



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 2 October 2012

Session 4

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## Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 2 October 2012*

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader this afternoon is the Rev Roderick Macdonald, minister of Beith parish church.

**The Rev Roderick Macdonald (Beith Parish Church):** Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament, Luke, chapter 14, verse 11 reads:

“those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

I was once asked by someone from Paris to explain why Scots football supporters celebrated even in defeat. To explain, I referred to personal experience as wee Roddy Macdonald, youngest of six and very small. I remember the playground, where the two biggest guys always got to pick the teams. They picked the biggest and oldest first. It was whittled down until eventually they picked the smallest—the wee guy—and that would be me. I was just happy to be picked and get a game.

For me, that is Scotland. We are like that wee guy, happy just to get a game.

The norm in society would be only to celebrate success, but we have the integrity to support no matter what, and that is what I call stoic Scots humility and integrity—not humility that says, “I am nothing.” If you cannot value yourself, you cannot truly value others.

Today’s quote is from a story of Jesus at a meal in the house of a Jewish Pharisee, where guests jostle for the place of honour at the table, in a community that interpreted position and wealth as signs of God’s blessing. The implications of such beliefs are that the poor and the disabled are judged and devalued. Sharing food in a society constantly threatened by hunger and famine meant that it was often a competition just to be at the table, but these guys competed for the best seats.

Today, how do we value people? Class, status, fashion, self-promotion—we are still competitive. The norm is still to score points off each other in the competition to get to the top or to win a vote. That is the way it is, or has aye been.

It does not have to be like that. Jesus’s words turn everything upside down with respect to the world’s values. They offer an invitation to be free

from the need always to advance your own cause by coming out on top.

It is really quite liberating when one’s inner life and external behaviour are allowed to be in sync and we are free to reimagine new ways to lead, support or serve with integrity, free from the dictates of competitive expectations of exaltation. For those who are exalted shall be humbled and those who are humbled shall be exalted.

Thank you for letting wee Roddy Macdonald share this with you today.

Amen.

## Scottish Government Question Time

### Topical Questions

14:04

#### Alcohol Minimum Unit Price (European Commission)

##### 1. Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what representations it has received from the European Commission regarding minimum unit pricing for alcohol. (S4T-00063)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** The European Commission submitted a detailed opinion on minimum unit pricing for alcohol on 26 September. We are required to respond to the issues that are raised in the opinion, which are confidential, by 27 December. We are confident that we can demonstrate that minimum pricing is justified on the basis of public health and social grounds, and we will continue to press the case for it in the strongest possible terms.

**Aileen McLeod:** My understanding is that, as minimum unit pricing is a public health measure to tackle the real problem that we face in Scotland from binge drinking and alcohol misuse, it is consistent with European Union law, provided that the measure is proportionate. Does the cabinet secretary consider that to be the case?

**Alex Neil:** We have always been clear that, in order to comply with EU law, we need to demonstrate that minimum pricing is justified on public health grounds and that it is the most proportionate means by which to deliver our policy objectives.

I firmly believe that Scotland's record of alcohol-related harm means that the introduction of minimum unit pricing is fully justified on public health grounds. Further, I am clear that minimum unit pricing is the least intrusive mechanism through which to reduce the disproportionate level of alcohol-related harm that is attributable to high-strength, low-cost alcoholic products.

For those reasons, the Scottish Government remains firmly of the view that minimum unit pricing complies with EU law.

**Aileen McLeod:** Does the cabinet secretary, like me, welcome the support that the Scottish Parliament's groundbreaking alcohol and minimum pricing legislation has received from the EU-level charities, groups and organisations that are concerned about alcohol abuse, such as the European public health alliance? Will he therefore

continue to press the case for minimum pricing because it is the right and responsible thing to do if we want to improve the public health of the people of this country and reduce the social harm that is caused by alcohol misuse?

**Alex Neil:** I whole-heartedly welcome the support from EU-level charities and organisations that work in this field. The cross-Europe support from public health professionals mirrors the support that we have received at home from our healthcare groups and professionals, our doctors, our nurses, our police and our public health experts—those who work daily with the terrible effects of alcohol misuse. That is one reason among many why we remain firm in the belief that a minimum price per unit of alcohol is the most effective and efficient way to tackle alcohol misuse in Scotland.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The action by the European Commission on minimum unit pricing and the challenge in the Court of Session notwithstanding, does the cabinet secretary recognise that there is much more that we can do to tackle alcohol abuse? On that basis, can I commend to him the member's bill of my colleague, Richard Simpson, which contains a range of measures to tackle alcohol abuse, and ask him for an early meeting so that we can take that work forward together?

**Alex Neil:** The Scottish Government has always made it clear that minimum unit pricing is part of a wider package of dealing with this significant problem. We will, of course, consider any proposals that are put forward, including those of Professor Simpson. I am always glad to meet any member of this Parliament, from any side of the chamber, to discuss their ideas and proposals.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** What discussions has the minister had with the United Kingdom Government and Lord Wallace of Tankerness in this regard?

**Alex Neil:** The clear indications from Lord Wallace and others are that we have the moral and active support of the UK Government in dealing with this matter at a European level. I would like to put on record my gratitude to the UK Government for that support—obviously, what happens north of the border will impact on its proposals for south of the border. Therefore, if we can speak with one voice and ensure that we win this battle in Europe, that will be good for people not only in Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom.

#### Proposed Smart Travel Card Scheme

**2. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when its proposed smart travel card scheme will be able to

provide integrated public transport ticketing throughout Scotland.(S4T-00066)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon):** Smart ticketing is not new to Scotland. Smart cards have been used to successfully deliver concessionary travel on buses for more than two years. There are more than 1.2 million card holders, and 146 million journeys are undertaken each year using the cards, so one in three of all bus journeys is already smart.

Delivering that scheme has allowed a lot of technical issues to be resolved and given the Scottish Government the knowledge to move on to the delivery of effective, integrated ticketing across Scotland. To that end, we now plan to establish and support a manageable number of pilot or demonstration projects with willing partners from the public sector and the transport-operating community. It is our intention that the pilots cover a number of different aspects of smart ticketing and that they are established in a number of different parts of the country. Most important, it is our expectation that all the projects will be capable of being expanded or replicated in other parts of Scotland.

There is therefore still a substantial amount of work to do, but our clear objective is that in due course and as quickly as is practically possible all journeys on Scotland's bus, rail, ferry, subway and tram networks can be accessed using smart ticketing or payment in an integrated way.

**Alex Johnstone:** I thank the minister for that answer but, in the press releases that went out yesterday and in the comments that she made, a consistent comparison was made with the Oyster card system, raising expectations. It is my belief that the saltire card will effectively be a prepayment card and as such will not offer the same standard of service as the Oyster card. When do we expect the system to be of a comparable standard?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The card is capable of operating in that way. I am sure that I do not need to tell Alex Johnstone and others in the chamber that there are, rightly or wrongly, appreciable differences between the organisation of the public transport networks in Scotland and London.

I guess that there are three stages in this process, the first of which is to get a card into existence; we have done that and I spoke about the scale of the card's use in my earlier answer. Secondly, we must ensure the availability of smart ticket machines; they exist now in our buses and we have plans to roll them out to other modes of public transport. Thirdly and crucially—this will start through the pilot projects that I spoke about—we must ensure that we have a range of smart

products for use with the smart cards, such as smart tickets or smart payment methods. That is the route to using the card in an integrated way.

I believe that we have a clear route map, if the member will pardon the pun, so it is important that we get on in the pilot projects to deliver. I assure the member and other members that I am keen to ensure that we make progress on the issue as quickly as possible.

**Alex Johnstone:** The minister has made it clear how valuable the system could be to visitors to Scotland. We are all of course aware that 2014 will see the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup take place in Scotland, with huge numbers of visitors coming here. Can the minister offer me a guarantee that this system will be beyond the pilot stage, up and running, and tried and tested before those events take place?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** This is an important point: it is not necessarily the intention to have the system in use for the Commonwealth games. I have made clear my desire to see the system move forward as quickly as possible, but the member will understand that the Commonwealth games are approaching quickly and that it is important that we do not have something that is being tested in an event as important as the Commonwealth games.

The intention for the Commonwealth games is that a version of Strathclyde partnership for transport's zone card product will be used. The games organisers, in discussion with Transport Scotland, are looking at how best to provide free travel for spectators travelling to games venues.

That does not take away from the real determination that there is, notwithstanding all the challenges around the issue, to make progress and get us to the point, which I believe we can reach, where we have genuinely smart, integrated public transport across Scotland. I am sure that that is an objective and ambition that members across the chamber will sign up to.

**Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Clearly, the issue of timescale is important. When does the cabinet secretary expect the pilot projects will be evaluated?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I will make more announcements in this regard over the next period, but my intention is to get the pilot projects up and running on a rolling basis as soon as possible. I would expect that to happen early in 2013, if not later this year.

