the name of Johann Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S3M-928, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, on equality and diversity, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-928.1, in the name of Hugh O'Donnell, which seeks to amend motion S3M-928, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, on equality and diversity, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)

Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 15, Against 61, Abstentions 41.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-928, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, on equality and diversity, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament is committed to securing equality of opportunity and a fairer Scotland in which diversity of need is recognised, respect for others is fostered, stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours are challenged and people have more control over their lives and welcomes Equality and Diversity Week, the creation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the commitment of the Scottish Government to promoting and mainstreaming equality and to working in partnership with public bodies, the voluntary sector, business interests and communities to tackle disadvantage and the barriers to equality; further recognises that equality impact assessment tools should be used in determining and assessing policy priorities and spending allocations, and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward a statement to the Parliament detailing how the above commitments on equality and diversity will be delivered through the Scottish budget.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-938, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Budget (Scotland) Act 2007 Amendment Order 2007 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-939, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Act 2007 (Incidental, Supplemental and Consequential Provisions) Order 2007 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-937, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a committee duration and remit, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to amend the remit and duration of the Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme Committee as follows:

Remit: To inquire into and report with recommendations for a Committee Bill on a replacement for the Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme rules and the Grants to Members and Officeholders Order;

Duration: Until the Parliament has completed its consideration of the committee's report and any ensuing Bill.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. As ever, I ask members leaving the chamber to do so quietly.

Science and the Parliament

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-768, in the name of Des McNulty, on science and the Parliament. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the Science and the Parliament event being held on 28 November 2007 in Our Dynamic Earth, organised once again by the Royal Society of Chemistry in association with Scotland's leading science organisations; notes that this year's theme is "The Science Behind the Energy Debate" in recognition of the important contribution that Scotland's scientific community can make to the debate on this vital policy area; further notes that Scotland is a world leader in many scientific disciplines; recognises the need to foster an environment that enhances pupil and student participation in science, to invest in the science infrastructure and equipment of our educational establishments, to increase investment in research along with supporting greater industrial research and to assist in the practical application of our world-beating research, and hopes that this year's Science and the Parliament event will play a positive part in contributing to the debate on how the Parliament and the Scottish Government address Scotland's energy needs and obligations to tackle climate change in the years ahead.

17:10

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I am pleased to lead this debate, which highlights the contribution that science is making, and can make in the future, to helping us to find solutions to the challenge of climate change. I attended the earlier sessions of the science and the Parliament event and I am delighted that so many of the delegates are in the public gallery this evening.

The Parliament is grateful to the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Royal Society of Edinburgh for the work that they do in arranging the event and helping to make parliamentarians more aware of scientific research and knowledge. Their parliamentary liaison officer, Bristow Muldoon, is well known to us all and I am sure that members from all sides of the chamber wish him well in the post that he has taken up.

The success of the science and the Parliament event over the past seven years has spawned a joint initiative by the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Scottish Parliament information centre, in association with the University of Edinburgh and the Institute of Physics in Scotland, which has resulted in the formation of the Scottish Parliament's science information service. That new service offers MSPs, cross-party groups and researchers access to rapid, reliable and impartial scientific information from leading experts. Requests for information are

administered by staff in SPICe and the Royal Society of Chemistry, who will contact any of the 52 topic co-ordinators, who are fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Those topic co-ordinators encompass a broad range of knowledge and expertise and will direct inquiries to the most appropriate expert in the field—so members cannot say that they have not got the information that they need.

This afternoon, delegates heard from a number of leading scientists, including Professor Anne Glover, who is the Scottish Executive's chief scientific officer. She provided a clear summary of the causes and consequences of global warming, informing the question-and-answer sessions and the workshops that took place.

There is no doubt that climate change is firmly on the political agenda. Last week, the Prime Minister called for Britain to lead the way in combating the threat of climate change and said that the world community must show vision and determination in rising to the challenge of tackling climate change. The United Kingdom's groundbreaking Climate Change Bill has now been published and will make Britain the first country in the world to set a legal framework for moving to a low-carbon economy.

Scottish ministers have endorsed the UK Government's introduction of statutory targets and a related framework for action to mitigate climate change by reducing climate change emissions and have signalled their intention to introduce a Scottish climate change bill.

