

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 28 October 2009

Session 3

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SCOTTISH MINISTERS AND LAW OFFICERS

Office of the First Minister

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Education and Lifelong Learning

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MINISTER FOR SCHOOLS AND SKILLS—Keith Brown MSP

MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EARLY YEARS—Adam Ingram MSP

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28 September 2009

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 28 October 2009

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Good afternoon, and welcome back from the recess. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection and our leader is Father Paul Kelly of St Michael's Roman Catholic church in Linlithgow.

Father Paul Kelly (St Michael's Roman Catholic Church, Linlithgow): We read these words in the Bible, from the book of Genesis, chapter 12, verse 1:

"The Lord said to Abram, 'leave your own country, your kinsmen and your father's house and go to a country that I will show you.'"

Abram's father, Terah, had left Ur of the Chaldeans, in modern Iraq, and, presumably following the course of the Euphrates, he settled at Haran, in modern Syria. Abram—later Abraham—was then called to keep moving. He did not know where the promised land was, but he set out anyway, trusting in the one who called him. In the fourth chapter of his letter to the Romans, St Paul sees that as the archetype of faith.

Faith is setting out on a journey without necessarily having any clear idea about where one is going. It is a journey into mystery—into what one might call "the more of life". It is about growing and developing as a human being; it is, perhaps, going in search of our heart's desire. This is also what we mean when we say that we follow Jesus Christ. We follow him along the way of self-giving love into a deeper and richer life. In that process of journeying, growing, developing and searching, we trust in our loving God, who is there with us, guiding, moulding and fashioning us. This is the on-going work of creation: God continues to create us through our experiences for the whole of our lives.

That is fine for those who believe in God, but what is here for those who cannot, intellectually or emotionally, believe in God? The fact is that we live in a world where there are believers and non-believers, and the question of religious belief, or lack of it, affects the way in which we see the world. Can there be effective dialogue between believers and non-believers? Is there a common basis for dialogue? I suggest that there is.

I am reminded of my Welsh atheist uncle, who arranged to have put on his gravestone the words: "My journey ends here." Atheist though he was, he could at least agree that we are on a journey. Even if none of us can be absolutely certain of where we are going, we can at least journey together and nurture a mutual respect for our companions on the way.

Student Support

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a statement by Fiona Hyslop on student support.

14:34

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome this opportunity to make a statement to the Parliament announcing the decisions that I have reached on how the Scottish Government intends to improve financial support for full-time higher education students, with an additional investment of £30 million from 2010-11.

The Government's stated purpose is

"to create a more successful country where all of Scotland can flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth."

That vision for the future of our country becomes more important, not less, as a guiding principle for responsible government through these toughest of economic times.

Despite the tightest settlement that has been received from the United Kingdom Government since devolution, with cuts of about £500 million imposed on our budget in the next financial year, we have put in place a range of policies that will help students today, tomorrow and in the future to overcome the financial barriers that they face. Those measures make a real difference to students and include abolishing the graduate endowment fee; replacing loans with grants for part-time higher education students; increasing student hardship funds year on year since we came into office; introducing fairer assessment of income for further and higher education students, to ensure that the available funding gets to the students who need it most; and making further improvements to the support that is available for part-time students, through changes to individual learning account 200 and ILA 500. Between April and September, 42 per cent more people attended courses supported by ILA funding than was the case last year.

On 15 December 2008, the Scottish Government launched "Supporting a Smarter Scotland: A consultation on supporting learners in higher education". The consultation set out a number of options for how higher education student support could be improved through additional investment of £30 million from 2010-11. It ran for 20 weeks, which reflected the importance of the issues and my express wish to engage widely with students and other stakeholders during the process. I thank everyone who took the time to submit a response.

What I will announce today has been heavily influenced by a range of factors. First, it has been influenced by the evidence in the consultation responses, the findings from the recent higher and further education student's income, expenditure and debt in Scotland survey and findings in the National Union of Students publication, "Overstretched and Overdrawn: A survey of student hardship".

Secondly, what I will announce has been influenced by three ministerial meetings with the main Opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament, which have taken place since September, and by our discussions with NUS Scotland. Thirdly, it has been influenced by the operational implications. Any changes must be capable of being designed, tested robustly and delivered by the end of March 2010. Finally, and most important, it has been influenced by the economic situation. According to official figures that were released last week, this is the first time since records began in 1955 that United Kingdom gross domestic product has contracted for six consecutive quarters. This is the worst recession for a generation.

When I launched the consultation, I said that we would consider the responses in the context of the wider economic and social environment and that we would listen to stakeholders' views. Our response to the consultation was published on 7 October and set out three options, which I said that I would discuss with the Opposition parties and the NUS before I came to a final decision. I am pleased that I have found common ground with the NUS on the need to improve financial support for independent students, in particular. I welcome the NUS's recent change of approach and its acknowledgement that the Government's direction of travel in the area is fundamentally correct.

The overwhelming majority of independent students are over 25 and many have dependent children. Our evidence on student income and expenditure tells us that the budgets of such students are under the most pressure and that those students have the highest levels of commercial debt. The majority of respondents to our consultation highlighted the inconsistency of the current student support system and thought that the additional resources that we are making available should not be focused exclusively on dependent students. This time last week, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service published data that show that the largest percentage increase in applications to Scottish universities is in applications from independent students. That is another compelling reason why such students must be better supported. I am sure that in many cases the increase has been driven by the impact of the recession, as people enter higher education before they seek to re-enter the job market after being made redundant.

As a result of the discussions that I mentioned and after consideration of all the factors that I set out, I am able to announce additional measures for higher education students at university and college. They are based on option A in our consultation response of 7 October, but I decided to vary elements of that option in light of further discussions with the NUS.

Under option A we said that we would provide—for the first time—a new grant of up to £1,000 for independent students who are studying in Scotland, increase by £2 million the amount of money that is available to all students to meet the costs of child care, and increase the maximum level of the income-assessed student loans. We will still do each of those three things. We will also increase the amount of money for young students, as we said that we would do. To ensure that the money goes as far as possible and is targeted at improving the income levels of the poorest students, at a time when other sources of finance are more limited, we will do that through a further increase in student loans, rather than through student grants. We will therefore widen the scope of the additional loan to include independent students, and we will increase it to £785 for those who are eligible. That means that the income of up to 75,900 students will rise by up to £442; up to 44,500 students will see their incomes rise by up to £622; and up to 14,000 new students will now receive a grant and benefit from the introduction of the new independent students bursary.

Those measures will mean that the income of dependent and independent students from low-income backgrounds who are living away from home and studying courses of higher education in colleges and universities will rise to £5,852 per annum. For the first time since devolution, every student who qualifies for an income-assessed student loan, irrespective of their age, will be eligible for the same level of financial support. Over and above that, I can announce another first. These proposals are to provide low-income students aged over 55 who study in Scotland with access to grants through the new independent students bursary for the first time.

Although I have gone further than many in the chamber would have anticipated, I am anxious to make further progress. I accept that the system of student grants and loans should be examined more closely to see what further changes can be made and what scope we have to spend our existing budget smarter. I am prepared to agree to adapt our option A in the way that the NUS requested to ensure that our shared goal of the best possible deal for Scotland's students is achieved. Although the strict terms of the motion that the Parliament passed on 21 May might not have been met, particularly the Opposition's original wish to increase the young students

bursary, the main element of it—addressing student hardship—has, I believe, been realised.

Our proposals also demonstrate that the Scottish Government is prepared to adapt its policies in the short term to raise students' income at a time when part-time work to supplement the support that they receive from the Scottish Government is harder to come by. Evidence suggests that banks are lending less money to students and on less favourable terms, with many students resorting to credit card debt. We have no choice but to respond to those concerns with proposals to alleviate debt where we can and make loans available on the best possible terms where debt is still accumulated.

Although a number of factors surround access to learning, we believe that the availability of realistic levels of student support plays an important part in any decision to study beyond school. Our colleges and universities have never been more popular: acceptances to universities are up by 5.5 per cent this year alone, and the greatest rise is in the number of independent students who will benefit the most from what I have announced today.

In these toughest of economic times, I believe that we have a duty to protect and promote the income and interests of this generation of students. I take that duty seriously, which is why I commend the £30 million-worth of proposals to support students to the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement.

Although I wish to welcome the statement, it must be acknowledged that it is because of the consistent calls and pressure from Opposition parties, along with the student movement, that the Government has been forced to listen and shift its position. I am glad that the campaign, which has been led by Labour, Liberals and the Conservatives, along with the student movement, has resulted in a package that will put more into students' pockets and that has recognised that tackling student hardship must be the Parliament's priority when addressing student support issues. Is the cabinet secretary able to explain why her junior minister—who I understand is rushing to a photo call at the University of Edinburgh after the statement—dismissed this exact same proposal out of hand last week? Surely that was a low point in what was largely a constructive dialogue.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that £30 million does not go far enough towards addressing the levels of identified student hardship? It is but a sticking plaster over the hardship problem. Does

she agree that more needs to be done to tackle the levels of commercial debt and the long working hours that many students will continue to experience?

Finally, the cabinet secretary agreed that the grants and loans system needs to be examined. Will the Government acknowledge Andrew Cubie's comments today that the time has come for a broadly based, comprehensive review of funding and support an independent review?

Fiona Hyslop: One of the issues for a minority Government is responding to the views of other parties. Following the instructions that we had on 21 May, that is exactly what we did. A number of people made constructive proposals, including in response to the consultation, and we listened to them. I agree that the Government has had to compromise on increasing the loan element of the package. I also agree that the Opposition parties acknowledged that independent students needed consideration of a kind that those parties had not included in their initial proposal. The NUS agreed with that as well. We are doing what the Parliament is meant to do, which is to respect the views of minorities and reach compromise and consensus. That is what I have sought to do.

From the initial discussions right back in September I indicated that the independent students issue was serious and had to be addressed. I conceded in the September and October meetings with the Opposition that I was also prepared to compromise on the loan element. As far as the meeting on 21 October is concerned, Keith Brown admitted that the NUS proposal had just been delivered to him for consideration, as it had been to Opposition members who were at that meeting. Within the timeframe for consideration, we therefore looked at what the NUS proposed. It proactively and positively came with a view on 21 October that we were happy to consider. Since it was not a brand new option but a variation of what we had already set in train as one of the three options that the Student Awards Agency for Scotland was working on, it was possible to consider it. I was very pleased that, at a constructive meeting that I had subsequently with the NUS, we were able to agree that the proposal would be a way forward.

At a time when we have a real terms cut in the Scottish budget for 2010-11, for a Government to come forward with £30 million in that year alone is a considerable achievement. The previous Administration put forward resources of £22 million a year to support students. This Administration is already putting forward improvements to student support of £44 million a year. Today's announcement provides an additional £30 million for student support. I think that that is a good record at a time of pressing financial pressures on

this Government, and that it should be congratulated.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. The £30 million on offer for student support is, indeed, welcome, although it of course falls far short of the estimated £2 billion cost of implementing the now infamous Scottish National Party manifesto commitment to wipe out student debt.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the extra £2 million for child care and the increase in student loans that has been announced today. The latter element represents a substantial shift in stance from the SNP, which as recently as last week was maintaining the position, contrary to all the evidence from student groups, that reducing student debt on graduation was the priority for additional resources. Fortunately, the united front presented by the Conservatives, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the National Union of Students in Scotland has seen a change of heart, with an admission today from the Scottish Government that the key issue to tackle is, in fact, student hardship and putting more money into students' pockets. I am pleased that the SNP Government has at last acknowledged that.

I believe that students will generally welcome the proposals. However, £30 million was never going to be enough to address entirely student hardship. Today, Sir Andrew Cubie is backing calls that were first made by the Scottish Conservatives for an independent review of university funding and student support so that we can take the next step forward. Will the cabinet secretary join the growing consensus in support of those calls? If not, why not?

Fiona Hyslop: This Administration has increased the university funding share of the overall budget to 3.87 per cent in 2010-11, compared with the position inherited from the previous Administration of a 3.73 per cent share. We also conducted, with Universities Scotland, a thorough joint review of funding mechanisms. Professor Anthony Cohen, former principal of Queen Margaret University, has said:

"This Government has I think manifested an extraordinary commitment to the universities since they came to power. The taskforce itself was the closest engagement which any Government in my recollection has had with the universities".

On tuition fees, Professor Steve Smith, who is the new president of Universities UK, said:

"The issue is almost completely irrelevant in Scotland ... It's not something we are thinking about. Because the funding level is roughly comparable (with England's) it seems to me there is no issue."

Whether or not the cap on fees is removed in England in the longer term, implementation of that will be some way down the line. Our job in the here and now is to ensure that support for universities, as I have evidenced already, continues to be strong. Rather than wait for some long-term review of student support, we are delivering an additional £30 million now. That money will make a difference in the pockets of more than 75,000 students by this time next year. Such action by the Scottish Government is to be welcomed.

I acknowledge that we have changed our position on loans, just as the Conservatives have changed their position on independent students, but we have come to that compromise because that is the correct thing to do. Having listened to what everyone has said, we have come up with a package that will make a difference. Given the comments from Opposition members, I hope that the package will receive support.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement.

For many months, the shared goal of the Liberal Democrats, the Labour Party, the Conservatives and NUS Scotland has been to equip Scotland's students with the support that they need, in their pockets, at a time of recession. We have consistently made the case that hardship is now the most important issue for students. Therefore, the Liberal Democrats welcome the Government's shift in focusing on hardship rather than on moving from loans to grants, which would have put no extra money into students' pockets.

The cabinet secretary is right to say that there has been movement on all sides, but that is why people enter into such discussions. The negotiations were to try to find a way forward that would benefit the students whom we seek to help. We made the case for an additional £2 million for child care funding, so we welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement on that. We support the introduction of an independent students bursary, given that research shows that such students are most affected by hardship and commercial debt.

The Government's original response, which was published on 7 October, acknowledged the Parliament's motion calling for a cross-party approach to tackle student hardship among the poorest students, but the Government still failed to propose any options that would tackle such hardship. That is why we welcome the Government's decision to think again on the option that was put forward last week by NUS Scotland, which was backed by the Opposition parties that attended the meeting.

The £30 million is a step in the right direction, but it falls far short of the Government's election pledge of £2 billion. Given that the cabinet secretary has said today that she has been prepared to adapt policies in the short term, when can we expect her to deliver the rest of the £2 billion?

Will the cabinet secretary also provide further details and the timetable for the review of whether child care funding should continue to be discretionary or should—as we all agree should happen—become an entitlement? What further issues does she intend to include in the wider review of the system of grants and loans to ensure that we spend our money as wisely as possible to the benefit of Scotland's students?

Fiona Hyslop: The member makes an important point about the £2 million child care fund, on which we will obviously make progress as soon as possible. However, she must recognise that issues with the systems of implementation might restrict the introduction of the fund until 2010-11. However, I recognise that we need to try to work on the issue as quickly as we can.

Let me say that there was no manifesto commitment for £2 billion servicing of debt. That would not cost £2 billion.

As a minority Government, we face a real challenge to get proposals through the Parliament when there is distinct opposition. I am pleased that the Liberal Democrats joined with the Government to abolish the graduate endowment fee, but the vote was very close. Indeed, Labour and the Conservatives would still have required students to pay £2,300 at the end of their period in university. In the teeth of such opposition, attempting to deal with some other debt issues that we want to tackle would have been challenging, especially if one bears in mind the resistance that we have already seen to our proposal to look at grants and loans.