We must ensure that we evaluate the projects on an on-going basis and use learning to accelerate progress. I am not going to put an end-point date on that right now, but I want to ensure that we make progress as quickly as possible in getting to the end-point. The member will

appreciate that, as well as differences between Scotland and London in how our bus services are regulated, there are issues around franchise arrangements for rail and ferry services. Clearly, they are material to our ability as a Government to mandate public transport providers to deliver the projects.

I hope that all members get a clear sense of the determination that exists. I know that the Minister for Transport and Veteran Affairs is as determined as I am to ensure that we make the progress that everybody wants towards what I think is a worthy ambition.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** I, too, welcome the Deputy First Minister's announcement of a new travel smart card, although I regret that, at this stage, the scheme does not go as far as including various fare structures to make travelling more convenient and cheaper, as was called for. How will the Deputy First Minister ensure that users of the saltire card will enjoy fairer fares to combat the ever-increasing cost of public transport?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I go back to my answer to Alex Johnstone. The point that bears repetition is that the card is already in existence—it has 1.2 million users, as it is currently used for the concessionary fare scheme across Scotland. Therefore, the card is not new.

We need to ensure that more public transport providers accept the card and have the card readers to accept it. That is the case with buses, and we need to ensure that it is the case as quickly as possible with other modes of transport.

The key point—this goes to the heart of Jim Hume's question—is ensuring that we have the right products, such as integrated ticket products or ways of paying for tickets. Through such products, we not only get integration but start to look at some of the cost savings to passengers that I believe will be possible.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** In making comparisons with London, the minister makes a good case for regulating the buses properly in Scotland so that we can have integrated ticketing and not just cashless payment. There is a risk that a mere cashless payment system that is based on the national entitlement card gives us the minimum level of functionality for the maximum impact on passengers' privacy. Does the minister agree that a cashless payment card creates no rationale at all for collecting data about the journeys that people make? Will she have an immediate discussion with the Scottish Information Commissioner to ensure the most rigorous possible application of the Government's privacy principles in the design of the scheme?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Patrick Harvie is right to point to what is a real issue and one on which we need to strike the right balance. I am fully with him in relation to the protection of privacy. The other side—I say this simply to give the other side of the debate—is the argument that the ability of transport providers to look at people's journey patterns allows those providers to better tailor their services.

There is a balance to be struck. We will obviously be mindful of any advice, guidance or stipulation of the Scottish Information Commissioner. As we progress with the scheme, I would be happy to speak to those who have an interest in the issue to ensure that we strike the right balance.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether flexible ticketing, particularly for students who travel, for example, between Ayrshire and Glasgow, will or could be part of the pilot or final scheme?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** The short answer to that is yes. The slightly longer answer is that the phase 1 demonstrator projects are aimed at testing several types of smart tickets. They will include, for example, school transport; transport and tickets to help young people to get back into employment; single-operator day returns or weekly, monthly or annual tickets; multi-operator versions of the same things; and rail season tickets. In saying yes to John Scott, I hope that I am giving him the sense that, through the demonstrator projects, we are looking to test a number of uses of the scheme to inform our approach.



## Scotland Act 2012 (Standing Order Rule Changes)

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-04298, in the name of Dave Thompson, on Scotland Act 2012 standing orders rule changes on legislative competence statements.

14:19

**Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** The Scotland Act 2012 included a number of provisions that we need to reflect in the Parliament's standing orders. The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has been working through the changes. This debate is on our second report on rule changes to implement the Scotland Act 2012.

The first set of changes—which, I am sure, members recall—were implemented before the summer and changed references to the “Scottish Executive” to references to the “Scottish Government”, and signified the coming of age of our devolved Parliament. Further changes will follow over the next year, but the committee's report concerns the statements of legislative competence that are made when a bill is introduced.

At the moment, only members of the Government who are introducing bills are required to make a statement confirming that they consider the bill to be within the competence of the Parliament. On 15 October, when section 6 of the Scotland Act 2012 commences, all bills will be required to have a statement of legislative competence. In the case of members' bills, that will be a statement from the member in charge; for committee bills, it will be from the convener; and for private bills, it will be from the promoter of the bill.

Although that is a new requirement, it should not involve significant extra work. Anyone who is drafting a bill already needs to consider whether it falls within the Parliament's powers. All the Scotland Act 2012 has introduced is a public assurance that the necessary consideration has been given. I should explain that the Presiding Officer is already required to issue her own separate statement of legislative competence for every bill that is introduced. That requirement will remain and is not affected by the Scotland Act 2012 or the rule changes.

The Calman commission, whose recommendations informed the Scotland Act 2012, made a further recommendation that the person in charge of a bill should also be required to explain the considerations that informed the legislative

competence statement. The committee considered that recommendation carefully, but decided not to introduce such a requirement. We were concerned that that might distract from scrutiny of the policy merits of the bill. It is, of course, always open to committees to ask for more information if concerns about competence arise during the bill's passage.

The rule changes in our report make only the changes that are needed to bring standing orders into line with the Scotland Act 2012. I invite Parliament to agree the rule changes that are set out in our report.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Will Dave Thompson explain for those of us who were not part of the committee process whether members will be required to seek external professional legal advice on the question of competence of members' bills and, if so, who will pay for that?

**The Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary. I am sorry—I meant Mr Thompson.

**Dave Thompson:** That was a quick promotion. Thank you for that, Presiding Officer.

No—members will not be required to seek external professional legal advice. It will be entirely up to the member who introduces the bill to state that they believe that the bill falls within the competence of the Parliament. As I said, the Presiding Officer has to issue her own statement in relation to that, too. How people arrive at that conclusion is entirely up to them.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 5th Report 2012 (Session 4): Scotland Act 2012 Standing Order rule changes—Legislative Competence Statements (SP Paper 190) and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annex A of the report be made with effect from 15 October 2012.

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

## Women's Employment Summit

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-04314, in the name of Angela Constance, on the women's employment summit.

14:23

**The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance):** I am delighted to have this early opportunity to report back to Parliament on the women's employment summit that was held on 12 September.

The purpose of the summit was to consider the issues that impair women's access to, and participation in, the labour market, and to identify action. Both the First Minister and Deputy First Minister addressed the 150 delegates, which clearly reflects the fact that women's employment is an issue of national importance that is at the heart of this Government, and that women are crucial to economic recovery.

The other keynote speaker, Professor Ailsa McKay of the University of Strathclyde—a key member of the equality budget advisory group—set out in stark terms the challenge that lies before us, but she also set out the opportunity that we have to move forward from the summit in order to make a real difference to women's lives.

Let me be clear that the event was not a one-off—the summit is a springboard for fresh impetus to identify action in the short, medium and longer terms, as a matter both of equality and economic necessity. I am committed to informing and involving Parliament every step of the way, as we develop a renewed and focused plan of action.

I was pleased to see members of the Equal Opportunities Committee attend the summit, and I hope that it was useful, given the committee's upcoming inquiry into women and work. I want to record my thanks and appreciation to Agnes Tolmie, this year's president of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, who chaired the summit. I am grateful to Agnes and to the STUC women's committee for all their work in the lead-up to the summit and on the day.

I also want to thank Samantha Ritchie and Rachael Macleod, the two students who made the film that was shown at the summit. The film, which was completed as part of their internships with Unite the Union, was a great snapshot of working women in Scotland today. I also want to acknowledge the young engineering apprentice Jessica King, who talked eloquently about her experiences as a modern apprentice in a non-traditional occupation for women.

I will not be able to cover all the discussions from the day, but I will endeavour to give an overview of them. One of the overwhelming messages from the summit was the importance to working parents—working mothers, in particular—of flexible, accessible and affordable early learning and childcare. Childcare is an economic issue. It is a vital part of this country's infrastructure, which can provide a route out of worklessness and can increase access to rewarding careers. We have already announced changes that will see parents in Scotland being able to access the highest overall level of Government-funded childcare and early learning provision anywhere in the UK.

The summit discussions will inform the subgroup of the early years task force that we have set up to help us to develop a long-term vision for family support, family centres and integrated early learning and childcare. It will take into account the many and varied childcare requirements of families today, which include the need for care for children in rural areas, out of school care, care in school holidays and care for children whose parents work shifts.

As well as a lack of suitable childcare, many women face other equally significant challenges in entering work. Those who face such challenges include women with disabilities, women from ethnic minority backgrounds, lone parents and ex-offenders. Women need to be supported to recognise their existing skills and talents and how best to build on them. Access to further skills and employment support is crucial. In addition, the strong view was expressed at the summit that money advice is key for many women.