Earlier this week, the Confederation of British Industry's climate change task force made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the challenges facing us. It made a key point about the importance of working together. It said:

"Politicians must give much greater priority to the subject, and not just on an ad-hoc basis. Consumers have to be empowered to make the right decisions and need to be given the facts to make informed judgements. And business must become green to grow."

If there is any doubt about the significance of climate change as a political issue, the Australian election last weekend must concentrate minds. In the country with the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the world, voters decided to punish politicians who refused to ratify and implement the Kyoto protocol.

However, promising to reduce carbon emissions in 40 years' time while, for example, promoting transport projects and policies that lead to more and more CO₂ belching out of car exhausts is not a sustainable position politically or environmentally. Transport is, obviously, the most difficult area in which to effect change, given the diffuse nature of the emissions involved and our

increasing use of cars and aeroplanes, which we will have to curtail in the future. However, we should not overlook energy, which represents the largest single sector responsible for carbon emissions. According to the Executive's figures, energy's share of those emissions is 37 per cent. If we are to come anywhere close to meeting our longer-term targets to reduce emissions, changes in the way in which we generate energy and improvements in energy efficiency are vital. There is a major role in that for Scotland's scientists and for those companies with a significant science base in relevant fields.

In the past, Scottish scientists and engineers were behind inventions such as the steam engine, pneumatic tyres, television, fax machines and microwave ovens, all of which achieved some commercial success. In his speech at the conference, Stewart Stevenson mentioned mathematics, so I will remind members that the decimal point was invented by a Scot, after whom Napier University is named. As modern mathematics would be impossible without the decimal point, we can see why its invention is important to Stewart Stevenson.

Another Scot, Joseph Black, was the first person to isolate and describe the properties of carbon dioxide, which is the key greenhouse gas. We need to ensure that the next generation of Scottish scientists and engineers can contribute to our understanding of the world as well as scientists in previous generations did. We need to help young—and middle-aged—scientists to develop the tools that we need to reverse the growing impact of carbon emissions.

Science can contribute more. Politics is often disputatious and the soundbite can be more important than the substance, whereas scientific disciplines involve rigorous thinking, the testing of assumptions and the weighing of evidence before knowledge claims are accepted. As Anne Glover said today, if we cannot reverse the melting of the icecap over Greenland and the polar regions, countries and regions will be wiped off the map.

Every journey starts with a single step. Anne Glover was right to welcome the increase in the target for the proportion of energy generation that comes from renewables from 40 to 50 per cent. However, hard questions must be asked. Concern about wind power's impact on the landscape has affected the speed at which wind power has been developed. Of course, wind power suffers from intermittency. Wave power is more predictable, but it is a long way from commercial exploitation on a scale that would enable us to replace other energy sources. An increase in the proportion of our energy that comes from renewables must be combined with a reduction in the proportion that is generated from fossil fuels if we are to begin to reduce Scotland's energy emissions.

During today's event, several people pointed out the importance of energy conservation and energy efficiency. However, we seem to be a long way from requiring heat pumps or solar panels to be installed in new houses, which would significantly increase the unit cost of house building.

Politicians must work with scientists, in universities and in businesses, if our economy is to shift towards the consumption of less energy, the production of less waste and the emission of less carbon. Expressions of good will and one-off initiatives will not do if we are unable or unwilling to grasp the nettle and reduce car use, slow down the depletion of fossil fuel resources and accept the inevitable costs that are associated with high energy-efficiency standards.

More than any other group of people, scientists should ask the hard questions about such issues and should demand greater consistency from politicians and Government in tackling the great challenges that are posed by climate change. Scientific experts in Scotland's universities and companies can make a major contribution to the better understanding of climate change. They can assist in setting out what we need to do to reverse the damage that has been done to the environment and they can provide expertise in helping to identify the best prospects for cleaner and greener solutions.

The motion expresses hope that

"this year's Science and the Parliament event will play a positive part in contributing to the debate on how the Parliament and the Scottish Government address Scotland's energy needs and obligations to tackle climate change in the years ahead."

The debate between politicians and the science community must continue. The debate will be enriched by the expertise that is available, and I hope that we can all listen to and learn from Scotland's scientific community.