For the first time under devolution, students from low-income households will now be entitled to the same income whether they are under 25 or over 25. That is a major step forward. In the past, the Parliament has abolished front-end tuition fees and the graduate endowment fee. Let today be the day that we recognise that we need to provide a universal grant that is available to people from low-income backgrounds, whether or not they are over 25. Such students will get financial support from the Scottish Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If we can have short, focused questions, I will be able to get everyone in.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): The SNP Government came to power with the principle that access to education should be based

on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. Today, Labour called for tuition fees in Scottish education. Will the cabinet secretary assure me that the principle of free education remains a policy of the SNP Government and that she will not introduce any proposals for the reintroduction of tuition fees in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: It is recognised that tuition fees have not been welcomed in Scotland. Indeed, the abolition of the back-end tuition fee through the abolition of the graduate endowment has been welcomed throughout the country. However, there are issues with student support. The Government down south overcommitted £200 million and has had to recoup £100 million from students, which is jeopardising places. England has a complex student loans system, even compared with ours. In considering some of the issues on student support, we have all found and continue to find that more could be done to make a budget that will be limited in future go further. However, as far as the Scottish Government is concerned, there is no place for tuition fees in higher education in Scotland.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Like others, I welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement. I am pleased that she has responded to representations from Opposition parties and the NUS and will provide an additional £2 million for child care. Discretionary funds that support students with child care responsibilities or those in hardship often make the difference for such students between staying in university or college and dropping out. However, given the 5.5 per cent increase in acceptances that UCAS has revealed, discretionary funds for hardship and child care will be put under added pressure. Will the cabinet secretary guarantee that such funds will not run dry this year, as they did at some universities last year?

Fiona Hyslop: The independent universities and colleges are responsible for their own funding streams but, as Karen Whitefield will be aware, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council responded quickly—in fact, within three weeks—when concerns were raised last year.

We have to monitor the position closely. Indeed, we discussed that subject in the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee this morning. I have asked the funding council to keep a close account of what is happening in the here and now. As we speak, it is engaged with colleges and universities to ascertain what the initial response has been to discretionary funds this financial year. However, the extra £2 million next year will benefit students across the piece. We are increasing the support for independent students, many of whom have families. That is the key focus of today's announcement.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Page 9 of the cabinet secretary's statement says that she accepts

"that the system of student grants and loans should now be examined more closely, to see what further changes can be made and what scope we have to spend our existing budget smarter",

which is an interesting phrase. What is the timescale for that review and when can we expect the cabinet secretary to report back to Parliament?

Fiona Hyslop: Although we are investing an additional £30 million for 2010-11, Elizabeth Smith will be aware that we are moving into a new spending review period and that we have heard from a variety of UK parties that there should be cuts, whether savage cuts or other degrees of cut. Going into the next spending review period, we will know what resources are available to us and we will be in a position to consider what improvements can be made. There can be slight adjustments. We have already made some, such as changes to means testing, within a short period of time, and we will make any further improvements that we can in the short term. I expect the review to inform some of our thinking, particularly going into the next spending review period.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The minister is aware that Scottish students who study courses in England that are unavailable in Scotland are hit not only because they have to pay tuition fees but because many receive a maximum loan support of only £900 a year while their English counterparts receive more than £3,000. When will she give those students real help to avoid the credit card debt to which she rightly referred by raising the level of the non-means-tested loans for all students above the impossibly low level of only £900 a year? She is forcing students into commercial debt.

Fiona Hyslop: Mike Rumbles has pursued the issue previously. Loans are available to help Scottish students to fulfil the tuition fee obligations that they have in England. I will write to him to address the impact that today's announcements would have on any Scottish students who study in England and to address some of the issues that he continues to raise with me. The issue that affects students from Scotland who study in England is not necessarily tuition fee support but income for day-to-day living. I am not in a position to respond to him immediately, but I will do so in writing.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): What are the principles behind supporting independent students, who are a group that has never previously had direct financial support?

What benefits will such support bring for many who are retraining through the recession?

Fiona Hyslop: As I mentioned, the UCAS figures show that the number of independent students going to university reduced in previous years but has now increased. Financial support can make a difference to whether they go to university in the first place and, more important, some of the feedback that we have on independent and older students at universities indicates that the issue puts pressure on the retention of such students once they have accepted a place and are at university. The problem can often be issues of income, family responsibilities and debt. The fact that independent and older students have up to £4,000 commercial debt, compared with several hundred pounds for younger students, shows that commercial debt is hitting independent students hard. An income of £1,227 more than they had previously will be welcomed by independent students throughout Scotland.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for her statement, although I do not fully understand why it has taken more than a year to agree on the distribution of a sum of money that, from the cabinet secretary's evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee this morning, seems to be a recycling or reallocation of savings from within the existing departmental budget—putting students' money back in their own pockets, as it were.

Could the cabinet secretary clarify the language that she used? She referred to rises of "up to £442" and "up to £622". Can she reassure me that all the 76,000 students identified will receive £442? If not, how many will be affected and how much will they receive?

Fiona Hyslop: Ken Macintosh perhaps misunderstood the comments that were made at the committee this morning—£30 million has been earmarked for student support from the start of the spending review period for the year going forward and it was identified for 2010-11. That funding is certainly not resourced by savings identified elsewhere in the budget.

Ken Macintosh raises a substantive point about who will benefit. With the Presiding Officer's indulgence, I will give Parliament some additional information. We have focused in particular on lower-income families. The £442 increase in income will apply to under-25-year-old dependent students with household incomes between £25,000 and £40,000. Students from that income bracket—both dependent and independent—will receive an increase of £442. Those under 25 who are dependent students will receive an increase of £622 in their income. The real winners today are independent students with income levels of around

£17,000 or less, as they will receive an increase in income of £1,227.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary said, we are now in the worst recession for a generation. Can she detail and confirm the support available to the universities and colleges sector to help those who are faced with redundancy during these difficult times?

Fiona Hyslop: The announcement today is about support for individual students, but in the university sector we have already introduced measures such as the ILA 500, which has for the first time replaced loans with grants for up to 20,000 part-time students. The ILA 500 was not initially intended to tackle the recession, because it was announced and agreed before the recession, but we are finding that it provides a bridge and an opportunity for some people who have been made redundant and who have to continue to work part-time to keep their families to retrain to go into a different profession and to train at universities. Replacing loans with grants for part-time students has added an extra boost at this time of difficulty during the recession. Independent students, many of whom may have been made redundant and are going to university to retrain—applications are increasing in particular in science, technology and engineering—provide a great opportunity for the country to take that talent and ensure that those people can contribute to the economic recovery in the future. The steps that we have taken help to ensure that they can support their families in the meantime.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): I, too, welcome the minister's statement, particularly with regard to the progress that has been made on support for poorer students. Further to Karen Whitefield's question, I press the cabinet secretary on the guarantees that she is prepared to give on hardship funds, which have run dry in some institutions. We are looking for an assurance from the cabinet secretary that she will do something to ensure that the hardship funds do not dry up.

Fiona Hyslop: We have increased the hardship funds in response to the demands that were being placed on them. The fact that there has been an increase of 17 per cent in the available hardship funds under the current Administration is evidence of that. If any member or constituent has concerns about the response that they are getting about hardship funds, they should please let us know. However, the hardship and discretionary funds are not a guaranteed source of income; they are discretionary and are for the universities to deploy. Nevertheless, we will respond in a timely way to any request that is made in that regard.

The experience is perhaps different in different universities. Pauline McNeill is correct to say that, last year, the bursaries and hardship funds in a

number of universities and colleges ran dry and were swiftly supplemented by additional income from the Scottish funding council. However, other institutions did not apply because there was no demand for the funds.

There is a difference between institutions in the distribution of hardship funds. As I explained to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee this morning, that is perhaps because of the experience that has been built up over a number of years. However, we are in a volatile situation just now and more women with dependants are entering higher education, so the system must be responsive.

A number of institutions throughout Scotland did not have to apply for additional hardship and discretionary funding, but I am aware of all the concerns that people are raising. As of now, the Scottish funding council is working with colleges and universities to see what pressures are arising this year. Last year, it responded within three weeks of concerns being voiced. The funding council is ensuring that it can respond but, until we know what the demand is, it is difficult for it to respond.

Elder Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on the reshaping of the future care of older people.

15:08

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I am pleased to open today's subject debate on the reshaping of care services for older people in Scotland. Ensuring the provision of good support for older members of society is a marker of a strong and just democracy, and it is fitting that the Parliament should come together to consider the challenges that that responsibility brings. Before exploring what some of those challenges are, I say that I am grateful to colleagues for agreeing to a subject debate at this stage in our thinking.

How we go about ensuring that older people have access to appropriate services is a matter of enormous strategic importance to this nation as a whole—indeed, to all of us as individuals, too. It is a challenge whose implications will span many generations and many Administrations of whatever political colour. We, as parliamentarians, must work together to put down a marker of the Scottish Parliament's will on how best to provide care for older people that is sustainable, deliverable, appropriate and fair. I feel certain that we would all agree to the basic premise of that commitment.

All members have had access to some background material on the subject from the Scottish Parliament information centre to inform the debate. Let me set the scene with a few statistics that I am sure leap out at other members as much as they leapt out at me. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of people in Scotland who are aged over 65 is projected to rise by 21 per cent, and by 2031 the number is projected to rise by 62 per cent. The rise in the number of people aged over 75 during those periods is projected to be 21 per cent and 81 per cent, respectively.

We estimate that, in 2007-08, slightly over 40 per cent of total expenditure by the national health service and social work services in Scotland was on older people. Of that expenditure, we estimate that nearly two thirds took place in institutional settings. Indeed, unplanned admissions to hospital accounted for almost one third of the total. Taken together, all of that means that the way in which we currently deliver services for older people is simply not sustainable in the longer term. Often, though, those services provide vital support to people. Day in and day out, our health and care professionals provide services that make a positive impact on the quality of life of thousands of older people. We must also acknowledge and

support the important contribution of the voluntary sector and of the many unpaid carers who support people across the country.

Nonetheless, we also know that there are many instances in which we could be doing things differently and, often, with a better outcome.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): On the demographics, does the minister agree that there might be additional pressures in rural areas, where figures show that the elderly population is growing the fastest? Will she work proactively to restore rural weighting to the funding formula that is used by the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee?

Shona Robison: During the work on the reshaping of older people's services, we are very much taking into account the needs of older people wherever they live. I accept that there are particular pressures around sustaining services in rural areas.

On a positive note, I point out that the enhanced care service that is being worked on in the Borders, I think, is interesting and provides a model that other areas of the country could learn from. I am happy to share details of that service with the member.

We have to ask ourselves whether our current patterns of service delivery for older people are delivering what people need or want. We must also ask whether we can use the money that is already in the system to better effect. The answer that I and most other people would give to that question is yes.

We need to start thinking in terms of a different fundamental philosophy about care of older people, one that begins and ends with the principle of supporting people, whenever possible, to look after themselves, rather than disempowering people by doing things for them, which can sometimes happen. Many unplanned admissions to acute hospitals could be avoided through, for example, greater support for self-care, more programmes of anticipatory care and easier access to health and social care services in the community at any time of the day or night.

Let us be clear that this is not Government looking for alternatives to increasing investment in older people's services. We already know that simply spending more does not guarantee better results. The multi-agency inspection report on older people's services showed that the significant levels of variation in elderly spend per capita had no obvious relationship to outcomes.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Constituents have raised with me the fact that Highland Council's budget for aids and adaptations ran out months ago, which means, for

example, that it will be next April before those aged over 90 get a shower instead of a bath. How can that help or empower people to live at home?

Shona Robison: Within this debate, we will no doubt hear of individual instances in which things are not as good as we would want them to be. However, the debate must be about how we can plot and plan services that can deliver a better deal for people in Scotland no matter where they live. We need to think about how, in doing that, we can overcome issues such as the one that Mary Scanlon has raised. However, we must concern ourselves with the bigger picture and with the direction of travel.

As a matter of priority, we need to design services that support moves away from overdependence on institutional forms of care. We also need to get to grips with the cost—in terms of results for people and value for the public pound—of the variation in clinical and care practitioner decision making.

Many of those working in health and social services would say that they could improve outcomes if only resources could follow the patient or service user to where they could be used most effectively. I am, therefore, pleased to note the work that is now under way in four test sites to implement an integrated resource framework that will enable partners to realign existing health and adult social care resources to support shifts in the balance of care. We can use the evidence from those test sites to consider better ways of managing resources across our health and social care systems, which we have been talking about in Parliament for as long as I have been here. However, those challenges raise questions for us all that go well beyond how much money we spend on individual health or social care services, or what those services look like.

A few key observations should guide us. First, older people get much of their care and support from someone who is close to them. Secondly, it is more likely to be a person's social support network rather than their health alone that affects where they receive care. Thirdly, many specialist services run counter to our policy goal of optimising independence because they fail to recognise the value of self-care.

We need a shift in our thinking so that older people are never viewed as a problem or a liability but are recognised as our biggest asset and as contributing far more than they consume. We need to ensure that unpaid carers are supported effectively and that our systems do not work against the vital contribution that they make. We must, of course, do everything that we can to enable greater protection for those adults who are most at risk of harm, primarily through the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007.

The 2007 act puts in place modern and strengthened measures to enable greater protection for adults in Scotland who are most at risk of harm. It sends a clear message that the harm or neglect of such adults is simply not acceptable. Members will be aware, as I am, of the recent press coverage of elder abuse. Elder and other forms of harm should never be tolerated by society. Adult protection is a sensitive issue and we should continue to address it sensitively, while endeavouring to strike an appropriate balance between protecting people and enabling them to live fulfilling lives. I will make a formal statement to Parliament tomorrow morning on elder abuse, in which I will cover the issue in more detail.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): Does the member share my concerns about the use of sedation for older members of society? Does she agree that inappropriate use of sedation constitutes a form of elder abuse?

Shona Robison: Rhona Brankin raises a very important issue. When the "Remember, I'm still me" report was published, I met the Mental Welfare Commission, the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and officials to consider how we can act quickly on some of the very serious issues that were raised in the report, such as the issue of sedation. I assure the member that work is continuing on the issue to ensure the appropriate use of any medication that is required, and that we are acting on her concerns.

The Scottish Government is actively working with local government and the NHS to agree on what we need to do now to shape the future of health and social care. At a local level, much is happening throughout Scotland to reshape and modernise care services to make them more outcome-focused, more personalised and more responsive. In 2010, we will embark on a process of public engagement to consider how best to address those challenges. That engagement exercise has been commissioned by the ministerial strategic group for health and community care, which I chair and which has NHS chairs and senior local authority councillors among its members. It will begin in early 2010 when the first stages of analytical and preparatory work are complete.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Has the minister included the voluntary sector in the eight very important work streams?

Shona Robison: We are involving the voluntary sector, and we have discussed with it how we should take that work forward. However, it was important for us to be clear about the general direction of travel, because it would be dishonest for us to go out with a blank sheet of paper and say to people, "What do you think?" We need to

be able to put down some ideas to gauge and guide that discussion, and that is the stage that we have reached. We have by no means ruled anything out, but we need to give some direction to the discussion, and we have been undertaking work on that. I will give members an indication of the priorities that have emerged early on from that preparatory work, on which the discussion will centre. I do not think that any of the themes will come as a surprise, but the fact that they are familiar in no way diminishes the challenges ahead.

In broad terms, we will focus on better integration across services and the workforce in health and social care; more anticipatory and preventive care; more supported self-care and better personalised care; better crisis care; more complex care at home; the use of care homes to provide more specialised care; better care pathways, particularly in and out of hospital; and last but by no means least, serious consideration of how best to promote and encourage healthy living so that our older population is as healthy as possible.