It is clear that welfare reform is having a significant impact on women and their aspirations. This year's report by the Fawcett Society, "The Impact of Austerity on Women", concludes that the welfare reform changes, combined with the high cost of childcare, are forcing women to give up their jobs, as the cost of childcare outweighs the benefits of work. A survey that was conducted by Working Mums found that 24 per cent of mothers have had to give up work as a result of the changes.

For women who are looking for work, the requirement to claim jobseekers allowance means that many are finding it harder to access skills provision. Although the Scottish Government offers up to £1,215 in lone-parent childcare grant to help lone parents who attend further or higher education, the changes to benefits legislation mean that fewer lone parents can now attend college without losing benefits.

For women who enter work, occupational segregation is an issue, as the group discussions highlighted. The reasons for occupational segregation are many and complex. A change in

culture and attitudes is required, alongside a shift in policy and practice.

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):** I note that, on the day of the summit, the First Minister chose to announce an investment of £250,000 to intensify engagement with schools to encourage recruitment of girls into the science, engineering and technology sector. A further fund is all well and good, but if we do not transform the sector, women will not stay in it. I think that the First Minister might have focused on the wrong end of the problem. Would the money not have been better spent tackling some of the barriers that the minister is outlining?

**Angela Constance:** Early intervention's value in changing the hearts and minds of young girls and, indeed, their parents cannot be overstated. Choosing to intervene with young girls before they get anywhere near secondary 2, when they make subject choices, is a choice that I would defend. However, I acknowledge that we need a range of interventions on occupational segregation at every age and stage. That is about what happens in secondary schools, colleges, higher education, and in particular sectors of industry.

As Ms McInnes mentioned in her intervention, we are failing to attract women into science, technology, engineering and maths-based careers. Women who do access those sectors often leave, with the result that we are failing to maximise opportunities for women and those sectors.

Caroline Stuart of Oracle spoke passionately at the summit about the need to bring more women into jobs in information technology. Currently, only 13 per cent of university students in computing are female and only 17 per cent of the IT workforce are women.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind):** Are there international comparisons on women or girls who go into science-based occupations?

**Angela Constance:** Ms MacDonald has hit upon an important point. As I move forward in my work on developing vocational education, I need to look at those very issues. I am committed to learning from the best elsewhere in Europe and across the world.

**The Presiding Officer:** Minister, I will be generous with time as you have taken two interventions.

**Angela Constance:** Thank you.

The fact remains that IT and other sectors offer very good career opportunities for women, but young women in particular are not making those choices, for many reasons. We need to understand better what drives those decisions. A range of factors influence career choice, and there

is no doubt that careers advice and guidance is one of them. We want to put an end to the idea that some jobs just are not for women. As Ms McInnes mentioned, at the summit the First Minister announced the new £250,000 careerwise Scotland initiative, which is aimed at encouraging more young women to consider careers in science, technology and engineering. I am pleased to say that it will be in place by April next year.

Another area of concern is the apparently low number of women who start up their own businesses. Professor Sarah Carter of the University of Strathclyde chaired a discussion on women in enterprise. I am delighted that she has agreed to chair a series of stakeholder-led workshops to identify what can be done to increase the number of women who start up their own businesses.

My speech has been just a very brief flavour or snapshot of what was discussed at the conference. At the end of the debate I will talk about how the outputs from the summit will be taken forward. At this time, I want to make it clear that the event was, for me, just the start—not the end—of a process on which we expect all Scotland to work with us.

Elaine C Smith said:

"In any country in the world, the key to real change always lies with the women of that country."

I hope that today's debate will represent another step forward in understanding and overcoming the challenges that face women in the labour market.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the Women's Employment Summit, held on 12 September 2012 in partnership by the Scottish Government and Scottish Trades Union Congress, recognised the significant contribution that women make to sustainable economic growth; recognises that, for many women, a range of barriers to achieving their full potential still exists and welcomes the Scottish Government's work with partners across Scotland to address those barriers, which include the pay gap, occupational segregation, childcare and difficulties in business start-up, and agrees that the Scottish Government should now work with partners to draw up and implement a cross-government approach to help achieve its short, medium and long-term ambitions for the women of Scotland.

14:34

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** I thank the minister for her opening speech. Before I get into the main substance of my speech, I will start with a brief digression. Last night, when I was at home preparing for today's debate, one of the tasks that I had to do first was change the belt on the Hoover. That is not a difficult or particularly time-consuming job, but it is clearly my job—as are

taking out the bins, cutting the grass and changing the light bulbs.

**Margo MacDonald:** Ken Macintosh can come to my house any time.

**Ken Macintosh:** Before Ms MacDonald and other members get the wrong idea, I should say that Claire and I do not live some sort of 1950s lifestyle—Claire in an apron and me with my papers and pipe. That is not how it is. The big advantage over our parents' generation for men of my generation and for younger men is that we are able to participate fully in childcare. It is a huge advantage.

As happens in many families, we choose to divide up the household tasks. That is fine, but there is a danger that if we pass on to our children a particular division of labour, then social and cultural attitudes become ingrained. If such attitudes translate into job segregation in the workforce, that is damaging to our society and certainly to women in our society. I think that Professor Ailsa McKay said at the women's employment summit that irrespective of what the Government can do, it is up to parents, first and foremost, to ensure that we bring our children up with the right attitudes.

However, I will not let the Government off the hook. Women's struggle for equality in the workplace is not new, but it has taken on added importance in recent years as a result of the recession. Female unemployment has risen at an alarming rate—by more than 16 per cent among working-age women in the past year alone. For women aged 16 to 24, the rate is almost twice as high. The current level of women's unemployment is almost double the level prior to the recession.

I thank the minister and the STUC for hosting the women's employment summit some three weeks ago and for calling for this debate, to enable us to reflect on the findings. An issue that was highlighted at the conference was that rising female employment has not only an acute impact on families and the economy but a more profound, although less talked about, impact on child poverty. The women in Scotland's economy research centre, in conjunction with Save the Children, carried out important research that revealed a relationship between rising levels of women's employment and falling levels of child poverty between 1998 and 2008. The centre found that women are more likely than fathers are to spend household income on children, and to defer their own consumption in favour of that of their children. The findings suggested that the needs of children in low-income households are more likely to be met when the mother is in work.

We can draw our own conclusions about the accuracy and truth of the findings. I do not want to

dwell on my party's shortcomings, but I distinctly remember that when the 10p tax rate was abolished, the people whom I met who were the most anxious about how they would be affected were women—mothers and often grandmothers—in low-paid or part-time jobs. In nearly all cases, those women belonged to a self-sacrificing generation that earned very little and put children and families' needs first. The women were worried about the impact, not on themselves but on the people for whom they cared.

The WISE research centre's study makes important observations about how Government shapes public policy, in particular in the context of our approach to the recession. We know that in many cases, posts that women held were the first to go when the cuts started to bite. The high levels of women's employment in the public sector—women are twice as likely as men to be employed in the public sector—mean that when the further cuts for local authorities that were announced in last week's budget start to bite, women will again be the hardest hit.

We have lost 30,000 public sector posts in a little over a year. Those cuts have come at the same time as the United Kingdom Government's reforms to the welfare system, which will make it even more difficult for families to make ends meet. Save the Children has said that unless the final version of universal credit is radically different from the current version, there will be markedly higher levels of child poverty. That will be the case even in families in which parents are in work, as support from working tax credits disappears.

What can Government do? In the Equal Opportunities Committee debate on the issue in June, Mary Fee and other members repeatedly highlighted the need for flexible, available and affordable childcare. I was encouraged when, at the summit, the Deputy First Minister equated childcare with infrastructure in its widest sense. As Frances O'Grady, the next general secretary of the TUC, said this week, investing in infrastructure for growth is about not just building more roads but is also about investing in our human infrastructure, by investing in education for young people, safe transport for workers and affordable childcare for families.

Scottish childcare costs are among the highest in the UK. We must do more to bring costs down. Childcare must be flexible and accessible, to enable women to gain employment in all sectors of our economy. Women continue to provide the majority of unpaid care in the UK economy, whether for children or for other family members, and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that women opt for part-time work to do just that. It is important to recognise that caring for children does not stop when a child reaches school age. All

too often mothers and fathers are restricted in the jobs that they can do because of the times that their children are in school.

I understand that the Scottish Government is committed to introducing a children and young person's bill in 2013, but there is no need to wait for that legislation. The Government would have our full support if it was to make more radical proposals now.

**Angela Constance:** Is Ken Macintosh aware that current provision is embedded in existing legislation, which ties early learning and childcare into schools and nurseries? Does he agree that we need primary legislation if we are to meet the needs of parents—like me and him—across Scotland for flexible childcare that is not necessarily provided in our schools but could be provided outwith school hours and terms?

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Macintosh, I will be generous because that was a fairly long intervention.