17:18

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am grateful to Des McNulty for slating the subject for debate. A year ago, the First Minister ended his campaign launch with a quotation from Hugh MacDiarmid:

"The present's theirs, but a' the past an future's oors."

Scotland has a stunning scientific past and, potentially, an amazing future, although that was not helped by the recent dish-towel saga—in *The Scotsman*, I think—which in a search for present-day achievements could come up with only Dolly the sheep and Michelle Mone's Ultimo bra. To be savaged by a dead sheep and supported by Scotland's other silicone glen—that is Labour's problem.

Let us think instead of the Clerk Maxwells and the Edisons: the former make the philosophical and theoretical breakthroughs and the latter transform those breakthroughs into saleable businesses, profits and a social dividend. The looming climate crisis has the world in a tight place and we have just a chance of getting humanity out of it—which will be the greatest service that we can do.

We must make a plan, as John Buchan's old Boer guerrilla, Peter Pienaar, might say. Let us consider the plan that we must make. The Government initiative on renewables through the prizes that the budget offers must be used to facilitate the second stage of adaptivity—what my Swabian friends would call *tuefteln*: playing around with an innovation until it becomes marketable.

We ought to name the main prize not after Clerk Maxwell but after Lord Kelvin. The latter may not have been as brilliant as Maxwell, but he was a theoretician and adaptor—more of an Edison type. Kelvin's work on the principles of water condensation captured for the Clyde in the 1850s the market for high-pressure marine engines that required clean water. His work made the river the world's prime ship-building centre, which is a title that it held until very recently.

In 1988, I remember seeing the Ocean Alliance being built at Port Glasgow. In place of the Scott Lithgow yard, we now have four call centres, which—we are told—act as an introduction to the knowledge economy. At Clydebank, we have seen the demolition of the John Brown yard, which latterly made rigs, but which is now to be the site of yet another Tesco or luxury shopping development.

Des McNulty: Christopher Harvie has, I think, inadvertently misled Parliament. The site will definitely not be a Tesco, or any other retail development.

Christopher Harvie: I am very glad about that.

We have an ever-bigger challenge in terms of renewables, particularly in harnessing what, in Arthur Hugh Clough's marvellous words, is

"the might of the mighty Atlantic".

We are a little later on in that development than Des McNulty's comparison with North Sea oil might lead us to think. My belief is that we are at the 1968 stage: I should know—I wrote the book. Various wave-generation prototypes are now proven and must be put into action. We now have to concentrate on transmission and storage of the power, in addition to burying the results of earlier carbon activity. The equivalent of about 250 billion tonnes of oil and gas has been lifted out of the North Sea, which means that about 250 billion tonnes of space is now available into which carbon dioxide can be reverse pumped.

The creation of a new technology network needs social back-up and public investment that concentrates on innovation, training and adaptation, but not on people working along the lines of the "same procedure as before". Only we can do the networks.

In terms of renewables, we must first tap into the technical expertise of Europe—particularly, Switzerland, Austria and Germany. Secondly, we need to know where to get the semi-finished equipment built. Thanks to our banking connections, it is likely that that will be done in China. We also have the Open University, which has the skills to disseminate education and training. However, we must have a plan. People in other countries that border the Atlantic—I am thinking of the Irish and Spanish—have good entrepreneurial techniques and training. If we do not move, they will take the initiative.

17:22

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Des McNulty on securing the debate today to coincide with this year's science in the Parliament event. Over several years, I was pleased to sponsor the event. I apologise to the organisers that the combination of an unforeseen event and preparation for debates tomorrow mean that I have not as yet been over to Our Dynamic Earth. I will go after the debate. I hope that people do not think that I am going there only for the wine.

Des McNulty referred to our esteemed former colleague Bristow Muldoon. In that regard, the Parliament's loss is definitely the Royal Society of Edinburgh's and the Royal Society of Chemistry's gain. Prior to Bristow becoming the event organiser for this and other events, one Willie Rennie was the science and the Parliament organiser. I have only two grouses with him. Of course, the first is that he took the Dunfermline and West Fife seat from Labour at the recent by-election, although that said, Thomas Docherty will rectify the situation at the next election. My other grouse with Willie Rennie is one that he will recall: at a Labour party conference one year, he persuaded me to take a health check, part of which involved an electric current being run through my arms and into a machine, after which a man told me that I was obese. I did not take that terribly well. In fact, I took it so badly that Willie still recalls the incident. He mentioned it to my colleague Russell Brown after he took his seat in the House of Commons.