We need to keep it in mind that the work is not just an exercise in improving services for today's older population and that we must also keep an eye on the horizon. Today's younger people, whom we must support to be tomorrow's healthy, independent generation of older people, will have very different expectations and desires. I will be looking for engagement to take place as much locally as nationally. I am pleased that the members of the ministerial strategic group have agreed to be key players in taking the discussion forward locally. The points and ideas that members raise in today's debate will also form an important part of the process and will be included in our deliberations.

We are, of course, also working with the United Kingdom Government in the light of its green paper "Shaping the future of care together". Given that any changes to the benefits system, particularly attendance allowance, will have profound implications for the way in which social care is delivered in Scotland, that dialogue is important. I am clear, however, that here in Scotland we need a free and open debate about the implications of an ageing demographic as well as discussion of specific ideas for change. We cannot develop individual proposals until we have all agreed, at the least, that marginal changes to current services will not be enough to bring about the required conditions for system-wide innovation.

I look forward to a lively and stimulating debate. We need to grasp the challenges and I hope that we can agree today on a common purpose and direction of travel. I am happy to engage with

parliamentarians either formally or informally as we take the work forward, and I hope that members will also get involved in local discussions. The issue is probably one of the most important areas that we can take forward at present and I hope that we can reach a political consensus as we do so.

15:22

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the minister's contribution on this important issue. I also pay tribute to my colleague Irene Oldfather, who has, along with the cross-party group on older people, age and ageing, driven a lot of the work on the issue. Unfortunately, because of her own caring responsibilities, she is unable to contribute today.

In debating services for older people, we must recognise that many older people are active and positive contributors, even though—inevitably—the discussion then begins to focus on care issues. When Malcolm Chisholm and Rhona Brankin, as ministers, drove our older people's strategy, they were keen to ensure that there was an emphasis on the former aspect as well as on care. I hope that colleagues will forgive me if I concentrate on care issues in my speech.

Journalists do not often find themselves being praised in the Parliament, but I begin by offering a vote of thanks to the BBC and *The Herald* for what was investigative journalism at its best. They made an important contribution to opening up a more rigorous debate on the nature of care of older people in our communities by confronting us all with the reality of neglect and abuse of vulnerable older people. The "Panorama" exposé on home care and the more recent *Herald* investigation have had a powerful impact, but I regret that there has been insufficient evidence of urgency on the part of the Scottish Government in its response to their findings.

The investigations revealed the misery and inadequate support of real men and women. Those findings are in tune with the reports of some of my constituents and, I am sure, of constituents of members throughout the chamber. Few of us will be untouched by the realities and frustrations of securing proper care for older people. Too many people—and their carers—describe their search for consistency and continuity of care as a battle or a struggle that is shaped by fear for the future rather than by confidence. When we think of carers' battles for their loved ones, how much more fearful should we be for those without family or those for whom family members, as *The Herald* identified, are the problem because they are the perpetrators of abuse?

In the face of that situation, the Scottish Government's approach as indicated by the concordat—although certainly not by the broader contribution from the minister today, which was welcome—focuses simply on respite places and funding issues around free personal care. That approach is inadequate and it misses the point. We know all too well of cases in which people are offered inappropriate respite and that, as a consequence, much-needed support is not taken up. It is also evident that we need to go beyond simple repetition of a commitment to free personal care, to addressing the quality of care and, indeed, what we mean by care.

The journalistic investigations have highlighted the gap between the reality in communities and the debate that the Parliament has been having over time. We face a massive challenge: if the voices describing physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable people and those who are unable to defend themselves are to be heard properly and understood, we should not—indeed, we cannot—be defensive. Our response must be brutally honest and urgent. This is no time to explain away or defend the situation, or to marshal statistics to prove that everything is better than it has ever been—or, if it is not, to claim that the blame lies elsewhere. I agree with the minister that the huge challenges that face us go beyond our usual politicking: this is the time for members of this Parliament to ask what we can do to address the challenges, and to examine what we need to change in order to respond to this scandal at the heart of our communities.

The challenge for ministers, the Scottish Government and the Parliament is to acknowledge that everything that they do must be tested against whether it makes people safer or makes things worse. One example is the Scottish National Party's commitment to a centrally imposed council tax freeze. Although the move has given some older people £1 or so a week extra in their pockets, it has also resulted in cuts to their day care services at a time when the Scottish budget has increased by £600 million. If we are to interrogate the options seriously, we cannot simply leave to one side the reality of the impact of the imposed council tax freeze, with only assertion to defend it.

In response to the "Panorama" programme, the minister has said that she will issue guidance on home care that will be "very robust indeed". I would welcome more information on whether that work has been done, on the dialogue that she has had with local authorities on the matter and on concerns that have been expressed about contracts.

As I say, the nature and scale of the challenge demand creative thinking and the acknowledgement that, as far as our society's priorities are concerned, we are in very-big-question territory. Although much of the debate about older people has focused on pensions and funding, and despite our recognition that for many people the fourth age is a time for learning new skills and facing new challenges, the fact is that surveys of older people have repeatedly identified as key concerns loneliness, isolation and safety issues. How should the Scottish Government be protecting those often very low-level but nonetheless lifeline services that are provided by lunch clubs, projects that take people to the library or to church and community transport schemes that allow people to visit hospital—in other words, the services that provide the kind of experiences that sustain people in their own homes, as opposed to care regimes that contain them there?

How is the Scottish Government going to support the community initiatives—such as the reminiscence groups run by the Village Storytelling Centre in my area—that seek to intervene early in respect of the impact of dementia, or the services that support elderly carers who wish to keep their loved ones with them as long as possible? The fear is that, despite this debate and discussion, those very services, which provide people with real quality of life, are seen as luxuries when funding decisions are made.

We must be concerned by Audit Scotland's finding that local authority spending on care is being retrenched towards high-level needs, so I would welcome the minister's saying what discussions she has had with local authorities on that shift. We have to fear for localised services when the efficiencies that the Scottish Government is demanding might be resulting in the stripping out of the key bits of care that make a difference. We must acknowledge that if such services, which are driven by a compassionate understanding of need, are proving to be vulnerable, and if contracts are being squeezed to the extent that care providers are experiencing high staff turnover, the result can be the unbearable image from the "Panorama" programme—which is, I am sure, seared on all our minds—of an elderly man being washed while his carer was talking on her mobile phone. Such an image will drive everyone in the chamber to tackle these issues.

I am interested to find out what the Scottish Government is doing to address staff turnover and the lack of regular contact with the same person, which are particular concerns in relation to quality of care. I cannot be the only member with constituents who still, with all the stress that it involves, go home at lunch time to check whether

the support for their elderly parents has been delivered in the right way.

I am glad that the minister has acknowledged the critical role that the voluntary sector can play in understanding and meeting needs. However, what is the sector's real role in the Government's work streams? I understand that we cannot start with a blank sheet of paper, but liberating those who best understand need to tell us what has to be done has informed policy in the past and can do so again. For example, we know that older volunteers have played a key role in supporting people and that an active interest in volunteering can keep people healthy and involved for longer. It is therefore a matter of regret that the retired and senior volunteer programme had to close through lack of funding.

I am sure that the minister will recognise the anxiety of many that the shift in the balance of care will lead to increased pressure on carers, including voluntary carers. I seek from the minister assurances on sustained funding, particularly for carer centres, which advocate for carers and offer a proper understanding of their experience as well as a support and help group for them through very challenging times. Such centres provide proper and meaningful support so that carers can do what they want to do as well as possible. Although I understand that spending alone does not solve problems, stopping spending often creates problems or compounds them. That is my concern about what is seen as the bonus issue.

There is an important debate to be had about the limit of technology as a means of supporting people in their homes. Although technology can buttress support in practical ways, it cannot be a substitute for it. Technology cannot hold a person's hand when they are sad. I am interested in what work the minister has done to shape the current approach of the Minister for Housing and Communities, at a time when sheltered housing is reducing—the number of wardens is reducing—and when organisations such as Inclusion Scotland are highlighting the need for local authorities to do more to provide housing to meet disabled people's needs.

Another issue is the effectiveness of the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care in monitoring and in dealing with those who abuse the trust that we place in them to care for people. We must ask how a dementia strategy can be supported and funded so that we transform the nature of care and provide proper processes in relation to personalised care and who is in control.

The future care of older people is a care issue, but it is also a justice issue. We must hear from the minister about the discussions that she has had with justice officials and the care commission about prosecuting those who are guilty of stealing

time from care packages or of abusing older people who are in their care. That is not just in the interests of the identified victims; it will also deter those who might be tempted to prey on the elderly, which we will revisit tomorrow. It is a scandal that the only action by the police as a consequence of the "Panorama" programme was to arrest the journalist who exposed the neglect rather than the perpetrators of it. We should all condemn the treatment of the undercover journalist Arifa Farooq. We must know that the justice system recognises its role in protecting the elderly.

If ever there was a need for a national conversation and a big debate, it is for one on future services to support older people. People need consistency, continuity and confidence. The work of *The Herald* and the BBC opened up a set of circumstances. It is a test for the Parliament to rise to the challenge. I assure the minister that, on the big questions, she will have the Opposition with her in ensuring that we have a proper strategy to protect our older people.

15:32

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I welcome the debate on future services for the elderly. We recently had an excellent debate on the charter of rights for people with dementia, which was led by Irene Oldfather, whom Johann Lamont mentioned. It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to do as much as we can to get that charter out to older people and their carers.

The debate is on future care, but I make no apology for repeating some points that I have raised previously. Currently, more than 800,000 people in Scotland are aged 65 or over, and 66,000 of them have dementia. Throughout the UK, one in four people over 65 has depression that impairs their quality of life. The over-65 population in Scotland is set to rise by 21 per cent by 2016 and the over-85 population is set to rise by 38 per cent in the same period. It is clear that the UK and Scottish Governments need to prepare for that.

As the minister said, last year health and social care expenditure for over-65s was £4.5 billion. A third of that expenditure went on emergency admissions. Surely, the first thing for a future policy is to provide support and care that will empower older people to be as mobile and independent as possible and to live in their homes for as long as possible. We should not assume that everyone over 65 needs care. Of that population, 89.5 per cent are not in the care system at all. As I said in a previous debate, the over-65s represent more than 20 per cent of the population, but receive only 5 per cent of the input from national health service psychology services

and the psychology profession in Scotland. That cannot be right. As well as their direct input, psychologists can train and support staff who work specifically with older people. That is very much needed.

If we wish to enhance independence and the quality of life of elderly people, we could stop rationing chiropody—or podiatry as it is now called. We could consider having a system in which elderly people can self-refer when their mobility is threatened, and we could stop the stupid argument about whether podiatrists should cut toenails. Podiatrists are highly qualified and provide high-quality foot care. If there is to be investment in any service to keep people mobile, it should be in podiatry.

The same applies to physiotherapy. It is a nonsense that a person can wait 18 weeks between general practitioner referral and surgery and yet can wait months or even years to see a physiotherapist. After such a long wait, the damage for an older person is probably much more difficult to repair—if it is possible to repair it—and it is almost impossible to restore the person to good health.

I thank the Royal National Institute for Deaf People in Scotland for providing an excellent briefing on hearing issues among older people. According to the RNID, 17 per cent of its respondents waited months to receive equipment, and it estimates that about 350,000 people in Scotland who could benefit from hearing aids are not using them. It can take 15 years before people seek help after first noticing that their hearing is deteriorating. In Inverness last week, I was delighted to get a little leaflet through the door—when the posties were not on strike—to say that Specsavers is now doing hearing checks. One can just walk in and get one's eyes and ears tested at the same time and, within a week, one can get a digital hearing aid for around £400. I hope that the Government will be as supportive of high street hearing tests as it is of optometrists and opticians, and that it does not allow its anti-private-sector bias to affect patient care.

More use of telehealth could greatly assist independence at home. Let us not assume that everyone who is over 65 does not know how to switch on a CardioPod. Let us not treat them all as if they did not live in the age of technology.

It is time to reconsider the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002. When it was passed, the intention was that every care home for the elderly would be an integrated care home, so that when nursing care was needed it would be provided. Somewhere between passage of the bill and implementation of the act, something happened, and instead of one type of care home we have three: residential care homes, nursing

homes and some integrated care homes. The result is that people who need nursing care in a residential care home do not get it. In fact, quite often the carers and managers of the home do not diagnose the problems.

Still on care homes—and bearing in mind the current budget scrutiny—I ask the Scottish National Party to consider another issue. I use the example of Dundee, given that it is the minister's constituency. Why does the SNP allow councils, for example Dundee City Council, to pay £454 a week for care of a person in an independent care home but £826 a week for people in council homes? We have a tight budget, and a growing elderly population, and twice as many elderly people can be cared for in the independent sector, with the same quality and standards as the council sector.

Finally, we need to consider the removal of ring fencing and what that has done for care of the elderly. Dr McKee is familiar with Kilchoan in the Highlands. Those who go to the lunch club there to be cared for are now serving soup and caring for themselves because there is no money in Highland Council's budget for their care. People in the Highlands are being told that the budget is spent and that they must wait until next year. The removal of ring fencing was to allow councils to ensure that all single outcome agreements were achieved, and that what was assessed as a need was provided for. If the budget to promote mobility, health and independence at home runs out in a few months, either care of the elderly is not a priority in the councils in Scotland or the single outcome agreements are not robust enough to ensure that the money is invested for older people. If we are serious about this issue, we must consider that.

15:39

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): As always, the difficulty in being the last of the front-bench spokespeople to speak in a subject debate is that all the useful statistics that have been provided by the various organisations have been copiously articulated by all the previous speakers.

It is given and accepted that Scotland's ageing population is graphically illustrated by recent population statistics. We know that. As Mary Scanlon said, we are talking about a valuable section of our community, which is a point that I want to share. In general, we should regard the fact that we are able to live longer as an achievement—something to be proud of, not as a great challenge; we should not think, "Oh dear, what a pity." Of course, the purpose of the debate is to acknowledge that sections of that community need our special care and attention. Since last we debated this subject, the only real difference—

other than the exponential growth of that population—is that difficulties that are largely a consequence of the financial crisis have arisen.

On individuals' ability to look after themselves—which we wish to encourage—real problems are arising with pension arrangements. That is not a matter for this Parliament, but it is a vital component of our attention to care for the elderly. It is clear that those problems will cause elderly people real concern, because their pension provision may not meet—and is not meeting—their expectations. My colleague Robert Brown will expand on that point in his speech.

Another issue is the impact on carers. Johann Lamont and Mary Scanlon made much of those who care. Recently, a lot of care in Scotland has been provided through, and funded by, charitable organisations. How tragic it is, therefore, for us to read some of the material that has emerged recently from the Princess Royal Trust that shows that not only have those smart bankers fraudulently obtained their bonuses, but those who worked for Lloyds TSB have brought an eminently great charitable organisation to a shuddering halt. I hope that, as they live on their inflated pensions, they might have some conscience about what they have done to hundreds of thousands of people in our community. The carers who, with charitable support, were able to offer such vital care to our elderly people are now in danger of being unable to do so. The tragedy of our banking crisis and the rapacious prosecution of self-interest by those who ran those banks is now being seen by those of us who operate in the community. That is one of the major differences since we last debated the subject.

Johann Lamont and Mary Scanlon majored on the issue of our being able to get care out of the institutional setting and into the community setting. I make no apology for getting into the same territory. As we look forward, we have to do so very carefully indeed. I think that there is unanimity in the chamber about the need to get care out of the institutional setting and into the community, but we have to be honest and admit that real difficulties are emerging not just in that transfer but in the way in which care homes and less-than-institutionalised arrangements are operating, how firms and other organisations are being employed and how they are deploying that service.