**Ken Macintosh:** I agree with the tenor of what the minister said, except that I do not agree that we require legislation. Primary legislation can send out an important message and it certainly clears the way by setting policy firmly. However, I do not believe that flexible, affordable and available childcare needs primary legislation. We can do a lot right now by just investing in after-school clubs or activities for children, for example. Back in June, Mary Fee raised the point about encouraging more flexible working practices in the public sector. That does not mean just working practices that are flexible for employers, but working practices that are flexible for employees.

Another example is our modern apprenticeship programme, which is very much to be supported. However—unintended or otherwise—it is clear that it is a Government-sponsored programme that can and does reinforce occupational segregation in certain areas. Some of the most recent statistics have revealed that, out of a total of 1,167 people who began hairdressing apprenticeships, 1,082 happened to be women. In contrast to that, only 31 women were accepted for an engineering apprenticeship out of a total of 1,209.

Thank you, Presiding Officer. It would be easy for the Scottish Government to throw its hands up and blame the current crisis in women's employment on the recession and on the actions of the UK Government. To some extent, we could make common cause in doing so, but I point to the many other things that the Scottish Government could be doing, even in these tough times, to promote equality and encourage women into the workplace.

I move amendment S4M-04314.1, to insert at end

“; is concerned that women have been particularly badly hit by the rise in unemployment in Scotland including an increase of more than 16% for all working-age women and more than 30% for women aged 18 to 24 over the last year alone and that women will have been disproportionately affected by the loss of around 30,000 Scottish public sector jobs over a similar period; is further concerned at the particular implications of high female unemployment in terms of tackling child poverty, and therefore calls on both the UK Government and the Scottish Government to urgently address this in their economic policies in addition to tackling traditional barriers to women accessing employment.”

14:42

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am pleased to speak in the debate. Had I known that I would be opening and closing the debate for my party, I would certainly have made it a priority to attend the women's employment summit in Edinburgh last month. Gavin Brown had intended to go on our behalf, but had to call off sick.

I commend the Government on the summit. Having done some research on the issue, I now appreciate that much more needs to be done to ensure that women have access to all the opportunities in a modern Scotland and beyond. I hope to be part of the fresh impetus that the minister spoke about.

The glass ceiling is always mentioned when we hear about women in promoted posts, and rightly so, but it implies that all women belong in the office and, potentially, in the boardroom. I would like to look further into the role of women in Scotland's oil and gas industry. Not only does oil and gas provide more revenue to the Treasury than Scotch whisky, it is the biggest employer in Scotland and contributes more than £30 million to the UK balance of payments. It is therefore disappointing, to say the least, that 15 fewer women are now working offshore today than there were in 2007. That is not good enough. Many jobs in the oil industry are onshore.

Women are generally associated with the five Cs—cleaning, catering, clerical, cashier and caring work. The oil and gas vacancies that are most difficult to fill are not in administration, secretarial or IT support jobs; the industry needs professional engineers, but less than 5 per cent of the professional engineers who are working offshore are women. It is difficult to understand why that is the case, given that more than half the entrants to further and higher education are female, although 66 per cent of those in modern apprenticeships are male. Of total school leavers, 32 per cent of males go into higher education compared with 39 per cent of females. I appreciate that, as Alison McInnes said, the First Minister has allocated £250,000 to encourage girls to widen their career options, and that he has launched careerwise to encourage girls to become engineers,

manufacturers and scientists. That is much needed and I hope that it will make a difference.

The skills shortage in the oil and gas sector was debated at the Scottish Council for Development and Industry conference in Aberdeen in February. It asked the Scottish Government to set out its skills strategy, policy and priorities. That relates to the sustainable supply of skilled people in Scotland. I agree with the minister's calls for better collaboration, knowledge sharing and alignment between Government, academia and industry, but we still need to ensure that more is done to focus on women in that process.

Scotland is ranked second only to London for the number of people who are qualified to degree level or above. We are highly skilled, but that does not translate into productivity. When we consider the movement of people who are educated to degree level into engineering and related occupations, the gap probably relates more to female employment than to male employment. However, the industry is up for the challenge. Perhaps it, too, could do more to get the message across that the North Sea oil and gas industry is open to qualified and trained women as well as men.

My second point is on childcare, which is a topic that is regularly mentioned in relation to female participation in the workforce, as the minister acknowledged. When I looked at the issue, it reminded me of the inquiry that the previous Health and Sport Committee held three years ago into child and adolescent mental health services. That inquiry highlighted the need for standard health checks and high-quality child support. Dr Phil Wilson mentioned the evidence base for the finding that children with problematic behaviour at two and a half years are likely to end up with problems later in life, and research has suggested that it is possible to predict at the age of three as many as 70 per cent of those who will end up as in-patients in a psychiatric hospital or prison.

It is for that reason, as well as many others, that I fully support the extension of free nursery education to 600 hours a year for three and four-year-olds, which will help women into the workforce. However, we need to look again at two-year-olds, given that only 1 cent of them get free nursery education in Scotland, compared with 38 per cent in England. The reason why I am so keen on that is that developmental issues can be picked up by qualified nursery staff and addressed early. That benefits not only the child but the mother, who in too many cases cannot work due to having to stay at home and look after children.

**Margo MacDonald:** Will the member give way?

**The Presiding Officer:** The member is in her final minute.

**Mary Scanlon:** The nursery education workforce is mainly female. I question whether those workers are fully valued for the excellent work that they do in identifying developmental issues, working closely with parents and adhering to standards of care. They deserve more recognition than they get. Historically, the training and education of the predominantly female employees, as well as the national standards, were not too relevant. I hope that, in the process of women's summits, we can change that perception and give them more recognition.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move on to the open debate. I remind members that the time limit is four minutes.

14:49

**Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** As the deputy convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the women's employment summit, which I was fortunate enough to attend last month. I am glad that the role of women in the workplace and in wider society has returned to the chamber for debate, although I am saddened to acknowledge the continuing need for such debates.

We have come very far in a very short space of time, but a lot of work remains to be done and I know that the minister Angela Constance and the Government are determined to take that forward. It is important that we lower—and eventually eliminate—the barriers and ceilings faced by women in the workplace, particularly given the recession's disproportionate impact on them. After all, according to statistics, women are more likely to work part time and to be more affected by Westminster's welfare reforms.

As I have done in the past, I draw the chamber's attention to the Royal Society of Edinburgh's report "Tapping all our Talents", which sets out a strategy for increasing the number of women working in STEM areas. Produced by a working group that included the inimitable Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, the report is a searing indictment of the barriers that are faced by women who wish to study and work in those areas and sets out in stark detail just how big a barrier gender can be to entering certain occupations.

On 2 August, "Women's Hour" on BBC Radio 4 featured a discussion with Christine Ashton, who has been named as the 12th most influential woman in IT in the UK. She advertised service manager posts, hoping to attract applications from women, but did not receive any. The show-stopper was this: when she readvertised the posts, having dropped the salary by £20,000, many more women applied. We can leave a debate on the

issue of reverse psychology for another day, but I think that that anecdote indicates the scale of the problem.

I believe that women will go into politics when women encourage other women to become involved. There is no doubt that they have the skills, experience, ability and talent but without the confidence to apply for posts or to get politically involved or involved in communities, women will remain reluctant. Some of those experiences must be factored into the correction strategy, and I hope that women will inform that process.

In response to Margo MacDonald's point, I note that in the "Women's Hour" discussion Christine Ashton said that women comprise 17 per cent of the IT workforce in the UK and 18 per cent of that workforce in Europe. It is clear that this is not just a Scottish problem. However, we should share things as widely as we can, and I was pleased to hear the minister say that that was one of her ambitions.

Members across the chamber will agree that actions speak louder than words. As someone who is always happy to speak on equality matters, I am especially heartened by the Scottish Government's determination to pick up the baton and put in place a strategy that will complement its work in so many key areas. In the 21st century, gender, age, ethnicity and disability should not prevent individuals from fulfilling their potential, which we must ensure that they do.

14:53

**Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome today's debate and thank everyone who took part in the recent women's employment summit. I hope that the discussions at the summit will feed into the policy process and go some way towards addressing the employment problems that women in Scotland face and which the minister outlined in her speech.

The professional and social landscape has changed significantly for women over recent decades. However, although many barriers have been broken down, many remain. The gender divide begins to assert itself at university, where the STEM subjects remain largely male dominated. Although the specific skills sets required by such subjects mean that the professional outcomes for graduates in those fields are generally positive, there is far greater representation of women in subjects with less technical and vocational aspects such as the arts and social sciences.

As for the world of work, although the gender balance within professional occupations is roughly equal, the top managerial positions are still disproportionately male dominated. Even starker is

the division of genders along occupational lines. For example, the skilled trades are 92 per cent male, while women comprise 80 per cent of the workforce in caring, leisure and service occupations, and a similar trend can be observed in the division between full-time and part-time work.