I turn to the serious matter of the debate. The challenge of climate change must, and will, be addressed in two ways. First, of course, we must change our behaviour. However, we cannot expect people to go backwards in lifestyle terms. People are used to having energy supplied to their

homes, to owning cars and so forth. They will not volunteer to go back to a dark age.

Therefore, we need development of new technologies that will enable us to enjoy our lifestyle better, without damaging the planet as we are. We need to develop alternatives to the internal combustion engine. I understand that a lot of work is being done in Japan on fuel-cell cars—we need to be at the forefront of that type of technology, too. We need to develop more forms of low and non-carbon-producing power generation. Renewables, microgeneration and, I believe, new nuclear power generation will play parts. There is international co-operation on developing nuclear fusion power. At one stage, I thought that the curtain had fallen on nuclear fusion, but it could be a future source of power.

We need developments in information and communication technology to enable people to work from home, so that they do not produce carbon by travelling to work. I believe that next week in the Sunday newspapers, there will be an article about the possibilities of data storage. One developer is keen on developing data storage facilities in Lockerbie in my constituency.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Elaine Murray: I am sorry—I have only one minute, otherwise I would.

The idea is to link that development in Lockerbie to the development of an internet village, using the excess power from data storage—which would be green energy—to power houses. That is an interesting project. I am not sure whether Mr Mather's colleague Mike Russell has spoken to him about it, but I know that Mike Russell is aware of the project. I realise that the minister cannot comment on the proposal, as it may come to the Government for ministerial approval, but it is an extremely exciting project, not just for Lockerbie, but for Scotland.

We need to produce more science graduates and postgraduates. Polly Purvis of ScotlandIS recently highlighted the shortage of computer science undergraduates and postgraduates, which is a significant concern to the information technology sector and other sectors that it services, such as the financial services sector. We need to tackle such shortages in two ways. One is to consider how we can improve science education in school—obviously, early numeracy is essential to that—and the other is to consider how we can reskill adults. For example, if there are to be fewer jobs in the public sector as a result of decluttering, we must consider how to offer training so that individuals can transfer from the public sector to the private sector, where there are skills shortages.

17:27

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I, too, congratulate Des McNulty on securing the debate. I welcome those who are in the public gallery and who were at today's conference. The theme of science and the Parliament is important and we should be proud to support that theme in the debate and in the Parliament generally. Scotland has a tremendous record on science, which is based on our great education tradition. Scotland was one of the first countries to educate a high proportion of its population. From an early stage, science and the engineering that evolved from it were key principles in our burgeoning industrialising economy. Of course, that industrialisation has resulted in some of the problems that we face today. The theme of the science behind climate change is an appropriate one for Scotland, which knows what it has been responsible for in the past and what it must achieve in the future.

As I said, the idea of science in the Parliament is important. Some members know a bit about science and can talk with authority on scientific subjects, but others are influenced more by public pressure and sometimes perhaps by public prejudice. That is why it is good that we have offers from scientists of all kinds to educate members and keep us right about the facts on many scientific issues. During the argument about the future of energy generation in Scotland, we have had to suffer some rather ill-informed comments about our erstwhile important nuclear industry. In recent times, we have had problems explaining to some members the possible significance of genetic engineering and biotechnology for Scotland's economy in the 21st century. Political prejudices often stand in the way of advances, so the offers of education are useful.

We must be careful in talking about climate change and how we deal with it, because Scotland has much to offer on that. The idea that we should simply run down our economy to remove our emissions of CO₂ and other global-warming gases is simply unacceptable in a developed democracy.

If we value our public services, and if we are concerned to ensure that men and women in this country are not subjected to the disadvantages of poverty that previous generations suffered, we must ensure that our economy continues to grow. For that reason, we must go back once again to the people in our country who have a great record in science and engineering and who can achieve still greater things in the future.