The "Panorama" investigation and the *Herald* article are not lone examples. There are problems about the nature of care that should not be described as institutional for individuals whose preferred option might be to live in their own homes but for whom that is not an option. The model that has been designed throughout local authorities cannot be said to be in any way providing a satisfactory alternative. Mary Scanlon

is right: we need to look very carefully at that in taking this whole issue forward. In addition to the "Panorama" programme, there is the issue that Rhona Brankin raised earlier about inappropriate prescription of drugs. Regardless of whether that constitutes elder abuse, it still has to be roundly condemned.

The minister should also be aware that, as local authorities struggle with the mantra of getting people out of institutions and into communities, clear examples throughout the country—I know of an example close by in the West of Scotland, in Renfrewshire—show that the bedblocking statistics focus almost exclusively on the local authority's inability to be satisfied that the provision that it can make is suitable. Sadly, that means that we return to increased bedblocking and the consequent incurring of unnecessary costs and cost burdens for social care budgets in the local authorities that are affected.

Shona Robison: I do not want to make a big issue of the matter, but does Ross Finnie acknowledge where we are with delayed discharge, which is the preferred term? We have a small number of delayed discharges—one is too many for me; I want none—but we are a million miles away from the days when hundreds of people were in beds but who should not have been. The latest figure is 55: it was 627 in 2006-07. Does he acknowledge that we have made progress? There is a way to go, but we are a long way from where we were.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr Finnie should finish now.

Ross Finnie: I am happy to accept the more refined term "delayed discharge".

What the minister says might be right. My point is not about the total numbers; my point is that it is clear in some local authority areas that any increase relates singularly to elderly people for whom appropriate care is not available in their communities. Renfrewshire Council's budget this year shows that the council expects an increase in its social care spending as a result.

The debate is about a huge, vital and multifaceted subject. It concerns a section of our community who demand and deserve the best care. Elderly people are a vital component and they should not only be cared for, but be in a condition to make a much-valued contribution to society. They should not find themselves a blight or a burden on our society.

15:47

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): A debate on the future care of older people is of great importance to the future of not only the country, but of us all

personally, because we will all be older people one day—indeed, several of us have been accorded that status already. In case one is inclined to laugh at this point, it is my duty to point out as sensitively as possible that most members are—on account of their great age—eligible to book Saga holidays. The name "Saga" stands for sex and games for the aged, as my children continually tell me. That might raise the occasional smile, but there are serious points to make in connection with what I just said.

I am certain that most of the 70 MSP colleagues who are over 50—including you and me, Presiding Officer—do not regard themselves as elderly. However, many young people have a different idea. At a meeting on the right to die that I attended some time ago, a determined young lady said that she was totally against euthanasia, but she was 24; she might take an entirely different view when she is 50. Many people who are 50, 60, 70 and 80 still enjoy sex and games, yet young people regard them as being totally past it. My mother-in-law is in her 90th year, yet she country dances in winter—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Be very careful, Mr McKee.

Ian McKee: When my mother-in-law was 82, she swam in the Sound of Mull—all right, that was because I accidentally dropped her in from a boat, but she managed 100yd to the shore without mishap and helped herself to the warm soup from the Kilchoan community centre. She would be horrified to be lumped into a catch-all category.

Older people are individuals, with individual capacities, needs and aspirations. It is wrong to treat them all as victims. It is with that in mind that I welcome the minister's commitment to keeping people at home wherever possible. Of course there will, sadly, be people who require long-term residential care—people who might need treatment and care that cannot be provided in the home—but modern methods of treatment, which in the past often required hospital or institutional care of some sort, can now in many instances be delivered effectively in the home. The establishment of Macmillan nurses working in the community means that elderly people who have malignant diseases and who wish to end their days in their own homes may do so in dignity, with the highest standards of palliative care. Mild to moderate dementia is best treated in the home environment, as are many other illnesses. Transferring an older person from home to hospital or residential care might solve some physical problems, but it might equally replace them with something much worse.

Johann Lamont: I do not think that anyone is arguing for older people to be institutionalised, but the difficulty lies in making the care at home real,

so that people are not contained in their homes, but are, rather, sustained in them. Does Ian McKee agree that the support that is given to older people is important—not just medical care, but the sort of care that is offered by voluntary organisations?

Ian McKee: I agree with that, and I will go on to make that point.

As I was saying, transferring an older person from home risks taking away their sense of independence. To substitute an entirely different environment for that with which they are familiar could make their pre-existing confusion worse, or could even induce confusion in someone who had never exhibited it before.

These days, we are continually fighting the curse of this modern era: the utterly foolhardy and doomed quest for an absolutely risk-free existence. People are stopped from doing all sorts of things because of the risks involved, even if more damage is done to them as a result. That is not confined to care of the elderly: we stop teachers from cuddling a child who has hurt herself in case the teacher is a paedophile, or we ban home cooking at office parties because someone somewhere once got food poisoning. However, the elderly receive more than their share of unnecessary cotton-woolling. The plain fact is that many older folk should live dangerously, especially if they live on their own. It is verging on being criminal to remove a person from his or her home to an unfamiliar institution either to avoid some very remote risk to that individual or, even more inexcusably, simply to protect the people responsible from any criticism should things go wrong.

That does not mean that we should actively court unnecessary risk. I am all for alarm systems, especially if they work. Telecare can provide an extremely reliable system for monitoring how someone is coping in their own home. I am delighted that the Government is sensitive to that, and that it has provided funds so that such schemes can be rolled out. Home helps should be trained and encouraged to report any signs that a person is getting into difficulties at a stage when action is likely to be beneficial.

Relatives, neighbours, voluntary workers and other older people all have potential roles in keeping people at home and in good health, but they need training, co-ordination and support if maximum benefit is to be derived. Above all, anyone who can play a vital part in such an endeavour should have their work recognised and valued. There is enormous good will in the community, but we need to know how to tap into it.

We in Scotland have a lot to be proud of concerning care of older people, not just in terms

of telecare developments but in free personal care and a variety of initiatives all over the country. My main message, however, is that with which I started: all older people are individuals. Some need personal care; others require help setting up new businesses. Some are very reliant on others; others want to keep working well after the age of retirement. We must recognise all those varying needs, and we must seek to meet them. Older people still have much to contribute to our society, and we must allow them to make that contribution.

15:54

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Like Ian McKee, I declare an interest. None of us is getting any younger, and we all have parents who are getting older. Just when we think we are escaping the responsibilities of child care, we sometimes meet the reality of the increased responsibility of elderly care. I am sure that there are many members with personal experience of care services represented in the chamber today. Inevitably, there will also be plenty of personal experience of failures in those services when we have needed them.

Members encounter a steady stream of problems and issues that are brought to them by constituents. Inverclyde, in my constituency, has suffered from a decline in population but will experience 16 per cent growth by 2031 in the number of people who are over 65. In such a community, elderly people are dependent for care on other elderly people, who will soon get to a stage at which they themselves need to access care. By 2031 it could cost £3.5 billion—more than treble the current level of spend—to provide the health and social care services for older people in Scotland that we currently provide. The minister talked about that, and we can all agree that it is an issue.

There will be varying degrees of need, as Ian McKee pointed out—I look forward to taking him for a long walk off a short plank at Leith waterfront some time—but the issue will not go away. It will grow, and we will be presented with a huge challenge—and I repeat, “we”. Of course there will be arguments about our big brother in London and where we can get £30 million to plug a gap, but the overall responsibility is ours. We are talking about our parents and our older people, in our communities. Rather than row about all that, we should concentrate on things that we can affect.

Free personal care is rightly viewed as one of the Parliament’s achievements. The minister will remember working on the issue in health committees in previous parliamentary sessions. Our focus was pretty narrow at the outset—it was on the cost to families of residential care—but now, after all those years, we are starting to think

about the 69,000 people who receive care at home. Many of those people cannot get out of the house to go for a swim. Sometimes they are forced to leave not just their family home but their community to get the appropriate care, because the Parliament has not connected up with local government and all the agencies to provide the services, aids and adaptations that would enable them to stay at home. Such matters are our responsibility and no one else's, and we should consider them, rather than fight over who should be paying for what and dropping problems on other people's budgets, as we all do. It sometimes seems that the health service and local government get involved not to consider people's needs but to argue about whose budget a service will come out of.

Similar issues arise in the debate on child protection. All sorts of people are responsible for child protection, but until we get someone in the Cabinet who has their hands on significant budget streams we will never pull everything together.

We need to realise that if we are to protect the health service, as we are doing, there will be consequential cuts in the local government budget and every last penny will be squeezed out of services. Care workers who deliver services will face greater demands and workloads and will have less time, less training and fewer opportunities to develop skills. The people who ultimately suffer will be the older people who need the services.

I understand that the balance between value and quality is difficult to strike, but there are issues that we need to confront. Evidence that the Local Government and Communities Committee heard showed that there is sometimes no correlation between what is paid out and the quality of the outcome.

The "Panorama" programme, which has been mentioned many times, was shocking. Secret cameras uncovered serious neglect as overworked and low-paid carers struggled to provide standards of care that we could be proud of. Leaving aside the question of whether it is appropriate to care for an elderly man while using a mobile phone, the programme raised serious questions about how we procure care services. Until that point, such services were procured by a reverse e-auction, going to the cheapest price, like Bid TV for cheap jewellery—that was how we procured our services for the elderly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be finishing now, Mr McNeil.

Duncan McNeil: Those issues are our responsibility. The questions of regulation and inspection are our responsibilities. They do not necessarily come with a big price tag but we must

recognise them as big issues. That is why we wanted this Parliament—so that we could accept such responsibilities. We cannot dodge them. There are major issues that need to be addressed quickly.

16:01

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I concur with some of Duncan McNeil's remarks, but I do not know if we should beat ourselves about the head too much as parliamentarians. In the 10 years of the Parliament, we have made some substantial achievements for the elderly in Scotland. The central heating programme has made a huge difference to people's lives. Free personal care—even with all the issues that have arisen from it, which were trailed when we considered the issue—has nevertheless been a major step forward on equity for our elderly people.

Concessionary travel has been an extraordinary success and led to better health for our elderly people through giving them mobility, reducing their isolation and often putting fun back into their lives. I say that as I use my pass regularly. We are keeping the bus services running, and I assure members that the buses that run between Edinburgh and Glasgow are full of pensioners and students. The Parliament, across all political parties, has taken some excellent steps.

All the aforementioned services have succeeded, and I applaud that because they are not means tested. It might be controversial to say this, but means testing elsewhere has proved to be administratively cumbersome, costly, ineffective and often unfair for individuals on the borderline. A prime example is the low uptake of pension credit, which pensioners who are on the borderline do not apply for or are just missed by. My preference is for taxation of those who have the money, but not to means test, and it is good news that means testing has been removed from services to older people.

Unfortunately, I disagree with Duncan McNeil on other points because we cannot change the basic rate of the state pension. If we were to ask pensioners what their top priority would be, most pensioners would say a decent basic state pension. As I say, the pension credit has failed because many who were entitled to it simply did not apply. The application form is lengthy and difficult; one would need a PhD in applying for a pension credit.

The minister referred to Scottish Borders Council, which recently conducted a review on transforming older peoples' services. I applaud the council for that; it has been a step ahead of the game and it has come up with some important

ideas. When someone is discharged from hospital to home, there is an intermediate care package to try to prevent the falls and readmissions that are, for the most part, avoidable.

The council is turning its attention to day services and day hospitals, many of which are provided by the voluntary sector as referred to by Johann Lamont. We must cherish that sector and ensure that its funding is sustained where appropriate. I am thinking particularly of the social centres that were piloted in Innerleithen and West Linton with the Red Cross providing neighbourhood services to them.

Many of those who work in the voluntary sector are pensioners themselves. We must remember that the pension age now runs from 60 to well over 90, which covers two generations and those who served in the second world war as well as those, like myself, who were born after it. That is a huge range of people and abilities. Ian McKee was quite right to say that everyone in that category is an individual with individual talents, abilities and needs. However, notwithstanding Ian McKee's attempt to shorten the lifespan of his robust mother-in-law, there is indeed a lack of appropriate assistance in various areas. That issue comes up in the cases that we get.

We do not have enough sheltered housing. The warden system, which was terribly important in much sheltered housing, is being reduced or taken away entirely. That is ironic when there are places such as Heinsberg House in Penicuik, where people went in at 65 and now find, 20 years later when they are 85, that they have lost the warden service. They now have a token round their neck to press or a buzzer to call if they are in difficulty, and what actually happens is that the lady who has the flat next to the door opens it and lets people in. The warden did so much else, such as arrange Christmas and birthday parties, and was a bit of a social worker for the 30-odd residents, but they are now gone, which is a great loss. The warden system represents something that we cannot always measure in monetary terms but can measure in terms of residents' wellbeing.

As we know, there is a shortfall in the provision of aids and adaptations. That may mean that, although somebody is assessed in hospital for discharge, while they wait for social work to kick in they have to be reassessed because they become worse or become institutionalised and lose some of their independence. None of that is rocket science, and we all know that funding it is not a bottomless pit. Parliament must address those issues.

I want to focus on medical care in care homes, which was referred to in the context of the documentary on it. However, I will refer to the "Remember, I'm still me" report of May 2009 by

the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland and the care commission. If members have not read that report, they should do so, because what it shows is absolutely shocking—I do not use that word lightly.

The report has a list of things that are wrong in care homes. For example, of the 67,000 people in Scotland who have dementia, 40 per cent are in care homes. They are the most vulnerable, but it was found that such individuals are rarely involved in any review of their care. It is as if they are an "it" and not a person. It was found that around half of people in care homes never leave them; it is as if the care home is a padded prison for them. It was also found that, although more than half of care homes have accessible gardens, there is little evidence that they are ever used. Those are not big problems to cure. It was also found that there is little creative use of a person's funds to support them.

One problem is that our care workers are undervalued. Care work is a poorly paid job, and it is often young people who do it. It is not their fault, but they may not relate in the best way to a very elderly, frail person. There are great differences in the way that the generations behave towards each other, but it is often young people who work in care homes with very vulnerable people.

Away back, we had talk about the pill in the sandwich, when people were given medication without their knowledge. That still happens, but all such problems are curable, and the Parliament should address them before the end of this session.

16:07

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): It is good that we are considering today and again tomorrow the care of older people, but it is important to set it within the broader framework of the wider agenda about the contribution of older people, the opportunities for them and attacking all forms of ageism. It would be good to hear from the Government before too long about progress on that agenda.

Sticking with care, we should remember that only a minority of older people require care services: 3 per cent of those between 65 and 74, and 40 per cent of those who are 85 plus. Of course, in relation to care, the welcome explosion in the number of over-85s in the next 20 years will be important.

The key issue for care is of course quality, and central to quality is personalisation. In many ways, we seem to be going in the wrong direction when it comes to that. Of course, we should acknowledge today the great deal of progress that there has been, from the setting up of the care commission a

few years ago to the welcome initiatives that the minister described earlier. However, it is right that we should focus in this debate, as Johann Lamont did, on issues such as the “Panorama” programme, the articles in *The Herald*, the rising number of complaints to the care commission, the “Remember, I’m still me” report, and what is actually happening on the ground, which is often contrary to the stated policies and objectives.

The “Remember, I’m still me” report has been referred to by several speakers. Sticking with the theme of personalisation, I refer members to a couple of examples in the report of an absence of personal plans that meet the individual needs and preferences of people, and an absence of activities that are tailored to people’s individual needs. Those examples and others send out a very important message to care homes, the providers of home care services and councils involved in the commissioning process.

That leads me on to an example of what is happening on the ground in my constituency. City of Edinburgh Council will soon introduce changes to home care services that I will come on to describe, but the council has already changed the tendering process for care-at-home services for people with learning disabilities, mental health problems and physical disabilities. In that process over the past few months, the views and wishes of those who receive the services have been ignored.