**Margo MacDonald:** Will the member give way?

**Siobhan McMahon:** I am sorry—I cannot give way just now.

Although with the rise in underemployment more men have taken up part-time work in recent years women are still vastly overrepresented in that area. The underlying reason for that is that in broad societal terms women remain the primary carers. As a consequence, what we might call the key transitional events of human life—marriage, the birth of children and the ageing and infirmity of parents—have a far greater social and professional impact on women than they have on men.

There is a raft of new challenges to add to those traditional ones. The prince among them is Mr Osborne's obsessive anti-state dogma, which has had a serious, if predictable, impact on a large proportion of women who are employed in Scotland's public sector. As Ken Macintosh said, over the past year, there have been 30,000 public sector job losses in Scotland. That has directly contributed to the 16 per cent rise in female unemployment—the figure is 30 per cent among women aged 16 to 24.

With 80 per cent of Cameron's cuts still to come, many more jobs will go before the dust settles. Most worrying for female workers in Scotland is John Swinney's refusal to admit responsibility for Scotland's sclerotic economic recovery and high levels of unemployment. With further restrictions on finance, job losses are unavoidable, and many of the victims will be women.

If that scenario is to be avoided, the Scottish Government needs to take real and decisive action to support and promote female employment from school leavers onwards. As a starting point, it must acknowledge that female unemployment is a specific problem that is influenced by a specific set of educational, professional and social factors.

The fact that the Government has, so far, failed to do that is evidenced by its youth employment strategy. The strategy document, which is fulsome in its praise of modern apprenticeships and the opportunities for all programme, features no specific policies on narrowing the gender pay divide while addressing occupational segregation. It does not mention that modern apprenticeships reinforce existing norms of occupational segregation, with women constituting 97 per cent of new starts in early years and education in 2011-

12 against only 3 per cent of new starts in engineering.

Most worryingly, the document features no overarching strategy for addressing female employment in the long term.

**Angela Constance:** Will Siobhan McMahon give way?

**Siobhan McMahon:** I am sorry, but I have only a minute to go.

The strategy document does not attempt to explain why women's educational superiority in the early years is not translated into employment in later life or to draw the link between the lack of childcare support and the consequent difficulty that many women have in obtaining and maintaining full-time employment. Those are tough questions that must be answered.

When I spoke in the debate on the national parenting strategy, I urged the Scottish Government to consider introducing an early childhood education and care system, as advocated by Children in Scotland in a submission to the European and External Relations Committee. That would not only create jobs, but give parents—primarily women—greater flexibility to pursue professional opportunities. If the Scottish Government is serious about solving Scotland's female employment problems and is really committed to transforming Scotland into a Scandinavian-type social democracy, that is the type of system that it needs to implement.

14:57

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** I welcome the debate, which is timely and, I hope, will continue the momentum that was generated by the women's employment summit that the Scottish Government held last month.

I join other members in paying tribute to all who were involved in supporting the Government to realise the summit. In particular, I pay tribute to the STUC for its valuable support and guidance.

The STUC briefing tells us that women are disproportionately affected by unemployment. I will concentrate on that disproportionate effect.

Equality in the workplace has been a long-standing sore for many Governments over decades. With the Equal Pay Act 1970 in her 40s, should we really be living in a nation that turns a blind eye to the pay gap? Let us look at the history of women's employment.

People talk about there having been full employment in Britain after the second world war, but there was never full employment for everyone; it was full employment for males only. Women

were taken out of the workplace and removed from the employment that they had undertaken during the war.

Women's work has always been an afterthought. It is not taken as seriously as, or thought as important as, employment for men. By leading the debate, the Scottish Government is showing how seriously it takes employment for everyone, regardless of gender, but also that it recognises that women have particular needs and concerns when it comes to work. The Government is putting women's work front and centre of the debate about how we create jobs, grow our workforce and grow our economy.

Writing in *The Guardian* in April this year, Tanya Gold said:

"A strategy for women's employment is necessary, encompassing women's security in the workplace, decent provision of childcare and the scandal of occupational and gender segregation, which, together, bring forth the pay gap."

That is a sad indictment.

It is a fact that we now have women in the army, women engineers and women who have rebuilt damaged satellites in space. We do not need to look much further than one of our own accomplished Scottish women: Professor Anne Glover, who is now the European Commission's chief scientific adviser and works closely with José Manuel Barroso. Women are no longer excluded from doing jobs previously carried out by males.

At the recent Scotland Europa event held in the Parliament, Anne Glover told us that Scotland is number 1 for research and development impact. It would be a shame to roll that achievement back by reintroducing tuition fees, which would create another barrier to learning for women.

Another point of fact is that having control of benefits and taxation in Scotland would allow this progressive Scottish Government to continue its work in supporting women into the workplace. Having control in Scotland over universal benefits such as child benefit would end the attacks on women with the Tories at Westminster, aided and abetted by Labour in Scotland following its lurch to the right, attempting to take away the little financial control some women have. Child benefit enables women to pay for childcare, it gives them some financial freedom and it enables them to contribute not only economically but intellectually to the recovery of our nation.

If, as Arthur "Bleak" Midwinter suggests, nothing is off the table when it comes to abolishing universal provision, I fear that the progress that we have made over the years will be eroded as women are pushed back into the kitchen and out of the job market.



There are fundamental questions to be asked of all Governments on equality in the workplace. If the answer is further to attack and erode the universal provision that enables people to get into and stay in work, that is not an answer that I am willing to sit back and accept—I suspect that many women feel the same.

It is certainly not an answer that this Scottish Government is willing to accept. The Scottish Government has shown that by taking the action it has taken to protect families' incomes through universally free higher and further education; addressing health waiting times; providing free prescriptions, personal care and support; and, of course, freezing the regressive council tax. This Scottish Government has proved beyond a doubt that the Tory/Lib/Lab way is certainly not, to borrow an STUC phrase, "a better way".

Johann Lamont says that the cap does not fit when her proposals are described as something that the Tories would be—and are, according to the Welsh Tories today—proud of. I say that the cap fits Labour far too snugly.

The Minister for Youth Employment, Angela Constance, said that the summit would help public sector bodies, employers, trade unions and other partners identify steps that they could take to make a difference. She has also pointed to the Scottish Government's pledge to increase childcare provision for three-year-olds, four-year-olds and looked-after two-year-olds from 475 to 600 hours per year. Those plans will deliver the best package of flexible childcare in the UK.

That is the action that the women whom I speak to need and want; it is the action of a Scottish Government that is not bound by London masters; and it is the action of a Scottish Government to be proud of.

15:01

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in this vital debate on women's employment, especially given the recent figures that show that women have been particularly badly hit by the rise in unemployment. As stated in Labour's amendment, there has been an increase in unemployment

"of more than 16% for all working-age women and more than 30% for women aged 18 to 24 over the last year alone in Scotland",

and women have also been

"disproportionately affected by the loss of around 30,000 public sector jobs over a similar period".

Male unemployment has fallen, while female unemployment continues to increase. Women are undoubtedly being hardest hit by the current

economic situation in Britain. It is time that something was done about that.

With or without the Government's summit, women in our labour market still face the same old issues, which need to be tackled. We need less talk and more action on issues that are critical for women in society every day, from a lack of quality part-time work to the gender pay gap. It is great to see groups such as Close the Gap continuing to fight to end the unfair difference between men's and women's wages. Even 42 years after the Equal Pay Act 1970, there is still an 11 per cent difference between the wages of men and those of women in part-time work, and a 32 per cent difference between the wages of women in part-time jobs and those of men in full-time jobs.

Others have talked about gender differences and occupational segregation. I will devote my time to childcare. Parents in my constituency and across the country routinely raise the issue of the point at which it is no longer cost effective to work and put their children in nursery care, so I welcome the recent announcement that free childcare will be increased by 125 hours a year to 600 hours for three to four-year-olds, but that is still not enough. Why was that move not made sooner—at any time since 2007, for example? It was essential that this Government do that, yet the move has been delayed until now. I welcome the fact that the minister has set up an early years task force to look at the issue. The policy helps people with children of pre-school age, but what is the Government doing to help the employability of women whose children are of school age?

This Government will not admit it, but the council tax freeze is impacting on the people of this country. Some local authorities have already closed after-school clubs and breakfast clubs. There are likely to be more closures due to lack of resources in this year's round of local authority budgets. The loss of those vital services for working mothers makes it almost impossible for some women to hold down a job, because unfortunately we do not all have grannies or relatives who can help with childcare.