An engineering solution to Scotland's problems would, of course, be valuable because it would save us from economic degeneration. More important, if we can develop new technologies that assist the rest of the world in achieving the same

aims, there will be two benefits: first, we will deliver benefits to other countries that do not have our advantages; and secondly, if we can persuade other countries—China and India in particular—to use our new technologies instead of digging up and burning the coal that we know they have, their surplus gases will not blow around the world and cause the problems that we suffer here.

Scotland has a great past in science and engineering. However, in recent years we have seen a drift away from those subjects in our schools and universities and we hear now that schools have a shortage of maths and physics teachers, in particular. Let us, the politicians, solve the problems that are in front of us today, but let us also ensure that our education system in the future is designed to produce the next generation of science and engineering graduates who will deliver what we need in Scotland and all around the world.

17:31

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): I will start by striking a slightly discordant tone: science at the moment is the bane of my life, and chemistry in particular has been the root cause of much wailing and gnashing of teeth in the McArthur household. My two young sons have taken to conducting chemistry experiments at home. Not magic potions, not malevolent poisons—no, I am assured that these are chemical experiments. They are concocted by emptying every bottle in the house that does not sport a skull and crossbones. As a result of one such experiment the other week, we are having to repaint the front porch.

Normally, I would blame the parents, but as there is barely a science O-grade between my wife and me, my sons' enthusiasm appears to defy simple genetics. However, the experience has confirmed for me the importance of nurturing the innate curiosity of all children about how things work, how they are made up and how they interact with other things. I share Elaine Murray's view about the central importance of how science is taught in schools and how such curiosity is stimulated throughout the critical pre-school years and onwards.

I am not saying that everyone should aspire to work in scientific fields but, although our scientific literacy bears comparison with our international competitors, a wider appreciation of science by non-scientists would certainly be desirable. I echo what Alex Johnstone said: it would be helpful if the minister could tell us what steps the Government is taking to manage the need for good-quality chemistry, physics and maths teachers in future, especially given the current age profile of teachers in those subjects.

Fundamental though schools are, much of the focus of the debate—not just today in Our Dynamic Earth but since the Government announced the budget earlier this month—has understandably been on the size of the settlement for the Scottish higher education sector. That may be a debate for another day, but there is no escaping the fact that the real-terms cut in the first year of the spending review period and the lower-than-expected rises thereafter will impact on our universities' ability to build on the excellent work that they have been doing.

In the context of this debate, it is pertinent to draw attention to the impact that the budget settlement will have on research and development and on the critical area of knowledge transfer. Both those issues will be key to developing a response to the energy challenge. Scottish universities have made impressive strides in pooling research capabilities. More collaboration across research disciplines will be an essential next phase—but, again, the budget settlement makes the process more difficult.

The theme of this year's science and the Parliament event is energy, and it could not be more appropriate or timely. Anne Glover's presentation set out the stark reality of the situation facing us. The challenges are certainly enormous. However, the impact that each of us as individuals can have should not be underestimated. Public opinion and public acceptance have moved a long way in a relatively short time. There is also a degree of political consensus on the issues that we face, although there is less consensus on how we should address them.

As the Stern review made abundantly clear, the costs of inaction and delay are considerable, so collaboration between the scientific community and politicians is fundamental. Politicians can lead, educate, regulate and fund, and scientists can innovate, inform and challenge, but what they can achieve together is almost certainly more than the sum of their respective parts. In my constituency of Orkney, real strides have been made through the collaborative work of the European Marine Energy Centre, Heriot-Watt University, the Scottish Renewables Forum, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and government at a local and national level. That work has put Orkney at the centre of worldwide marine renewables.

The science and the Parliament event has established itself over the past seven years as a valuable forum in which ideas can be exchanged. In that regard, it can help to ensure that informed decisions are taken for our long-term interests. Like Alex Johnstone, I congratulate all those who have been involved in today's event, many of

whom are present in the public gallery. I also congratulate Des McNulty on securing such a worthwhile debate.

17:35

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): I too congratulate Des McNulty on securing this enormously important debate. I sympathise with Liam McArthur—I was one of those small boys who did the chemistry thing. Anybody who knows the smell of sulphur dioxide—and a few people here will—understands why I rapidly got out of my bedroom when I managed to fill the room with it. When I realised that the smell would stick around, I went back in, holding my breath, opened the window, and came back out again. That may explain why, in later life, I stopped being a chemist and became a chemical engineer. Other people worried about the chemistry; I just worried about the big pots and pans that made it all happen—it was actually much more fun.