A central feature of personalisation is putting the person at the centre as a participant in shaping the services that they receive, but the views of service users in Edinburgh have been ignored. Many service users have said that they will take out direct payments rather than accept the new providers, so what has City of Edinburgh Council done over the past few days? The council has frozen direct payments, which are an important dimension of the personalisation agenda. I believe that the minister should look closely at what is happening in Edinburgh, which seems to me to be contrary to legislation.

On home care services, City of Edinburgh Council intends to move 75 per cent of provision into the private sector. Before the Conservatives leap to their feet to intervene, let me clarify that I am not saying that the private sector is necessarily worse. We need to look carefully at quality. In service reviews, the views of users of independent sector services contrast with those who use council services. On the basis of that evidence, it seems that the users seem to prefer council services, although that is not necessarily the case. It is certainly wrong to award contracts solely on the basis of lowest cost—as appeared to happen in the evidence shown in the “Panorama” programme—but the changes in Edinburgh seem

to be driven by the desire to make the services cost as little as possible. We should all be concerned about the implications of that for the quality of service.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I have only two minutes remaining. I shall give way if I have time, but I will first highlight two other issues.

On the important subject of abuse, which we will also consider tomorrow morning, we should acknowledge the progress that has been made through the requirement for enhanced checks and through the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007. However, following a concerning incident in a council care home in my constituency—someone was convicted of sexual assault of the patient a few weeks ago—I wrote more than once to the minister about how the case raises serious issues about the effectiveness of checks when, as in this case, the member of staff comes from abroad. I know that the Government will try to deal with the issue to some extent in the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill, but there is still a wider issue about checks on agency staff. In the case in question, the member of staff was employed by an employment agency, which cannot be inspected by the care commission. More generally, I think that we need to look carefully at who is employed in care homes. As Johann Lamont said, continuity of staffing is important and part of the problem is that agency staff come and go.

My last point is about the wider agenda. There has been a lot of progress on personal care, but some of the wider agenda is being ignored. Last week, I had a meeting with Care and Repair Edinburgh. I know that the Government supports such services in principle, but I must pass on the organisation’s concerns about the loss of ring fencing, which obviously creates worries about funding. Another project in my constituency is the Pilton equalities project, which is trying to fill some of those gaps by using volunteers to provide a handy person service.

I will take Mary Scanlon’s intervention.

Mary Scanlon: Given the tight budgets, does the member think that it is wrong that councils pay twice as much for care in a council home as in an independent home?

Malcolm Chisholm: We need to look at the reasons—wages, pension rights and so on—for those differentials.

I am glad to accept that intervention from Mary Scanlon, given that she hosted a recent meeting with clinical psychologists that I attended in the Parliament. Like her, I want to make a point that was raised at that meeting. Clinical psychologists

have recommended the development of a national education programme that would target general practitioners and practice nurses to support better identification and management of depression in older people. They also propose more posts for psychologists with specialist skills in supporting older people. That is an important aspect of the care agenda for older people that we should remember.

16:14

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): We have heard some excellent speeches both by the opening speakers and by the subsequent contributors to the debate from the body of the chamber. One point that we should perhaps keep in front of us is Malcolm Chisholm's comment that what happens on the ground is sometimes contrary to the policy. That has perhaps been a lesson of the implementation process of free personal care from the beginning. The theory behind the policy was supported by all parties in the Parliament, but the practice has sometimes been rather different.

It is common ground that we face considerable challenges because of changing demographics, but let me put that in perspective. Although our ageing population poses growing policy and financial challenges for us, it is possible to overstate the matter. I will give a couple of illustrations of that.

Just over 100 years ago, in 1908, the Government—a Liberal Government, as it happens—introduced the first old-age pensions at the rate of 5/- a week for a single person and 7/6 for a couple. There were dire predictions—mostly, it must be said, from the forebears of the Conservative members—of the end of civilisation as we knew it. It was said that the national finances, which were running an empire that straddled a quarter of the globe, would never stand the strain and that the pension was an encouragement to sloth and idleness among the lower classes. The bureaucrats of the day predicted that demographic changes, including an increase in how long people lived, would destroy the scheme. In fact, the old-age pension gave innumerable older people dignity and security in retirement for the first time, and the demographic time bomb somehow failed to explode in quite the way that was predicted.

In recent years, the value of the pension has eroded to the point where, under the current Government, it is worth less in real terms than it was in the 1950s. That is my second illustration. Britain was on its uppers in the 1950s, crippled by the cost of the second world war and the underinvestment of the depression and the war years. For that matter, it was deprived of 1 million male members of the workforce by deaths in the

first world war and another 500,000 working-age adults by deaths in the second world war. However, it could afford a reasonably decent pension for its older citizens, whereas now the basic state pension is 25 per cent below the poverty line and some pensioners are thrown on to reliance on benefits for the first time in their lives.

That is not a matter for this Parliament, but we must, as Liberal Democrats have argued, relink the pension to average earnings and move it upwards to pension credit level—which is one of the current Government's achievements, albeit one with many faults—as soon as possible.

My comments are also directed at the empowering policy of free personal care for the elderly, which is one of the Parliament's signal achievements. Many people—Sam Galbraith springs to mind—crop up periodically to claim in doom-laden terms that the policy is not affordable. It is undoubtedly subject to upward pressures, but it is a gross exaggeration to suggest that expenditure of the order of £300 million or £400 million a year—less than half a new Forth bridge, for example—is not possible to fund. In any event, it is also a vital underpinning to everything that we try to do in this policy area.

Various members have touched on social contact, which is vital. I said in an earlier debate that the "Remember, I'm still me" report on the provision of care in residential homes for people with dementia was

"one of the few, stark, totemic reports that are immediately and obviously definitive."—[*Official Report*, 9 September 2009; c 19395.]

I hope that that proves to be the case and that the report proves to be a wake-up call.

We look forward to the Scottish Government's dementia strategy in the spring, but I hope that it and other initiatives will have at their heart a commitment to ensure that older people are treated as unique individuals, are not left without social contact or stimulus and—particularly, but not only, in residential homes—are enabled to live as full lives as possible.

That is the guiding phrase that goes right through the debate. It will mean providing specific and accessible opportunities for older people—sometimes not independently ambulant—to take part in cultural, social and recreational activities. It will mean, for example, that a local authority such as Glasgow City Council will not in future be able, under the pretext of financial pressures, to regard social work transport to local groups as an optional extra—discretionary and not part of its core duties—rather than the vital conduit to flexible, loneliness-busting and life-enhancing social contacts that it is. That is an important aspect of

the expansion that we get from the voluntary service.

I will give members another statistic of relevance on psychologists, an issue on which Mary Scanlon and Malcolm Chisholm touched. Although one person in four over 65 in the United Kingdom has depression that impairs their quality of life, there are eight psychologists per 1,000 people for those aged under 20 and 0.6 per 1,000 for those over 65. Only 32 psychologists work in specialist services for older people in Scotland. That is a gross scandal on which I hope the minister can give us some comfort. Depression in older age is understated, under-reported and undertreated. In some primary care trust areas, there are no mental health services specifically for older people. There is a huge task to educate GPs, practice nurses and other health professionals; to better identify and manage and support depression in later life; and to build a system that has wellbeing at its core.

Carers and people with caring responsibilities have to be central to our thinking. The network of carers centres works with up to 50,000 unpaid carers and 3,000 young carers a year, supported until recently by the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland, which Ross Finnie mentioned, and the Laidlaw Youth Project, among others. Lloyds TSB Foundation, with its vital voluntary sector input, is the newest victim of the banking crisis and of an attempt by the bank to slash the future funding agreed at the time of privatisation. The Laidlaw Youth Project is also stopping its funding.

We are facing a major challenge in voluntary sector funding, and we must look at whether the Government might convene a national forum of leading funders to consider what can be done to replace or stabilise funding in these difficult circumstances.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): You must close please, Mr Brown.

Robert Brown: My concluding point, Presiding Officer, is that how we treat our old people, whether we make full use of their talents and enable them to overcome loneliness and depression, and how well we support them are central to our future as a society. We cannot ignore the demographic trends, but they need not be our masters either.

The Presiding Officer: I must point out that we have no spare time at all left in the debate, so members should please keep to the times given.

16:20

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): A month ago, I turned 65. I got letters of congratulation from my German member of

Parliament and from the university rector, for I still put in several weekends' unpaid teaching—which is great; I will come back to that point—and examining during our recesses. I seem to be working harder than I have ever done as, besides my MSP duties, in the morning or evening most days I have to care for my parents, who are 91 and 92 and are still in a house that would be rather big for them if I was not around. I enjoy that work and I appreciate the different perspective that caring has given me, although at times it can be a crazy egg dance.

Home care of the elderly in Scotland costs local authorities, gross, about £1.5 billion per annum. That is roughly the size of the share—proportionate to population—that Scottish bankers got of the £21 billion that was divvied up into bonuses in the glorious year 2006 to spend on multiple houses, yachts, huge watches, four-wheel drives and so on. In Germany, we always got the *Financial Times* of a Saturday, including a magazine called *How to Spend It*, which my wife used to brandish at me, saying, "Aren't you lucky that you're married to me and that I don't want one of these?" I notice that the publication is still as healthy as it was before the crisis. I mention that because, in my four years looking after the old folk in Melrose, I have never met socially any of the numerous four-wheel drivers who set out through the village looking as if they are going to cross the Gobi desert, whereas my parents are dependent on plenty of women carers who have rather small cars, if they drive at all.

As I have implied, caring has a lot to do with housing. A good point about the council housing system is that it created the possibility of our having a policy that caters for people at all stages of life, particularly those who are widowed or less mobile. Throughout Scotland, there are groups of houses—compact, convenient for shops and well insulated—that were built in the 1950s or 1960s for the elderly. I have my doubts whether our owner-occupied free-for-all has provided anything better.

There are societies in which care happened in an in-built, rough-and-ready way, such as India, Russia or Ireland, where old folk lived in great houses as part of extended families. That sort of family clan was actually closer to the historical Scottish clan than the English nuclear family. We learn that from a valuable book, "The Causes of Progress," by the French-Scots social anthropologist Emmanuel Todd. That type of organisation could provide a model for the present day.

The space and income of the elderly in our society is under unrelenting attack. There is also the pension funds crisis, the collapse of what had once been reliable shares, the closure of local

shops, bus routes, churches and pubs, not to mention the deterioration of daytime TV—anyone for Jeremy Kyle or, mysteriously, “Postman Pat” in Gaelic in the morning?

Lloyds Banking Group’s desire—I am not the first to refer to this—to curb the charitable foundation that it inherited from the Trustee Savings Bank shows exactly what we should not be doing. The effect on Scottish charitable organisations, including those aiding the elderly, would be extremely harmful, especially as their clients are already suffering from the recession.

That leads me to the notion that we ought to try to revive the mutual and civic forms of saving and insurance, since aggressive, profit-driven finance has shown itself unfit for purpose. Its decay shows how little integrated our society has become. If anything, our ageing society needs more funding of charitable organisations, but charity is not enough. As Shona Robison pointed out, those who move into retirement now and in the future will have different expectations and requirements, with the emphasis above all on independence.

I stress—as I have done in previous debates—that European countries gain a lot from the commitment of young people to undertaking a year of social service between school and university. One of the delights of teaching in continental universities is the fact that the young people are more mature by the time that they reach the university system.

We must make it a priority that home carers—especially relatives—receive assistance, information and respite time to protect those for whom they care and their own physical and mental health. We must ensure that councils choose care providers that provide good-quality care and that instruments and effective feedback exist for the customer as well as for the council.

However, things cannot stop there. Scotland’s elderly also require a society that is fit for their purpose and simple improvements to be made in public transport, such as regular clock-face timetables. The timetables in the Scottish Borders have changed six times this year. Imagine how difficult it must be for elderly people to find out when their bus is going to arrive to take them to the post office or the Co-op. Strengthening local communities and making post offices, shops and community centres more accessible will benefit the elderly and maintain their participation in society. That will benefit not just them, but all of us.

16:26

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): It appears that the minister will be the youngest member to contribute to the debate this

afternoon. I wonder whether she will consider the speeches of other members as wisdom derived from her older peers or the expression of vested interests by MSPs who are closer to the end of their careers than she is.

Christine Grahame was right to point out that the Parliament has done a good deal to take forward the agenda on behalf of older people. Concessionary travel, care in the community, the establishment of the care commission, free central heating and the introduction of free personal care are a series of milestones and achievements that have undoubtedly made a significant difference to older people. However, one of the problems that I have with the debate—and perhaps with its title of reshaping the future care of older people—is that, in the context of the financial situation that we face, we have not engaged with the real issues in discussing the future care of the elderly. It is reasonable for us to consider the principles of what services ought to be available in an ideal world, but the reality that we face is that difficult choices will have to be made by the Scottish Government and by local government concerning competing priorities, not all of which can be pursued.

In the debate that we ought to have about reshaping the future care of older people, we must first be clear about what we can and cannot do financially. Secondly, we must address the demographic pattern of growth in the number of older people with care needs. Thirdly, we must recognise that the needs of elderly people are not static but fluid and that they change as people get older and require different kinds of care at different points in their lives.

Jeremy Purvis made his usual plea for more money for rural areas and talked about the increasing number of older people in the Borders. In fact, the statistics show that Bearsden and Milngavie, in my constituency, have the highest number of elderly people of any district in Scotland. Interestingly, there is a larger population of elderly people in Bearsden and Milngavie than in Clydebank because of the significantly higher mortality rate in Clydebank. There are more elderly people in Bearsden and Milngavie than in Clydebank because people live longer there.

Of course, we know that the issue with the costs of care—if, as I think we should, we take into account hospital care—is that the biggest cost to the state in relation to the provision of care to older people occurs in the last 18 months of their lives, and largely within the last six months of their lives. We need to find ways of keeping people out of hospitals and residential nursing care institutions and ensuring that they can stay in their own homes. That is not simply an issue to do with services that are deemed to be care services; it is

an issue to do with how we provide housing services. We should think about making it easier for relatives and friends to provide support services for elderly people that do not cost the state anything and which provide a cost-effective way of dealing with some of the problems around health, care and loneliness that affect elderly people and might otherwise induce them into more expensive—for them and the state—institutional settings.

As well as providing support for care, we also need to deal with the quality of care in residential nursing care and palliative care settings; we must ensure that such care is of the best quality.

Robert Brown made the point that the Princess Royal Trust for Carers found out today that another major source of funding for its network of carer centres, the Laidlaw Youth Project, is shutting down. That will have a significant effect on the work with young carers that the trust does through that national network of carers centres and young carers projects that is part of the Scottish young carers alliance. If we are not able to support young people in providing care, the chances are that they will be less likely to do it or that they will not do it as effectively as they otherwise would.

Of course, it is not only the Laidlaw Youth Project that is under financial pressure; we have heard about the Lloyds TSB Foundation, and there are also pressures on the Big Lottery Fund. We need to find a mechanism that ensures that younger people can support older people effectively, in a way that does not necessarily place a burden on the taxation system. We need to find policies on housing and issues such as transport that ensure that people are not totally dependent on state-provided care and can stay in a community setting. To an extent, we have done that.

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: No, the member is closing.

Des McNulty: That is not only good for the state but absolutely good for older people. We hear time and time again that that is what they want.

Now, I—

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Mr McNulty, but we must move to the closing speeches.

16:32

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is clear that we have all returned refreshed from our short recess, because around a core—perhaps I should say a nugget—of a very worthy debate, in which every speaker has

displayed an impressive knowledge of and care for the elderly, there has been a wide-ranging discussion on the periphery, from the Deutschland of Christopher Harvie, on which he is a great expert, to Robert Brown's history lesson about the golden days of H H Asquith, which we Liberal Democrats remember happily as we drop off to sleep at night.