Only yesterday, I spoke—

**Angela Constance:** Will the member give way?

**Margaret McDougall:** Let me finish my point.

Only yesterday, I spoke with women from the Dalry breakfast club and after-school care club, which charges £3.50 or £7.50 a day per child during term time and £17 a day per child during school holidays. Those are the lowest amounts that the club can afford to charge to cover costs. The club operates in an area where high-quality jobs are few and far between.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The member is now in her last minute, so no interventions can be made.

**Margaret McDougall:** I say to the minister that I am sorry—I had intended to let her in.

Many women work to pay for their childcare. Improvements will not be achieved by more summits or meetings. The Government knows why some women cannot work—they simply cannot afford to. The threat from local authorities of less affordable care because of the council tax freeze puts even more people in that situation. We need sensible solutions to this serious problem. Scottish women deserve better.

15:06

**Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP):** I am tempted to begin by saying that, unlike Ken Macintosh, I will not focus too closely on the division of labour in my household, because my wife sometimes watches debates and might pick me up on my interpretation of that division.

**Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** If she does not hear what the member says, we will tell her.

**Jamie Hepburn:** We can talk about the issue later, without Ms Fabiani's sedentary interventions.

I welcome the debate. It is widely recognised that the subject is serious and important and that it concerns all parties in the Parliament. That has been reflected in the speeches. The issue also concerns people outside the chamber.

I will refer to a report—Ken Macintosh mentioned it—that was prepared by Save the Children and the women in Scotland's economy research centre. The report is important because it highlights the link between increases in women's employment between 1998 and 2008 and a reduction in the number of children who live in poverty.

The report points out that women are more likely than men to be the money managers in poor households, as Ken Macintosh said. It is important that we reflect on that. When we focus on women's employment, we must consider the impact not just on women but on their families. Save the Children has held a series of conversations with parents across the United Kingdom who highlighted concerns about the availability of childcare. That was reflected at the summit that we are debating.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase radically the number of hours of childcare for three and four-year-olds. I recognise that there is a sense that the Government should go further. We would all like

the Government to go further. If concrete proposals are made to the Government, I have no doubt that it will be willing to consider them. I see that the minister for the early years has joined the debate, and I have no doubt that she would be willing to consider such proposals.

Save the Children's report highlighted concern about the severe cuts in welfare spending having a disproportionate impact on women's incomes. That point was reflected in the briefing that the Scottish Trades Union Congress sent us and it was looked at during the summit.

The Minister for Youth Employment made the important point that single parents cannot access college courses to gain new skills, because of welfare changes. That hardly strikes me as likely to improve the employment prospects of many women who are already struggling. I am a member of the Welfare Reform Committee, which is hearing plenty of evidence to suggest that the welfare reform changes that the UK Government is bringing in will be likely in some circumstances to force out of work people who are supported in employment. That is entirely counterproductive.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will the member give way?

**Jamie Hepburn:** Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes—for a brief intervention.

**Ken Macintosh:** I appreciate Jamie Hepburn's comments about welfare reform. What does he think will be the impact on women's employment of the Government's decision to cut local government spending by 4.3 per cent in real terms, when we know that two thirds of local government workers are women?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Jamie Hepburn has 30 seconds.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I am trying to be as consensual as I can be, but I hasten to point out that Mr Macintosh's party is involved in a campaign with another party to keep a funding system that would continue to reduce the money that is available to the Scottish Government. That would have an obvious impact on the services that are delivered through the devolved Administration.

It is important to point out that local government today gets a higher proportion of the Scottish block grant than it did under the previous Administration.

I close—as I see that the Presiding Officer is asking me to—by welcoming the debate—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are closing now.

15:10

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I welcome today's debate and the women's employment summit, which focused on the barriers facing women in accessing the labour market—barriers that must be removed, as the minister reminded us, both for equality and because of economic necessity.

There is no doubt that there are enormous challenges in removing those obstacles, which are exacerbated by current circumstances, as was emphasised in the recent Fawcett report "The Impact of Austerity on Women". Those challenges are also reflected in some of the dismal figures on women's employment in recent times. For example, in the third quarter of 2011, 34,000 women in Scotland lost their jobs—370 jobs a day, at a time when male jobs were on the increase. More generally, the level of women's unemployment is currently 8.3 per cent, compared with 4 per cent pre-recession.

The problems are not new. Another way of looking at them is to focus on the glaring anomaly in the educational qualifications and job destinations of girls and boys. For some time, girls have consistently outperformed their male counterparts in the subjects that they choose at school, yet that is not reflected in their employment rates in later life. A higher proportion of girls go on to higher education—40 per cent of girls compared with 32 per cent of boys. The same is true of further education—29 per cent of girls go on to further education, compared with 25 per cent of boys. Yet the percentage of females who are employed in later life within the category of medium to high-skilled jobs—jobs that have degree-level qualifications attributed to them—is just 22 per cent, compared with 38 per cent of males. Similarly, a huge difference exists in the category defined as medium to low-skilled jobs, where the figures are 46 per cent of females and only 24 per cent of males. I am sure that anybody who even glances at the statistics drawn from the analysis of school leavers and their prospective destinations would be—and certainly should be—shocked by the disparity. We must ask why the situation is as it is.

It seems that women cannot access the jobs for which they have the qualifications. Many of the reasons for that have been highlighted in the debate. The lack of affordable childcare is central. I will not speak at length on that subject, as I usually do—except in anticipating tomorrow's debate, to which Christina McKelvie's speech really belonged. I think that she would agree that one of the things that has helped people with childcare is the provision of tax credits in general and childcare tax credits in particular. That is a targeted benefit that has made a significant

difference, and I deeply regret the fact that the current UK Government cut the rate from 80 to 70 per cent.

Other issues are relevant, such as the need for flexible working opportunities for both women and men. The absence of quality part-time jobs for women is a big issue, and access to job sharing is all too infrequent. Occupational segregation is relevant, too. It is rife both horizontally, through job stereotyping, and vertically, through women missing out on positions of influence and power. That relates to early gender stereotyping, which must be addressed, as the minister reminded us. We must also address gender stereotyping that occurs later in life, through modern apprenticeships, for example. Only 2.6 per cent of engineering apprentices are female, while the reverse is the case for childcare apprentices. That must be addressed as well.

Occupational segregation feeds into the pay gap. Margaret McDougall gave the figures for that. If we compare women's and men's full-time hourly rates of pay, we see that the mean gap is 10 per cent. However, if we compare women's part-time and men's full-time hourly rates of pay, we see a mean gap of a staggering 32 per cent.

There are enormous challenges, but the beginning of a solution to the problems is that we face up to them. I look forward to the minister's winding-up speech, in which she has undertaken to outline how the outputs of the conference will be carried forward by the Scottish Government.

15:14

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I am pleased to be taking part in the debate and I have listened eagerly to all the speeches. I believe that regardless of which party we are from, we are all intent on ensuring that all women can achieve their full potential, at their own pace and taking into account their circumstances. We recognise that, despite what Mr Macintosh says, women do most of the caring. I am sure that Mrs Macintosh would be willing to change the vacuum cleaner belt and the light bulbs if Mr Macintosh did all the ironing and dishwashing.

Childcare has been mentioned a lot. Affordability is key, but flexibility and accessibility are also issues. The majority of doctors and vets and similar professionals are now women, and they require flexible childcare rather than the normal office hours that are available in childcare establishments. As a result, the on-call hours and flexible surgery hours that the Government now requires are an issue for some practices.

We used to talk a lot about job share, which used to be actively promoted. Now, we hardly ever see jobs being advertised for which job share is a

possibility. We should get that back on the agenda—and higher up the agenda.

Jean Urquhart mentioned the Royal Society of Edinburgh's report "Tapping all our Talents", which is an excellent piece of work. The report recommends many things, one of which is the commitment of those in leadership. It means commitment from all our educators, from nursery to higher education, to eliminate gender stereotyping. Our universities and their research establishments still have a lot to do to address the gender balance in senior management.

Mary Scanlon mentioned the oil and gas sector and why so few women were taking up the opportunities, of which I agree that there are many. This morning, I spoke at an oil and gas breakfast in Aberdeen with Alix Thom of Oil & Gas UK, who is doing a lot of work to address the skills shortage and skills gap. I am sure that Alison McInnes has had discussions with Alix, too.

If we ask fathers in the oil and gas industry whether they would like their daughters to work offshore, the resounding answer is no. We have an attitude problem here. Most members who have spoken today have been pussyfooting around this. We still have a lot to do to address male attitudes towards women working in traditional male roles. Many women are resigned to the fact that many such opportunities are not open to them. I am glad that the Government is addressing those issues. We have got to get cohorts of female apprentices in engineering into the oil and gas industry.

On Margo MacDonald's point, 3 per cent of people in the UK oil and gas sector are women; in Norway, the figure is 9 per cent. We have a long way to go.