I want to touch on a couple of issues, starting with the hydrogen economy. We all recognise that our generation and that of our children will have to worry about carbon. Our children and grandchildren may worry about nuclear power, although I hope that they will not have to. In the long term, when the carbon runs out, even nuclear will give us a problem. The balance of what we know—which perhaps ignores fusion, which may yet come as our salvation—is that wind, wave and other renewable sources can be converted into hydrogen by a simple process of electrolysis. Heaven knows, Scotland is not short of water to electrolyse. However, we need to solve the problem of moving that hydrogen around—I am very aware that there are real technical problems, given its boiling point. I make a serious plea that we should not forget the hydrogen economy. It will probably not save us or our children, but that it is where I think the planet needs to go.

Robin Harper: In relation to an earlier comment that was made about running down our economy, does the member agree that in fact the trick will be to gear up the economy to deliver what we want—which is human well-being, social well-being and economic well-being—without impacting as much as we are doing on the environment?

Nigel Don: I absolutely agree, but surely the thrust of the move to renewables should be that we power—and power in more than one sense—what needs to be powered from the right sources rather than the wrong or outdated sources.

My second plea returns me to my background. I did half a chemistry degree, then half an engineering degree. A chemical engineer is someone who belongs to the Institution of Chemical Engineers, as I once did. A better

definition is that a chemical engineer is someone who talks engineering when there are chemists around, talks chemistry when there are engineers around and talks golf when both are around. An even better definition, which I got from my first boss, is that a chemical engineer is someone who can do for half a crown what any fool can do for a pound. Somewhere in between those definitions, we get the right answer.

My plea is that we do not do too much to differentiate too early on in our education system between science, engineering and maths. I would call them all “hard science”, although they are largely called maths, physics and chemistry at school—I am not trying to ignore the biosubjects. I had the benefit of doing a degree in which it took a long time to sort out precisely which discipline I was going to train in. That approach has merits, and I encourage all those who have anything to do with secondary and tertiary education to try to ensure that those who go through it have a good grounding in hard science—in particular, a good grasp of maths, and, if remotely possible, a grasp of thermodynamics—so that when they later take a particular discipline, they come with a good background.

We need more professional advisers. We need people who can do the work, people who can manage that work and people who can teach. We also need as many folk as possible in places such as the Parliament who understand what is going on. We cannot have too many technically qualified people.

I applaud the Royal Society of Chemistry for today's event. Unfortunately, I have not visited it, but I may follow Elaine Murray over for a glass of wine.

17:40

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): I, too, congratulate Des McNulty on securing the debate, which concerns issues that are crucial to Scotland. I also congratulate the organisers of the science and the Parliament event on yet another successful event this year. Their presence and the debate provide an excellent opportunity for the Parliament to discuss this crucial issue, but they also enable us to celebrate the achievements of scientists and technologists whose contribution to our economic success and to improving our quality of life are perhaps not praised widely enough, albeit that Christopher Harvie conjured up quite a galaxy with Clerk Maxwell and Kelvin and told us that they had followed the Adam Smith path and were leading us on to the Paul Romer path of neoclassical endogenous growth theory that would give us a perpetual panoply of new technologies rather than see Scotland fall into the trap of lower-wage jobs and a low-wage economy.

However, there is also the really big issue of climate change, which is clearly one of the most serious threats that we face today. We recognise the absolute need to take action to avoid and reduce emissions if we are to avert disaster for ourselves and future generations. Our everyday activity generates emissions, but we all need to travel and use energy. Indeed, those facts bring us into a difficult tension with our overall priority to grow our economy sustainably.

Being on the edge of our major markets in Europe adds further to the difficulty: we need good transport links and reliable energy supplies to enable Scottish businesses to compete in the global marketplace. However, there is also a positive side: our location delivers the natural resources and triggers the research and investment that will enable Scotland to harness renewable energy to the material benefit of its economy and environment. Indeed, Scottish and Southern Energy proved that point in Brussels last night when it briefed European Commission officials and other potential allies on the progress that it is making on offshore wind, wave and tidal technologies and the immense progress that it is making on energy efficiency—all of that here in Scotland.