Like Christopher Harvie, I have an interest to declare, in that my mother, who is 85 going on 86, lives with me and my wife. She shows no sign of leaving home or going into a care home, which is quite understandable, because she is, amazingly, still helping out with the over-60s Christmas party and the meals on wheels service. Although she is my mother, I say that she is an example of an individual who is contributing to society. People such as her are to be supported.

As Ross Finnie quite correctly noted, the opening speakers outlined the statistical background to the problem that lies before us. I will touch on some of those issues from the point of view of my constituency.

Shona Robison referred to the issue of unpaid carers and, although I will not get into the details of that matter tonight, I have at other times spoken about care organisations in my constituency, and young carers in particular.

Johann Lamont correctly reminded us of what the BBC and the *Herald* said. They did a great service: as appalling as those revelations were, it can only be a good thing when journalism shocks us and makes us collectively sit up and think. Mary Scanlon, in her speech and in an intervention, made the point about public care homes versus private care homes. Any MSP knows that that is an issue, and, to be fair to the private and public sectors, we must get to the nub of the matter. We should ask about the facts and the expenditure patterns that lie behind the apparent imbalance, for which there may or may not be good reasons.

My colleague Ross Finnie outlined what the huge change—the financial crisis—that has occurred since our previous debate on the subject has meant for charitable organisations. He said that he hopes that the executives who headed up the banks and took large bonuses have that on their conscience. I think every single one of us would say amen to that.

Dr Ian McKee gave a most amusing speech, in which he mentioned his mother-in-law and touched on the issue of home helps. Every one of us knows that paid home helps—both those who work in the public sector and those who work privately—are becoming harder to find. It is becoming harder to get young people to go into that profession, and many of the home helps who are on the Highland Council payroll in my

constituency are reaching retirement age. We heard from Des McNulty about the huge importance of getting young people to join in with caring for, helping and working with older people in a way that does not alter the tax situation, which was an extremely sensible point that we would do well to bear in mind.

Mary Scanlon: We all want home carers to be paid as much as necessary, and according to the value of the job, which is huge. However, it is a concern that the wages for Highland Council home carers are not the same as the wages that organisations such as the Crossroads Association pay. The council loses very good staff because it is unable to match those wages.

Jamie Stone: I accept Mary Scanlon's point. It leads me to an issue that I have just thought of. I am aware of an incident that I have mentioned before in the chamber, in which a home help on the council payroll went to help a man in his 80s, who rose out of his bath and laid out the woman to such an extent that she is still injured to this day. The safety of home helps, which I have mentioned in previous debates, is an issue that we should not forget when we discuss the safety of elderly people.

We talk about people coming out of institutions, or staying in their communities rather than going into institutions, and I say amen to that—it is a thoroughly laudable aim. However, I remind members again of the case in my constituency of William Hunter, who lay dead, undiscovered, for far too long. We cannot blame the housing association, the health service or the police, because everyone did their job within their terms of reference, and yet that gentlemen fell through the net. That case gave every single elderly person living in Scotland and elsewhere a most chilling and terrifying message. Co-ordination is important, and I know from my conversations with the minister that she recognises the problem.

I make one final point. I recently had occasion to visit a home for the elderly, where one old lady was very pleased to see me. She held both my hands and said that it was a great honour to meet me. I am a naturally modest man, so I did not—

The Presiding Officer: The member must close now.

Jamie Stone: She told her friends and neighbours the next day that she was very pleased to have met Jeremy Thorpe.

16:39

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): This afternoon's debate has been welcomed by members throughout the chamber. My preparation for it has illustrated for me the many and varied

perspectives of the organisations that engage with older people, which have been articulated by members in the chamber.

Frankly, the only firm conclusion that we can reach is that the challenge ahead is daunting. In general, policy must deal with the here and now or the immediate period ahead, but in many of the health briefings that members receive, there is invariably a common paragraph somewhere that says in so many words that we have the ageing demographic challenge to consider.

It is not that we are unaware of what lies ahead, but we know that the challenge is, as I said, daunting. We are an ageing population. In many ways, that is a tribute, despite all our other failings, to so much that has been achieved in the past 50 years, but that success in living longer has been outperformed, if you like, by Scotland's birth rate. More of us will be retired and dependent in some way on fewer younger people. The minister set out the figures in detail, as did my colleague Mary Scanlon. That position is recognised implicitly by all the organisations that submitted comments before today's debate. Their responses essentially amount to two propositions. The first is that we need to do more in almost every area and that that will cost money—at a time, too, when resources will be scarce—although some of that investment might release resources, the seemingly insignificant and trivial matter of toenail care being an example.

Secondly, there is recognition that with a scarcity of resources, or even simply in recognition of the affordability issues that are presented by a changing demographic balance, we have to rethink the means of delivery. That thoughtful analysis is encouraging because, frankly, if the discussion were to be distilled down to the notion that politicians will just have to find the money to go on as we are but with incremental increases to support both the burgeoning demographic and all the worthwhile initiatives that are actively canvassed, planning would simply run into the sand. Des McNulty made a thoughtful contribution in focusing on that point towards the end of the debate.

From the perspective of funding, the Scottish Parliament's policy achievement of free personal care, which Duncan McNeil discussed, will be an enormous challenge to sustain. Successful planning for that alone will be a considerable achievement and we cannot take it for granted.

Elsewhere, Conservatives have proposed an increase in the age at which people retire coupled with a restoration of the link between the state pension and earnings, so Christine Grahame can relax and take comfort from the many and varied benefits that the union can and will confer. An

unwelcome rise in the retirement age will fund a more financially secure future for older people.

I want to right the historical wrong to which Robert Brown drew attention. The Liberal Government did introduce the state pension back in 1906. Perhaps it is worth while to say how sad it was that an ungrateful nation was shortly thereafter to consign his party to the fringes of political history. If Jamie Stone has the disc of Mr Asquith that puts him so happily to sleep, I am sure that many older people would welcome the opportunity to purchase it, because I am sure that it would have a similar effect on us all.

We are still at the crossroads of the lifestyle change that has seen many more people choose to live alone for the majority of their lives, and those people will move into old age having enjoyed and lived capably with that status. We have both an ageing demographic and a general lifestyle change that has seen more people choose to live alone. It is possible that some of the issues around education will be mitigated by the experience gained by those in the generation who have lived a single life prior to old age, whereas it is still common today for many older people who live alone and need support to be those who have been left behind.

However, Age Concern in particular has identified that too many issues—such as general malnutrition, lack of knowledge about or unwillingness to take up the many income benefits for older people, which Christine Grahame mentioned, or an issue that I mentioned earlier, toenail cutting—can lead to problems being severely compounded. Johann Lamont drew attention to the lower-level services that combat feelings of isolation, and I agree that it would be a mistake to class those as luxuries. All this, of course, before the emerging challenge of dementia, which we have debated before, and of which every family must anticipate a future first-hand experience.

Scottish Conservatives welcome the debate. We recognise and applaud the reasoned analysis by all the organisations that are involved that what we do now will not work in the future and that effective resource management will be vital if we are to sustain the imaginative breadth of initiatives that are envisioned. We support the view that there is an urgent need to develop a policy approach that commands as much support as possible, but it is more urgent still that we take the required time to think through the options and thoroughly discuss the potential consequences—both intended and unintended—of any changes that we implement.

As I read the various submissions, I was somewhat stopped in my tracks by one that defined older people as those aged 50 and over. It is one thing for our children to say that we are

ancient when we still feel very much in our prime or, at least, we can just about remember what that felt like. In a previous debate, Dr McKee entertained us at some length by talking about his passion for silk underwear. He was at it again today with the sex and games activities of Saga members. However, it is another thing to realise that the debate that we are having today is about a future, which is not so far away, in which we will be the very older people whom we have been discussing.

This is not an abstract population concept; as the minister noted, we must ensure that older people are not seen simply as a problem and that we create an atmosphere in which people who say that they are 50 or over do not elicit the response “You poor thing.” As Mary Scanlon pointed out, not everyone who is aged 65 or over is in need of care. As I say, this is not an abstract concept. We are talking about the care and dignity of our friends, our families and our fellows, so we had better get it right.

The Presiding Officer: I call Dr Richard Simpson. You may have no more than eight minutes, Dr Simpson. [*Interruption.*]

Dr Simpson: I am sorry, Presiding Officer. I did not hear how many minutes I had.

The Presiding Officer: You can have absolutely no more than eight minutes—seven, if you can.

16:45

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): This has been quite a good debate; as all members have agreed, it is certainly a very important one, given the demographic issues that are coming down the line. I will not go into those issues in any detail, because members have already put the facts on the record. However, a very important point that has not been emphasised enough is that although life expectancy has increased massively, with a subsequent significant increase in the numbers of older people, the healthy life expectancy that they will experience has grown at a far lesser rate.

There have been two elements to this debate: first, how we have arrived at the current situation over the past few years since the Parliament's establishment; and secondly, the challenge of the future. We all agree that the Parliament has done a considerable amount to improve the lot of our older colleagues through, for example, free personal care, which righted a discriminatory wrong against people with dementia; the central heating programme; concessionary travel; and the many other measures that members have mentioned.

However, as the “Panorama” programme and the *Herald* investigations that Johann Lamont, Duncan McNeil and others referred to have indicated, we face a very serious problem. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that we are beginning to see in a community care setting the same kind of massive institutionalisation and inappropriate care in an institutional setting that my generation of psychiatrists saw in the asylum depicted, for example, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. As members have pointed out, we are in grave danger of warehousing people in their own homes.

The fact is that we should begin to look at these problems when people turn 50—not because they necessarily become older people at that age but because that is when we can begin to prevent some of the problems that might materialise later. Recent Swedish research has shown that, even for couch potatoes, beginning to exercise at 50 can have huge benefits for older people’s physical and mental wellbeing.

Many older people want to remain active. Indeed, in many families, it is almost a joke that the 75, 80 or 85-year-old family member goes off—as they put it—“to look after some older person”. As Des McNulty has said, we have to recognise that needs change as we get older. Such changes might be rapid or slow, but we must never consider older people as some unitary whole. Their problems must be dealt with on a completely individual basis.

As a result, we need to consider the activity in which older people are engaged and look at allowing and encouraging them to continue in work. We should consider the role of part-time work, for example, in helping older people to manage the sudden move from full-time work to retirement. We also need to consider individual elderly people’s aspirations, the skills that they can bring to our communities, their desire to acquire new skills and any opportunities in that respect.

The most important element in creating the necessary resilience in our communities will be volunteering. Unless we see older people as a resource, not a problem, we really will have problems. As a result, it is a matter of considerable regret that, despite a members’ business debate and a Labour-initiated parliamentary debate on this issue, the retired and senior volunteer programme has lost half of its development workers, who are the very people who can train and support older people and help to fulfil their desire to contribute. The programme’s £350,000 funding is no longer provided centrally but has been given to the local authorities, and the move has resulted in four redundancies out of a staff of nine. That is disastrous for what I am sure the Government wants to achieve, yet the Government has failed to recognise that.

Many members, particularly Robert Brown and Ross Finnie, emphasised the other major change for volunteering, which is that charitable organisations’ income has gone down and they are no longer able to contribute in the same way. Organisations such as Lloyds TSB might not be able to make any contribution. We are faced with a funding crisis that has been generated by the banking crisis, and a second funding crisis that has been created by local authorities withdrawing services that voluntary organisations provide. The other day, I spoke to Crossroads Care, which is facing the worst situation that it has faced in the 12 years under the current chief executive. Crossroads is fundamental to the provision of respite care, which supports the carers who then support older people who are in need. We are destroying the system that has been established in the past 10 years. The Government must recognise that and start from that point.

If we want people to remain in their homes, it is absolutely vital that we ensure that our adaptation programmes are adequate. Christine Grahame and Mary Scanlon alluded to that. Adapting people’s homes gives them a much better opportunity to stay there. We need to maintain people’s independence and provide them with support. As Jeremy Purvis, Robert Brown and others said, we must ensure that people are not isolated. The concessionary travel scheme helps with that, but we must also allow support to be provided in the home.

Members have referred to the fact that the majority of funding goes to the NHS budget and is spent on institutional care and, within that, on unplanned admissions. We can certainly do a lot to improve that situation. Many programmes are being operated. For example, Peter Gabbittas in Edinburgh has a programme of support and rehabilitation for people coming out of hospital. In Lanarkshire, the Monklands integrated discharge and assessment service—MIDAS—does the same and Christine Grahame referred to a similar project in the Borders. There are many projects that aim to enable people to maximise their independence when they come out of hospital and therefore to prevent their return.

As Johann Lamont said, community care is facing a major challenge. There is a retrenchment to dealing with the most serious issues, rather than preventing people from developing those issues. We need continuity and consistency of care. As Malcolm Chisholm eloquently put it, we must ensure that users and their carers are consulted fully. Please, can we get away from the present system of retrenched funding and cutting costs? If we do that, we will improve care for the elderly.

16:52

Shona Robison: I thank members for a stimulating and useful debate. We hoped to provide an opportunity for Parliament to initiate a long-term discussion on how best to respond to the challenges—demographic, financial and otherwise—that will affect our planning for caring for older people. I think that we have achieved that initial goal. We are also here as a first step towards the wider public engagement that I referred to in my opening remarks, which will take place next year, when we will invite discussion on proposals for change. It is important that we all play a part in that.

I turn to some of the points that have been made, starting with Johann Lamont's comments on voluntary sector engagement. I reassure her that, over the summer, officials worked actively with the voluntary sector through meetings, events and other engagements. We have involved the sector in a wide range of activity on the agenda. The next stage will be the more formal and structured element. The voluntary sector is well aware of what we are doing, but the formal engagement will begin next year. I hope that that reassures Johann Lamont on that issue.

I continue to discuss with the care commission the issue of home care and what has been done to respond to the concerns that were raised in "Panorama". However, I can tell Johann Lamont that the care commission has reviewed its inspection methodology. She will appreciate that knowing what is going on in an individual's home is not without its challenges. The care commission has tried to provide greater emphasis on direct engagement with service users and their families. For example, it has increased the use of lay assessors in inspections, and it has been shadowing care at home. When the commission visits people's homes, its staff spend a lot more time talking to service users. The area is challenging, but I am keen to see what else we can do to monitor what happens in people's homes.

Dr Simpson: There is concern that services that users and the care commission regard as being excellent are losing their contracts because of a retendering process that seems completely unnecessary because it is not about a new service.

Shona Robison: Local authorities have always tendered for services. That has gone on for years. The concern is how they do it. I have always said that procuring social care services is not like buying tins of beans—we are talking about people.

I am sure that Dr Simpson is well aware that guidance on social care procurement was issued in August 2008. However, we recognise the need

for further guidance, which is why we are working with carers, users, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and service providers, including the voluntary sector, to ensure that we have robust guidance on what is expected. Local authorities have made it clear that they do not believe that methods such as reverse e-auction are appropriate, and they have signalled their intent not to use such methods. That is to be welcomed.

Johann Lamont talked about the important work that is being done jointly with the Minister for Housing and Communities on older people's housing. As other members said, housing is definitely part of the solution. We need to consider how to develop housing options that change with the person—it is almost about future proofing housing so that care services can be built around a person without them having to move to another house. I hope that I can assure Johann Lamont about the importance that we give to housing.

Mary Scanlon raised a number of what were, as always, pertinent points. The area of psychology services for older people is one in which we need to improve. As we develop and expand psychological services, we need to ensure that older people have as much access to those services as other sections of society. I am keeping a close eye on that issue.

Ross Finnie rightly reminded us of the big issue of pensioner poverty in relation to pension arrangements, and the real challenges that face funding bodies such as the Lloyds TSB Foundation. Those challenges are a concern to us all.