15:18

**Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind):** I am glad that Maureen Watt finished on that note, because that is where I want to start. This is where we get the start of cultural segregation in employment. We just have to accept that some men are bigger and stronger. Incidentally, Ken Macintosh can come to my house any time, if he is willing to do that.

There is a reason why a lot of employment is physically segregated. Nature dictated that women could not do some things that men can do, and vice versa. Has any other woman here been on an oil rig? I have, and there is no way that I would go back; there is also no way that, if I could choose, I would put sons or daughters out on an oil rig. It is a terrible existence. The workers deserve every penny that they get.

One of the reasons why the statistics on average wages are skewed is that the types of jobs that are being done by men and by women cannot be compared. I was unable to intervene, but Malcolm Chisholm gave us job statistics that were completely skewed, because we cannot compare apples and oranges. The point is that women are doing lower-paid and less-valued work, which is why they are getting less money. We cannot use statistics; we must use our personal experience, which tells us that girls are still not encouraged to do all that they can do. However, there are some things that they should never be asked to do, and we have to accept that.

We have tossed around the idea of the amount of female unemployment that has been caused by local government paying folk off. Is that what local government is for—creating employment for women? That sounds to me like a something-for-nothing society.

15:20

**Mary Scanlon:** This has been an interesting debate—it was especially interesting to hear Margo MacDonald talking about a something-for-nothing society and to hear about the division of labour in the Macintosh household.

I say to Maureen Watt that Alix Thom has been busy, because I spoke to her on Friday—I think that we probably got the same figures. Maureen Watt raised an important point: we need to understand not only the headline figures, but what lies behind them.

I want to raise the issue of the caring profession in Scotland, which is made up of around 198,000 staff, mainly female. The training of the staff and their registration by the Scottish Social Services Council has been painfully slow. Despite the SSSC having been set up for 11 years, the registration of those predominantly female support workers is not required until 2020—another eight years—and, in order to register, staff must be trained to Scottish vocational qualification level. I cannot imagine any other profession in which women would be asked to do such a responsible job with little or no training. If we value the level of care that is given to elderly people and others, we should equally value the workforce that is supplying it and give those people the training, support and recognition that they need and deserve.

Earlier today, I highlighted an industry in which there is a desperate need for highly trained engineers, and few women in the workforce. Compare that with the caring profession, in which the workforce is mainly female and in relation to which training and support will not be required for another eight years—19 years after the SSSC was

set up. I confess that I was on the Health and Community Care Committee that set up the council, but I do not think that any of us imagined that, two decades later, home care staff would still not be expected to have any training.

It is 42 years since the Equal Pay Act 1970, yet, shockingly, there is today an 8 per cent gap between male and female hourly rates and a 32 per cent gap in part-time hourly rates. Further, the female employment rate was 53 per cent in 1971 and, in 2010, the most recent year for which figures are available, it was 65 per cent. There has been progress, but it has been slow.

I am aware, from my background in further and higher education, that many women are underemployed—not only in terms of hours, but in terms of their occupations, which are well below their training and capability levels. I particularly noticed that in women who came to college to do HNCs on day release.

However, of the 27 countries in the European Union, female employment in the UK is seven per cent above the average, with only six countries having higher female employment rates—the highest is Denmark, then Sweden and then the Netherlands. We are not as bad as others, but there are still huge amounts of room for improvement.

I look forward to further debates on the issue and to the updates on outputs and progress that the minister promised. I hope that my contribution will prompt more recognition for the role of nursery staff and of the caring workforce. If the early years task force is to do something really successful and if we want to focus on the early years as a priority, we need to ensure that the standard of care and education supplied by the workforce, which is predominantly female, is acknowledged and recognised.

I hope that the minister will discuss the training of the caring workforce, which comprises 198,000 people, in order to ensure that they are given the support that they need. That would benefit not only the carers but those who are being cared for, and it would be a great boost to further education providers.

15:25

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

The debate is, indeed, welcome, as was the summit to which the motion refers. There has been consensus about the issues regarding women and employment. Indeed, unemployment has been highlighted as one of the biggest issues, and we have heard that women's unemployment is up by 16 per cent and that the rate for younger women is double that. We have also had a good report from the WISE group and Save the Children

highlighting the connection between women's employment and child poverty; when more women were in the workplace, child poverty fell, but we are now seeing the reverse of that as more women lose their jobs.

We must remember that poverty impacts on a range of things, such as our health, education and, indeed, our future opportunities. Protecting women's jobs and providing women with accessible and affordable childcare is preventative spend, because it means that we protect our children from damage in their lives ahead. It is not right that Scotland has some of the most expensive childcare in the UK. We need to change that situation and make the childcare affordable, but we also need to make it accessible.

I cover a rural area in the Highlands and Islands where it is difficult to get access to childcare without travelling huge numbers of miles. The situation is similar in areas of deprivation; I hear that much less childcare is available there and that, because of the cost, a lot of people who live in deprivation cannot consider childcare.

We need to look at how we can get women back into the workforce. Siobhan McMahon talked about local government cuts as one of the major reasons for the fall in the level of women's employment. We see a further cut of 4.3 per cent coming down the line to local government in the budget. Front-line workers such as care workers and educational assistants, who are predominantly women, bear the brunt of the cuts. However, it is not just those women who are affected by the cuts, because other women have to pick up the pieces when services are removed. That makes it more difficult for them to work, because they are predominantly in charge of the caring responsibilities in the home. The knock-on effect is that more female unemployment is created.

The cuts are being made by this Government now. By cutting local government funding, the Government is driving children into poverty. Christina McKelvie may think that we in the Labour Party should not question the Government's spending commitments, but when the Government drives children into poverty, I for one will continue to question those spending commitments.

Many members have talked about occupational segregation. We need to start educating very young people or, rather, not educating or forcing them into the stereotypes that we carry with us. Ken Macintosh was rightly concerned about how he and his wife divvied up the chores last night. If they did that night after night, that would create a stereotype for his children to follow. However, he has assured me that he did the dishes and the ironing as well, so his children are probably getting a good role model to follow. That is the last of my sooking up to Ken.

We have to be careful about how we pass on our own stereotypes, because we carry stereotypes with us that were formed at an early age.

**Margo MacDonald:** Rather than beat ourselves up over stereotypes, should we not just admit that there is a cultural bias across northern Europe towards a certain sort of family structure and therefore a certain sort of employment outside the family structure? That is what we are trying to change, but we should not beat ourselves up about it.

**Rhoda Grant:** I was not suggesting that we beat ourselves up; I was suggesting that, if we allow women the same opportunities as men, we will have to change. We need to educate ourselves, our children and our employers to ensure that they recruit women into the right kind of roles. Like recruits like—if I interview people, I am much more likely to appoint somebody with whom I have something in common. Therefore, we need positive discrimination in places such as the boardroom to ensure that women are offered the same opportunities as men.

We must offer the right advice and guidance when people choose careers. Several members have talked about the oil and gas industry. We have skill shortages in engineering. It is important that we encourage women into roles in those sectors. This week, I met a woman who had a science degree and who is doing an engineering apprenticeship at Nigg—I was really impressed by what she is trying to do.

We need to ensure that we raise expectations about levels of pay, as Jean Urquhart said. Women need to have the same expectations as men on careers and what they can earn from them. As members have said, we are still way behind on equal pay, despite having legislation on the matter.

There is a clear link between women's employment and child poverty and we need to do something about that. We cannot afford the education, health and life opportunity risks. The Government can take action now. I urge the Government to consider providing accessible and affordable childcare and to protect women's jobs.

15:31

**Angela Constance:** Today's debate, like the debate on the issue that was led by the Equal Opportunities Committee, has been largely consensual, although in parts it has been feisty, thanks to Siobhan McMahon and my good friend and colleague Christina McKelvie. That is all right, because I strongly resist the automatic stereotype that women have to be consensual on all occasions. As in that debate in June, there has

been a focus on the big-ticket items. Childcare has been central. I agree that childcare should not just be women's work, although I accept that in reality it largely is. We need more flexible working for parents, for both men and women. Maureen Watt made a good point about job sharing and flexibility in working practices.

The Government is ambitious and wants to put in place a platform for childcare that can take us forward and allow us to match the best in Europe. However, the reality is that our lofty ambitions will only ever be ambitions if we do not have control over tax and benefits. We can only ever support parents with the cost of childcare via the tax and benefits system. Given that the childcare workforce is largely made up of women and is among the lowest paid, we cannot make childcare more affordable to families at the expense of those low-paid staff.

Mrs Scanlon made an important point about support for two-year-olds, but I stress that the Government's overarching policy is to focus on zero to three-year-olds and, in some cases, pre birth. With that in mind, I remind Parliament of the investment in, and good work of, the family-nurse partnerships, which work with vulnerable women before their babies are born and until they are two years old.