It is clear that our path to that new future depends crucially on science and technology, which can provide us with new ways of generating energy as well as saving it and new ways of continuing to grow Scotland's economy without growing carbon emissions. They can also allow us to make the best possible use of our vast renewable energy potential. I have just been reading a book that I thoroughly recommend to members: "A Thousand Barrels a Second: The Coming Oil Break Point and the Challenges Facing an Energy Dependent World". Essentially, it draws the conclusion that while others might fool themselves that oil prices could come down to \$60, \$50 or \$40 a barrel, the issue now is to crack on and make the most of new technologies and natural resources.

This Government will ensure that there is good support to maintain our global lead in wave and tidal energy and to ensure that we build on the research base and the development of new industries and products, such as offshore wind and hydrogen fuel cells. In the meantime, we are taking action to ensure that we make the most of Scotland's clean energy potential. Carbon capture also presents an enormous opportunity. The vast capacity of the oil wells has been mentioned. It was interesting to hear Ian Marchant, the chief executive of Scottish and Southern Energy, make the case last night that carbon capture demonstration systems should not only be used but be used in Scotland.

Scotland stands in a strong position to take advantage of such opportunities with the knowledge that we have gained from oil and gas production in the North Sea. I believe that we have the expertise, appetite and capacity to become the pre-eminent location for green energy research and development in Europe. The Government will do all that we can to foster that, because it will create a new economic opportunity and new career opportunities for individuals; grow and retain more wealth in Scotland; and create export markets for energy, products and engineering support and advice, as well as guidance in energy, energy goods and energy services.

Scotland already has an excellent science base that is punching above its weight in credibility and enjoying a fantastic reputation for integrity. Five of our universities are rated among the top 200 in the world. That, effectively, is the best performance of any country when we factor in the relative sizes of the competing nations.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): We are all very proud of what our universities do, and they are among the best in the world. The minister has obviously been spending time reading books. Has he taken time to read what the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Universities Scotland have said about the real-terms cut in funding for universities next year?

Jim Mather: I hope that the member is not advocating that we do not read books. We must keep sharpening the saw. I have been reading what others have been saying. The Government's commitment to the sector is clearly signalled in the spending review, with a total increase of 10.9 per cent over three years, which is more than 2 per cent above inflation. In addition, we have spent a lot of time over the past six months talking to different industry sectors—life sciences and electronics, for instance—as we seek more collaboration and cohesion between and within those sectors and academia.

The Government is setting up new initiatives to encourage innovation. We have established a £2 million saltire prize fund, and we are developing the saltire horizon prize which, at £10 million, will be one of the biggest international innovation prizes in history. The prize will inspire the cream of the world's scientists to revolutionise the future of green energy.

We need to keep investing in young people to bring the next generation of scientists through, which is why the Government is placing science and technology at the heart of education. We must enthuse young people about science at the earliest age. I applaud the work of Peter Hughes of Scottish Engineering, who has taken his person and his guitar around the schools of Scotland and has enthused people such as my daughter, who

has moved on to become an engineer. I am very encouraged by the 2007 figures on science uptake in schools. The number of science highers has gone up by 11 per cent year on year, and entrance to science courses at university has also been increasing in recent years.

If we work together and with the support of a robust science and innovation sector, I am sure that Scotland will be able to show the world that we can be a really prosperous low-carbon economy. That is what we are trying to do as we activate the various industry sectors, as we talk to academia and as we seek to ensure that those activated centres create the collaboration that this country needs to capture everything that Des McNulty set out today.

That means answering the challenge, as Des McNulty defined it, of putting our declarations of intent into action and working together on a common goal. That is the key point that Mr McNulty was making, and I have drawn a lot from it tonight. If we do that, if we harness the expertise of previous generations, as Christopher Harvie said, if we develop the right skills and the sort of approach that, to refer to what Nigel Don said, effectively allows chemical engineers to talk a lot more about golf—or to talk about a lot more than golf—and to achieve more monuments to their success and if we follow Elaine Murray's advocacy of being both global and local, we can achieve something rather wonderful in Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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