I will pass over Ian McKee's Saga comments. However, he made an important point about the balance of risk and independence. Enabling and supporting people to live in their own homes will sometimes come with a risk but the issue is whether that risk is appropriate and proportionate.

Johann Lamont: Is the minister aware of anxieties among charities that receive money from community planning partnerships and are being told that they have to have match funding? Finding match funding is very difficult because of what has happened to the Lloyds TSB Foundation and others. Does the minister plan to issue further guidance to local authorities and community planning partnerships to ensure that that change is recognised?

Shona Robison: We are well aware of the issue of match funding and the concerns that it has caused. We are discussing our response to that as a Government.

Duncan McNeil made some pertinent points, for example on the issue of e-auction, which I have dealt with. He said that the focus should be on supporting people, such as the 69,000 people who

receive care at home. That is very much what the whole debate is about.

Malcolm Chisholm raised a number of local issues, about which I am happy to write to him in detail if he would find that helpful. He said that the issue of checks on people is complex. We recognise the issues and we are working with others to try to resolve them. The implementation of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 next year will help with the robustness of the system, particularly in relation to vulnerable adults. We are alive to those issues and challenges.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to close please, minister.

Shona Robison: Okay. Robert Brown and Des McNulty also made important points, which I am afraid that I do not have time to cover. I am certainly happy to respond to them in writing.

I genuinely hope that in future we can engage on a cross-party basis, in the way that we have done today, as we take forward this issue, which is one of the most important.

Business Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-5064, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a revised time for the start of business on Thursday 29 October.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that "9:00" be substituted for "9:15" in Rule 2.2.3 for the purpose of allowing the meeting of the Parliament on Thursday 29 October 2009 to begin at 9.00 am.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-5065, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a revised business programme for Thursday 29 October.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 29 October 2009—

delete

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Marine (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Marine (Scotland) Bill

and insert

9.00 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Influenza A (H1N1)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Elder Abuse

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Marine (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Marine (Scotland) Bill—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-5066, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 4 November 2009

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Scotland's National Parks

followed by Ministerial Statement: Making Skills
Work for Scotland: ScotAction

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 November 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist
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:
Autumn Fisheries Negotiations

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 11 November 2009

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 12 November 2009

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

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

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-5067, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a stage 1 timetable for the Home Owner and Debtor Protection (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Home Owner and Debtor Protection (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 18 December 2009.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-5068, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a stage 1 timetable for the Legal Services (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Legal Services (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 be completed by 26 March 2010.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S3M-5069, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Teaching Council (Scotland) Act 1965 Modification Order 2009 be approved.—[*Bruce Crawford.*]

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

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There is one question to be put as a result of today's business.

The question is, that motion S3M-5069, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Teaching Council (Scotland) Act 1965 Modification Order 2009 be approved.

Scottish-Polish Connection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-4641, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on celebrating the Scottish-Polish connection. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commemorates the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Polish navy in Leith on 1 September 1939; notes that the three Polish destroyers *Burza* (Storm), *Grom* (Thunder) and *Blyskawica* (Lightning) saw service alongside the Royal Navy during the Second World War, with *Grom* being sunk with heavy loss of life on 4 May 1940; recognises that the arrival of the destroyers marked the beginning of a strong wartime Scottish-Polish connection, with several squadrons of the Polish Air Force serving in the country and Polish ships based at a number of Scottish ports, including Rosyth, Greenock, Port Glasgow, Ardrossan, Gourock, Dundee and Scapa Flow; further recognises that the main influx of Poles during the war occurred following the collapse of France in 1940 when some 30,000 Polish troops were evacuated to the United Kingdom and were stationed in Scotland, many of whom settled here; notes that a Polish house was organised in Edinburgh by the British Council to help the Polish community socially and educationally at this time; celebrates not just the wartime links but the long historical connection between Scotland and Poland, which includes upwards of 40,000 Scots migrating to Poland during the 17th century, and applauds the work of many organisations, including the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum and the Scottish Polish Cultural Association, for helping to develop awareness of the historical connections, promote cultural understanding and foster strong relations between modern generations of Scots and Poles.

17:05

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): The recent arrival of Poles in Scotland is not the beginning of the connection between Scotland and Poland. Instead, it marks a new era in the long and interesting history of the relationship between our countries. Given the closeness of remembrance day, which is also Polish independence day, I will focus first on the wartime connection between our countries.

No history of world war two in Scotland is complete without paying tribute to the thousands of Polish servicemen who arrived on Scottish soil, defended our shores and fought alongside our troops. They made a vital contribution not only to the wartime effort but to Scottish society in general. Many of them settled here, and their presence has had a long-lasting positive influence on communities throughout the land.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the first Polish forces arriving in Scotland. That happened just down the road, in Leith, which is now home to many of our modern-day Polish immigrants. In September 1939, three Polish destroyers sailed

into the Forth and were escorted into Leith after escaping the Baltic Sea on the outbreak of war. The sailors were followed shortly afterwards by two Polish submarines, one of which escaped internment and made a remarkable journey to Scotland without charts or navigational aids. All those vessels returned to sea as soon as they could, and with the Polish navy they served bravely alongside the Royal Navy in the Atlantic, in the Mediterranean and in home waters.

That was the start of a strong wartime connection between Scotland and Poland. Many Polish ships were based at Scottish ports, and several squadrons of the Polish air force served in parts of the country. Many Polish air crews received their training here and Polish squadrons of the Royal Air Force served with distinction in the battle of Britain.

The vast majority of the wartime Polish influx arrived after the collapse of France in 1940. About 30,000 troops found a temporary home in Scotland, which for many became permanent. They first arrived in Glasgow to a warm welcome and genuine hospitality and sympathy. The troops were moved to camps throughout the country, and lasting friendships, relationships and marriages developed in towns and villages. In the east of the country, Polish troops took over the defence of a large section of the coastline and were responsible for safeguarding our shores from Nazi attack.

Edinburgh has long been a main centre for Polish exiles in Scotland. The first Scottish-Polish Society was founded here in the 1830s. During the second world war, the British Council organised a Polish house to help the Polish community socially and educationally. Soon there were homes, hostels, schools, libraries and even a Polish medical faculty at the University of Edinburgh to cater for the needs of Polish soldiers and their families.

The long tradition of Scottish-Polish relations started way before the 20th century wars. Recent trends have been for Poles to come here but, from as far back as the 15th century, Scots have traded and settled in Poland. Upwards of 40,000 Scots emigrated to Poland during the 17th century, and many became very wealthy in their adopted home. Two such people were a mayor of Warsaw, Alexander Chalmers from Aberdeen, who was re-elected four times, and Robert Gordon, who was a merchant in Gdańsk and returned to establish the institution that became the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen.

The motion is about not just remembering those historic links but celebrating our continued relationships with Polish people. Their influence has never been more noticeable than since 2004, when Poland's European Union entry meant that once again a number of Polish workers made their

way to Scotland and called it their home. Many stay for just a short time and others might stay longer, but all contribute to our economy and our culture.

Scotland now has a thriving Polish community and our society is far richer for its presence. Edinburgh is home to one of the largest and most vibrant Polish communities in Scotland, and integration between the Scottish and Polish communities is deepening. The first Polish cultural festival took place in Leith in April and was organised by a committed group of young Polish volunteers. It featured a wide range of events from traditional folk music to Polish film and lectures from eminent historians. Just this month, a Polish artist painted a mural in Leith that was inspired by new Polish residents and depicts our two nations to help increase understanding of the links between our countries.

Last year, a memorial was unveiled in Redbraes park as a tribute to the Scotland-based Polish soldiers I mentioned earlier who fought in the war. The memorial was the idea of the community police officer, Simon Daley, and it was created to help unite the communities. That was done in response to a racist attack against a Polish man in this city, which is a timely reminder that, although most Scots are welcoming, a minority of people still have negative and ignorant views about and attitudes to people from other cultures and countries who make this country their home. That is why an appreciation of our shared history and past is so important.

During the war, Poles and Scots fought together against fascism. The recent media focus on the British National Party serves to remind us all of the threat that fascism and racism still pose to modern-day, democratic, multicultural societies such as Scotland—to the Scotland that we all want. We must work together to increase knowledge and celebrate the mix of cultures that makes our society what it is today.

As remembrance day approaches, I wish to celebrate the Scottish-Polish connection and pay tribute to the thousands of Poles who were based in Scotland and fought for the freedoms that we enjoy today. I congratulate the many Polish societies in Scotland, particularly those in Edinburgh and the Lothians, for the work that they do in building connections between our communities. May the long historical links of friendship continue to grow stronger between our nations.

17:11

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I congratulate Shirley-Anne Somerville on securing the debate and on her opening speech,

which was very appropriate. Just in case there is an impression that the Polish connection with Scotland is purely an east coast matter, I highlight the fact that during the very difficult time of the blitz in Clydebank, on 13 and 14 March 1941, an undying bond was forged between Poland and the people of Clydebank when the Polish sailors of a ship that was being refitted in the yards demonstrated considerable heroism in helping to put out the fires. Those individual acts of heroism on the part of the sailors also demonstrated the commitment to the common cause of tackling fascism, which united our countries at that time.

The blitz was the worst incident of direct violence against Scotland during the war, and the Polish sailors in Clydebank unhesitatingly pitched in to help when the whole of Clydebank was devastated by the German bombs. Their contribution is reflected in the fact that the square immediately opposite the town hall in Clydebank is called Solidarity Plaza. There is a memorial to the efforts of the Polish sailors and their vessel at a prominent place in Clydebank, and people there are very much aware and proud of that. On a number of occasions since the war, most recently at the 60th anniversary of the blitz, people from Poland, the Polish embassy and the Polish Government have visited Clydebank to maintain the links—something that members throughout the Parliament would like to see.

The issue is not just historical. In Clydebank, as in many other parts of Scotland, Polish people are coming to take up residence and contribute to our economy. I have to say that these people, whether they are visitors or migrants, are very welcome in our communities. They make a significant contribution to our economy, and they join in very well with the indigenous population. They really want to work hard, to have their children educated here and to contribute, in collaboration with other people, to the wellbeing of Scotland. We are learning from them, too; it is not simply a question of them coming here to find employment. They are enriching our culture—adding to the cultural enrichment that many other migrant groups have brought to our society.

Shirley-Anne Somerville made a good point about the historical links between Poland and Scotland. I was fortunate enough to go to Gdańsk a number of years ago—I think with Richard Lochhead and Mike Pringle—where I saw for myself the memorial evidence of the Scottish contribution there. We should work at parliamentary level to maintain such links between ourselves and Poland, which are historical and practical for both sides.

The debate is valuable, and I hope that it has the support of all parties. We should remember and value the contributions that were made in the

past and we should consider the valuable contributions that can be made if we work together in future.

17:15

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I congratulate Shirley-Anne Somerville on securing this important debate. As she and Des McNulty said, Scotland and Poland have a rich history.

Throughout Scotland there is a strong Polish presence, in the workforce and in the culture. People from Poland who have made Scotland their home have shown genuine willingness to integrate into Scottish society—and have done so with marked success—while at the same time celebrating their own culture. Their presence has been hugely beneficial to Scotland's economy; they have provided additional skills to the labour market while making an impact on Scotland's culture. Polish restaurants are dotted throughout the country and several areas have Polish festivals. Many football players from Poland play for Scottish clubs. Polish has become the second most spoken language among Scottish schoolchildren. Scotland is an attractive destination for Polish students who want to study abroad, because of our enduring ties with Poland and our strong academic reputation. I am told that there is even a Polish tartan.

Several Scottish towns and cities are twinned with towns in Poland. Edinburgh is twinned with Kraków, and Duns in my constituency is twinned with Żagań in the west of Poland. There is a special relationship, which is steeped in history, and we should continue to commemorate and cultivate it.

As the motion says, on 1 September 1939 three Polish destroyers of the Polish destroyer squadron sailed into Leith. Their presence was one of many Polish presences in Scotland during the second world war. The Polish army made a significant contribution and thousands of its soldiers were stationed in Scotland—indeed, the majority of Polish soldiers in the United Kingdom were stationed in Scotland. The Polish 1st Armoured Division, which was formed by General Maczek, was stationed in the Borders, near Kelso and Duns in my constituency. The division quickly gained a reputation for smartness and efficiency and made a valuable contribution to allied efforts. The Polish Military Staff College, near Peebles, ran air force studies, and an operational training unit for Polish pilots was formed in Grangemouth. Polish pilots fought with the Royal Air Force in the battle of Britain and the Polish navy aided the Royal Navy in the battle of the Atlantic—a plaque that commemorates the Polish sailors who died in the endeavour is on a monument in Prestwick.

The presence of Polish people during the second world war not only provided a significant military contribution but introduced many skilled professionals to Scotland, many of whom chose to stay here after the war. As the Soviet Union began to expand its sphere of influence into Poland, Polish people sought refuge in Scotland.

There is a strong Polish presence in our education establishments. In 1941, the Polish school of medicine was established in Edinburgh to train students from the Polish forces in British methods of medicine. The school closed in 1949, but aspiring medical students from Poland can still benefit from the Polish school of medicine memorial fund, which was established at the University of Edinburgh in 1986. Numerous students at the University of the West of Scotland in Paisley can study at Polish universities in towns such as Warsaw and Kraków, as a result of links that were cultivated by Professor George Blazycza, who came from Hawick. Examples of such co-operation can be found throughout Scotland, for example at the Glasgow School of Art, the University of Strathclyde and the University of Stirling.

As a result of the relaxation of EU movement restrictions, at least 60,000 Poles have moved to Scotland during the past four years. Some chose to live in cities but many decided to make their home in more rural parts of Scotland, such as Duns, Kelso, Melrose and Galashiels, in the Borders. Regardless of where they settle, they are often noted for their admirable work ethic and dedication. They have supplied workers to the building and construction and tourism and hospitality industries and to the health services, especially in dentistry—an area in which their help was much needed. Many young Poles come to Scotland for education. They want to learn English, acquire new skills and gain experience before they return home. That illustrates the evolving nature of the relationship between the two countries.

The Polish community in Scotland is an important presence. Our relationship with the nation itself is also important. Poland is an important trading partner for Scotland and we should support the nation as it grows and continues to strengthen its economy and democracy. Poland is often our ally in the European Parliament and we should aim to continue such an important relationship.

From Bonnie Prince Charlie, whose mother was Polish, to Voytek the bear, who was adopted by the Polish soldiers who were living in Scotland, to Polish contributions to medicine, education and business, Scotland's connection with Poland is well established. It is a relationship that we should seek to preserve as both nations benefit from the

exchange. It is therefore appropriate that the Scottish Parliament should celebrate that connection tonight, and I again commend Shirley-Anne Somerville for securing the debate.

17:20

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am grateful to Shirley-Anne Somerville for securing tonight's members' business debate on a topic that has long been close to my heart, as I hope I will be able to show in my speech.

As a historian, although an altogether minor one compared with the irreplaceable Polish Scot, Neal Ascherson, I have an interest in Scots-Polish friendship as it goes back long in history. The rudest lines in all the poems of Burns—I will not quote them in a family chamber—were pro-Polish and Thomas Campbell, another Scots radical, was a hero to Polish liberals. He wrote eloquently

"And Freedom shrieked when Kosciuszko fell".

There was a migration to Scottish mining districts of Poles, first between the 1880s and 1914, and then during and after world war two. Many servicemen came, some of whom married and settled. As someone told Neal Ascherson, they could all dance like Fred Astaire. My closest childhood friend, the social anthropologist Charles Jedrej, who died last year, was from that background.

Scotland has an ageing population and we need younger people as skilled workers. Besides, Scottish nationalism is not exclusive. In the words of the First Minister, we are a mongrel nation and proud of it. In the middle ages, we were unique in having five ethnic groups and a peaceable enough make-up. Our links ran abroad, particularly to the Baltic.

We have many Polish workers and families in my constituency. We felt that it was necessary to open up a dialogue with such a large and hard-working community that faces the same issues as local residents. The problems that they encounter are, of course, aggravated by a language barrier that often prevents them from receiving help, so it is important that they have access to local councillors and MSPs. We have a long-established Polish club in Kirkcaldy and the number of Polish workers who live and work there, not least of whom is my assistant Mariusz Szewczyk, who came up with the notion of decorating Kirkcaldy's esplanade with wind-powered lamps, has helped to rejuvenate the town. If anyone can get that, Mariusz can.

To give people the opportunity to access help, we set up the Kirkcaldy Scottish-Polish group so that people can communicate with each other and overcome the feeling of being isolated. It provides

a platform for Polish citizens who are living in Kirkcaldy to discuss their special needs and hopes for their lives in Scotland. We hold surgeries and meetings, which already reflect great interest among Polish people from Kirkcaldy and the kingdom, and we post articles about matters of general community interest in Polish on our website.

On 31 May this year, I supported Kirkcaldy's international children's day and sports day, which was a successful event organised by the Polish club. More than 1,000 people took part on one of the rare days of light and sun that we had this summer. The Polish school is another active and successful local organisation that assists residents with applications for grants to help the children who attend. Such activities have led to an improved relationship with the Polish consulate and brought wider attention, as is evidenced by the formation of the parliamentary cross-party group on Poland.

Scotland is in need of expertise and skilled personnel. Nevertheless, many of our new Polish Scots are employed in jobs that are far below their qualifications. A competence centre that combined bringing migrants quickly up to speed in the English language with providing training and equivalency tests to enable Polish and other migrants to have their degrees confirmed—about 40 per cent of them have degrees—would be good in this context.

A year or so from now, Glasgow will open probably one of the world's greatest transport museums. It would be excellent if it could commemorate the genius of the Pole Joseph Conrad, the novelist of the sea when the Clyde built the ships and the close friend of that other exotic, Don Roberto Cunningham Graham, the first president of our own Scottish National Party. It was Conrad, of course, who said in one of his novels, about a character who appears in it:

"He claimed Scottish ancestry, but what ambitious man has not done so?"

It was a nice compliment from an elegant Pole, and something that I hope we will be able to repay.

17:25

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Shirley-Anne Somerville on lodging this important motion and taking the opportunity to emphasise the great contribution that Polish people make to Scotland today and which they made in the past. The motion emphasises in particular the Polish contribution during the war. It also refers to a fact that is perhaps lesser known among Scottish people today: very many Scots went to Poland,

particularly in the 17th century. In fact, I am told that several Polish names are based on Scottish names.

It is fitting that there is a war memorial in the Redbraes community garden in my constituency to the Poles who died in the war. I pay tribute to PC Simon Daley, whose idea the memorial was; it was one of several actions to help bring the Scottish and Polish communities together. I also pay tribute not only to the organisations that are mentioned in the motion but to the Polish Cultural Festival Association, which organised the superb Polish cultural festival earlier this year. An exhibition of photographs of that festival was on display earlier this month in Edinburgh and, if anybody missed it, some of it is currently on display in Fountainbridge library in Edinburgh.

I was very pleased to speak at the launch of the festival and to attend several very enjoyable events, including a combined ceilidh and Polish dancing event in Leith back in April. That kind of intercultural event is very important for integration, which is the theme that we want to emphasise when it comes to talking about Polish or, indeed, many other ethnic minorities who come to Scotland—celebrating and recognising their distinct cultures but seeking integration.

It is important that we ensure that there is adequate provision for English language teaching, which is another important aspect of integration. The Minister for Housing and Communities may want to cover that in his closing speech. I am conscious of quite a lot of such activity in my constituency. I am pleased to meet Polish people every Saturday morning when I do a surgery at Royston/Wardieburn community centre; a large number go there for English classes at that time.

I have also been pleased to meet many Polish people at a weekly drop-in at the Fort community wing that is called a swietlica. Advice sessions are available, but it is also a social event at which Polish people can meet and talk to people who were born in Scotland. I pay tribute to the volunteers who run that drop-in, one of whom spent several days work shadowing with me earlier in the year.

The main theme that we want to emphasise today is the contribution of Polish people to Scotland. We should remember all that they have done for Scotland, all that they continue to do and all the skills and cultural diversity that they bring to Scotland. In a speech that was useful from the historical point of view and for present issues, Christopher Harvie emphasised the importance of training and equivalency tests. A couple of weeks ago, a well-qualified Polish electrician came to one of the surgeries at Royston/Wardieburn community centre with a problem: his qualifications had not been properly recognised in

Scotland. It is important that such problems are ironed out.

I end as I began—by congratulating Shirley-Anne Somerville on introducing this important debate.

17:29

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Shirley-Anne Somerville on securing the debate and on the way in which she presented both the historical context and the current situation. In an excellent debate, we have heard some very good speeches from all sides of the chamber.

Growing up in Cowdenbeath, I went to school with many people with Polish names and many of my friends came from the Polish community. In places such as Cowdenbeath, it is evident just how integrated people from the Polish community were. I always remember that, when I asked her what life was like during the war, my mum described the Polish soldiers and sailors who came to live in Cowdenbeath. At that time, the women of Cowdenbeath had never seen anyone so exotic and having such old-fashioned charm. The young women of Cowdenbeath were quite bowled over—I do not think the men were terribly chuffed. My mum certainly spoke well about the manners of the Poles and wished that some of our Cowdenbeath lads had been the same.

I also remember how jealous I was when, on special occasions such as Christmas parties, girls from the Polish community would arrive wearing their wonderful Polish costumes. At a time when Cowdenbeath was a bit dark and grey, they certainly brightened things up considerably.

Of course, my constituency of Central Fife contained several Polish communities because of the soldiers and sailors who were billeted in Windygates and Markinch. Those communities have a long history because many of them stayed on—they stayed in St Andrews as well—after the war.

Chris Harvie mentioned the Polish club in Kirkcaldy, which I have had the great fortune to visit several times and where I have met the Polish community. Outside that club is one of the most poignant memorials to those who died in the Katyn forest massacre, in which the officer class of the Polish army was slaughtered by Russian and Soviet soldiers. Not only was the Polish officer class practically wiped out at Katyn, many intellectuals and others also perished. The memorial provides a great reminder of the massacre, which is commemorated every year by the Polish community in Kirkcaldy. To the best of my knowledge, it is the only memorial to Katyn on Scottish soil.

Moving forward, I think that we in Scotland are fortunate, as communities and as a nation, to be able to welcome the many young Polish people who now stay here and contribute to our economy. They contribute to our economy and to our culture in exactly the same way as the Poles who came here in 1939 and in the 1940s. Scotland and Poland are far richer for those connections between the two countries. Long may they continue.

17:33

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this evening's excellent debate—I congratulate Shirley-Anne Somerville on securing it—on the Scotland-Poland connection. Please accept my apologies that I cannot stay for the minister's closing remarks.

The motion highlights the significant contribution that Poles have made to Scotland, beginning with the significant influx of Polish soldiers in 1940. As the motion explains, that relationship also goes back generations, to a time when many Scots emigrated to Poland. Indeed, when I attended Neal Ascherson's lecture on the subject at the University of Edinburgh earlier this month, I was given a fascinating journey through the 400 years of that relationship, from the 17th century to the present day.

What struck me about the special relationship is that it has been fostered by ordinary people rather than by kings or queens or governments or states. The Scotland-Poland connection has been one of individual relationships: of marriages between Polish soldiers and the Scottish women who were left behind to fight the war effort at home; of Scottish families who took in Polish lodgers, who became part of their homes and communities; of Scottish emigrants who went to Poland in the 17th century to find and explore new opportunities and to gain a better life for themselves and their families; and of the young Poles who continue to come to Scotland to help to grow our economy and to settle here with their families. Through the generations, there have been many lasting relationships between Scottish and Polish families, and new ties are being developed all the time.

In recent history, many Poles settled in Fife, and it is significant that so many Fife members have taken part in the debate. Many Poles came during the war, and Fife has worked to recognise the contribution that Polish servicemen made. To name a few highlights, there is the statue of General Sikorski in Kinburn park in St Andrews, the monument dedicated to the 1st Polish parachute brigade in Leven's festival gardens, the commemorative plaque on Earlsferry town hall and the mosaic in St Andrews that commemorates the relationship between the townspeople and

their Polish allies. The museum in St Andrews also hosts a collection of Polish military objects that were gathered by a group of Polish ex-servicemen who were based in Fife during the war. Although they perhaps often go unnoticed by locals, those symbols of the Polish alliance with Scotland and the defence of Fife are scattered throughout the kingdom.

As has already been mentioned, Fife has a well-established Polish ex-servicemen's club in Kirkcaldy, which has provided a focus for the community. In 2006, Fife Polish Association, or Most, was formed by a group of young and enthusiastic Polish migrants. They chose the name Most, which is Polish for bridge, to symbolise the integration of Polish people among themselves and with Scottish people living in Fife. They work hard for integration of Polish people in Fife and to support and help them as they arrive here. We are fortunate to have that organisation to engage with the younger Polish community and those who have recently come to Scotland.

Following the war, many Poles settled in the mining communities in Fife. Tricia Marwick talked of her experience growing up in Cowdenbeath. She might not appreciate the comparison, but my dad, who grew up in Kelty in the 1950s and went to St Joseph's primary school, remembers that half his class had Irish surnames such as O'Donnell, Brennan and O'Reilly and the other half had Polish surnames such as Nowak, Jerneki and Muszynski.

Like many people throughout Scotland, my dad gained a Polish uncle who came over to Scotland during the war, when he was stationed at Kinross. Uncle Marion Makinski was noticed by his Scottish bride to be because she admired his uniform, which, as a tailor, he had made himself. He was typical of the generation that came to Scotland, who arrived with the forces but brought other skills to the Scottish economy. We know that, unfortunately, those skills were not always directly employed. We can trace the issue back to that period as well as observe it among young people who come over from Poland, as Chris Harvie highlighted. Many officers and teachers who came over during the war ended up finishing their careers as labourers in Scotland.

The Poles brought excitement and interest to Scotland in the 1940s. Pruszyński's book "Polish Invasion", which was first published in 1941, is a fascinating account of Poles' and Scots' mutual impact on one another during the second world war. The book describes how real affection grew out of initial misunderstanding, as the Pole

"took the other for a kind of Englishman, and was rewarded by being taken for a kind of Russian".

There is a section in which Private Nowak's English is better than that of the rest of his company not because of his diligent study, more

"due to Elsie and her method of instruction rather than to the good old schoolmaster".

It is a fascinating account of a time of innocence that is hardly recognisable now.

As co-convenor of the recently established cross-party group on Poland, I recognise the challenges that Poles face coming to Scotland. Other speakers have highlighted those. I encourage members who have taken part in the debate to join the group and to help us to highlight some of the issues that face Polish people who live in Scotland and continue the celebration of the relationship between Scotland and Poland.

17:38

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): I join in the congratulations to Shirley-Anne Somerville on securing the debate on an important subject. From listening to the speeches, I think that it is clear that the Polish connection stretches the length and breadth of Scotland, from Leith in Malcolm Chisholm's constituency, through Edinburgh, which Shirley-Anne Somerville mentioned, into the Borders, which John Lamont mentioned, and Fife, which a number of members mentioned. That is a clear indication of the welcome impact that Polish immigration into Scotland has had.

There have been three waves of Polish immigration into Scotland: during the late 19th century and early 20th century; during and after the second world war; and in the past few years, when the migration has perhaps been more economic than it was previously. All those waves of migration of Polish people into Scotland and the historic connections that they have established have been extremely welcome to our country. A number of members have mentioned individuals such as Robert Gordon, who made his fortune as a merchant in Gdańsk and then came back and established the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen.

More recently, many of our memories are from the generation who fought during the second world war. In particular, I welcome the Polish consul to Scotland, who is here on—I think—his last day as consul. I spent some time with him over the summer in commemorating the 70th anniversary of the start of the second world war, in particular marking the Polish navy's contribution in Scotland.

Some of the figures for the involvement of Polish people in Scotland are staggering. About 50,000 service personnel and, as John Lamont mentioned, at least one bear, were based here and, after the war, 10,000 people—a fifth of those

people—stayed and settled in Scotland. We should also recognise that Poland made the fourth largest allied troop contribution to the war and, having been evacuated from France, they protected many of Scotland's coastal defences. As Des McNulty mentioned, one of the most heroic efforts was in March 1941, when the Polish destroyer Piorun saved John Brown's shipyard by putting up heavy anti-aircraft fire. Today, the Solidarity Plaza in Clydebank honours that achievement.

Polish women have also played a major part in our shared history. The nurses of the Polish Red Cross and the army medical service, together with the Polish women's auxiliary service, cared for the sick at the Polish military hospital at Taymouth castle, near Aberfeldy, and at Dupplin castle, near Perth, where there was another Polish military hospital. The latter was funded by three Scotswomen for the evacuated Polish and British troops from France in 1940. The Polish military hospitals based in Scotland each had a PWSK—Polish women's auxiliary army service—company.

The community has formed a number of societies and institutions, including the Polish Hearth, a centre for Polish refugees and servicemen, a Polish school, and the Polish Ex-Combatants Association.

Today, the Scottish Government welcomes the contribution that Polish people have made to our economy and our society in more recent years. A number of organisations have not been mentioned. One that has been mentioned is the Sikorski Polish Club in Glasgow. There is also the Scottish Polish cultural association; there is Swietlica, the local Polish drop-in centre in Edinburgh, which has also been mentioned; there is the Polish Association in Inverness, where up to 35,000 Poles have settled in the past decade or so; and there are many other large and small groups throughout Scotland that help Polish and immigrant communities.

I am glad to say that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, will attend the United Polish Falkirk conference on 28 November, and I am also glad to say that the Scottish Government granted £2,000 towards helping the organisation of the conference, which is typical of the kind of events that have been taking place, particularly over the past year or so as the 70th anniversary of the start of world war two has been marked.

As part of our engagement with people who have moved from Poland to Scotland in recent years, we have produced an information guide for Polish nationals looking to work in Scotland. The guide has been distributed throughout Scotland and Poland and is available online; it provides practical information on employment, housing and training opportunities as well as highlighting

leisure activities in Scotland. There has been a bit of a return of some migrants from Scotland to Poland in recent years—perhaps as a direct result of the relative performance of the Polish economy in recent years and the exchange rate—but nevertheless many of those who came have settled here permanently. The recent movement of people between our two countries has led to the establishment of important transport connections, particularly direct air links, between Scotland and Poland, which underpin our historic ties.

Some of the other projects in which the Scottish Government has been involved include a project in Glasgow to which £200,000 has been committed between 2008 and 2011 to help the integration of the Polish community and a project at the Dundee International Women's Centre, where more than £250,000 of funding has been made available to assist with language and integration.

Scottish Development International, which enjoys excellent relations with the British-Polish Chamber of Commerce, is currently working to establish a Scottish-Polish association to focus on promoting and networking Polish-Scottish bilateral relations. As I said earlier, there is a very good relationship between the Polish Government and the Scottish Government. Since 2004, the Scottish Government has hosted trainees from the Polish national school of government on short-term internships. I am pleased that the current intake is also in the public gallery tonight to pay tribute to the historic links between our two countries.

The Scottish Government welcomes the contribution that the Polish community has made, is making and will continue to make to Scottish society and the Scottish economy. We look forward to many more hundreds of years of close connections between the Polish people and the Scottish people.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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