**Mary Scanlon:** Once a child is born, how many development checks does it get up to the age of three?

**Angela Constance:** As the mother of a four-year-old, I should be able to remember the answer to that in detail. However, as my four-year-old does not sleep, I will have to get back to the member. [*Laughter.*]

I want to focus briefly on our modern apprenticeship programme because I firmly believe that that programme reflects, rather than reinforces, occupational segregation. I am always willing to hear ideas and proposals about how the modern apprenticeship programme could play its part in addressing occupational segregation, but we must be realistic and be aware that we cannot tackle occupational segregation by focusing on one part of that system in isolation.

We have heard some rumblings about the council tax freeze, which is something that this Government is proud to support and to continue with, but there are credible economic arguments that state that putting and keeping money in women's pockets is the best way to address things such as poverty and child poverty.

Malcolm Chisholm made the point that our young women are outperforming our young men in their educational performance in terms of their attainment and the numbers that are going into further and higher education. That begs the

question about what happens to women after they achieve high qualifications. What happens to women in particular sectors, whether that is oil and gas or the IT sectors, or the STEM professions? We must use the educational achievement of our young women as the platform for tackling occupational segregation; in no way should we turn back the clock by undermining progressive policies, such as tuition fees, when more young women are now going into further and higher education.

On skills shortages, it must be a quid pro quo. I am the first to say that we need to do more to recognise and support the needs of industry, but we must say to those who highlight skills shortages that half of the population's talents and skills are being underutilised.

Last month's summit gave us an opportunity to start a conversation with women from across Scotland and to seek their views on what should be done to make a real difference. In the coming months that conversation will, no doubt, continue through the Equal Opportunities Committee's inquiry and, of course, the STUC women's conference in November. I am confident that those events and processes will very much influence the Scottish Government's work.

In February next year, following a commitment to Parliament in June, the Scottish Government will hold an event to consider what more can be done to increase women's representation in public life. However, just because we are continuing the conversation does not mean that we will delay taking action now, and that is exactly what we must, and will, do.

We cannot make change of the level that is required overnight; we must be in this for the long haul. However, there is action that we can take and, in the coming weeks, we will draw together the recommendations from the women's employment summit and develop an approach to take those forward and to identify short, medium and longer-term action at all levels of government, whether that is at the United Kingdom Government level or with our partners in local government. We need to be clear about where Government and employers have a responsibility, and where individuals can take advantage of further opportunities. I very much hope that that work fits in with, and is completed before, the Equal Opportunities Committee's inquiry into women in work at the beginning of next year.

I intend to convene a small group of external and Scottish Government policy and practice experts to support me in ensuring that we implement the actions that we sign up to, and I would be very happy to report back to Parliament on the progress that is made in the coming year.

We are determined to work with partners across Scotland to tackle those areas in which we have the powers to do so, and to influence change where we do not. It is important that we are clear about the challenges on which we have clear evidence, and where we need to know more. That discussion was taken up in one of the summit's sessions on research and analysis, and it is being continued.

I agree with the STUC that, as well as looking at the headline figures, we need to understand the trends that underlie them and to do more for women in Scotland to ensure that—as a matter of equality and economic necessity—they can play their full part in the workforce.

## “National Gaelic Language Plan 2012-17”

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-04313, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on the national Gaelic language plan.

15:40

### **The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):**

Oifigear Riaghlaidh, ged a tha mi moiteil deasbad air plana nàiseanta na Gàidhlig ùr fhosgladh an-diugh, tha mi ag aideachadh bhon a' chiad dol a-mach nach bi planaichean a-mhàin gu leòr airson na Gàidhlig ath-nuadhachadh.

Seachdain no dhà air ais, chuala mi cuideigin air Radio nan Gàidheal ag ràdh—gu searbh, gu ìre—gun robh e an dòchas gum biodh rùm gu leòr anns an taigh-tasgaidh ùr ann an Eilean Leòdhais airson a h-uile seann phlana Gàidhlig. Ann an dòigh modhail, is dòcha gun robh e a' toirt rabhadh dhomhsa.

Ach ged nach eil plana sam bith gu leòr, tha iad deatamach agus feumail. Air sgàth sin, is ann le fìor thoileachas a tha mi a' fosgladh an deasbaid air a' phlana cànan nàiseanta Gàidhlig 2012-15, a tha air a chruthachadh fo lagh Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005. Tha mi taingeil do Bhòrd na Gàidhlig airson an cuid ùine, saothair agus lèirsinn ann a bhith ag ullachadh a' phlana. Tha mi cuideachd gu h-àraid taingeil do Art MacCarmaig, a bha roimhe na chàthraiche air a' bhòrd, airson obair cho cruaidh air a' phlana seo.

Dè tha sinn ag iarraidh? Tha mise ag iarraidh dà rud gu math sònraichte. Airson a' chiad rud, tha mi ag iarraidh gum bi an àireamh de dhaoine ann an Alba aig a bheil a' Ghàidhlig ann an 2021 air ais aig an aon ìre 's a bha e ann an 2001. Bhiodh sin a' ciallachadh gun robh sinn air grèim fhaighinn air stiùir tancair-ola na Gàidhlig mu dheireadh thall. Airson an dàrna rud, tha mi ag iarraidh gum bi daoine leis a' Ghàidhlig deònach Gàidhlig a chleachdadh nas trice agus gum bi àitichean agus suidheachaidhean ann far am bi e comasach Gàidhlig a chleachdadh. Airson seo a thachairt, tha feum air ro-innleachd airson fàs. Seo na tha againn leis a' phlana nàiseanta.

Tha am bòrd air grunn raointean-leasachaidh ainmeachadh agu seo iad: dachaigh agus tràth-bhliadhnaichean; foghlam ann an sgoiltean agus tidsearan; foghlam seach-sgoile; coimhearsnachdan; àite-obrach; ealain agus meadhanan; dualchas agus turasachd; agus corpas a' chànan fhèin. Fhad 's a tha sinn a' gluasad air adhart leis a' phlana, bheir e cothrom

dhuinn ar dealas Gàidhlig bhon mhanifesto a chomharrachadh.

Ach tha am plana ag ràdh rudeigin tòrr nas bunaitiche na sin. Mar a bhios fios agaibh, bha rannsachadh air a dhèanamh o chionn ghoirid mu choimhearsnachd Shiaboist ann an Leòdhas. Chan eil adhbhar sam bith dhuinn creidsinn nach eil suidheachadh Shiaboist diofraichte bho bhaile sam bith eile air a' Ghàidhealtachd. Anns an fharsaingeachd, tha an rannsachadh ag innse gu bheil an t-àm againn dùsgadh. Mar eisimpleir, tha a' mhòr chuid de choimhearsnachd Shiaboist taiceil don Ghàidhlig—agus tha sin math—ach fhuair an rannsachadh a-mach gun robh cuid a dhaoine den bheachd nach robh feum ann an cuid Gàidhlig a chleachdadh airson a bhith taiceil dhan Ghàidhlig. Tha deagh eisimpleir an seo dha na coimhearsnachdan eile far a bheil Gàidhlig làidir—cleachd i no caill i. Na bithibh a' fèitheamh timcheall airson cuideigin eile Gàidhlig a shàbhladh.

Agus don Riaghaltas agus buidheanan Gàidhlig, tha seo a' dèanamh soilleir cho deatamach 's tha e gu bheil smachd aig coimhearsnachdan fhèin mar a bu chòir cànan a leasachadh. Air sàillibh seo, bha mi cho toilichte a bhith an sàs ann am plana Gàidhlig Shiaboist. Is e seo a' chiad plana den t-seòrsa, agus tha mi air leth toilichte gun tug coimhearsnachd ceum cho sònraichte mar seo.

Feumar a-nis dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil coimhearsnachdan eile mothachail air a' phàirt chudromach a tha aca a thaobh dèanamh cinnteach gum bi a' Ghàidhlig seasmhach agus gu bheil na goireasan aca seo a dhèanamh.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Although I am extremely proud to open the debate on the “National Gaelic Language Plan 2012-17”, I recognise from the outset that plans alone will not revitalise the language. A couple of weeks ago, I heard someone say on Radio nan Gàidheal—somewhat bitterly—that he hoped that there would be plenty of space in the new museum in Lewis for every old Gaelic plan that has been produced. In a polite way, perhaps that was a warning to me.

Although no single plan will ever be enough, a plan is still useful and important. For that reason, I am extremely pleased to be opening the debate on the national plan, which has been produced in line with the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. I would like to thank Bòrd na Gàidhlig for the benefit of its time, energy and insight in preparing it. In particular, I would like to pass on my thanks to Arthur Cormack, the former chair of the board, for his work in the plan's preparation.

What do we want? As many members know, I would like two things in particular. First, I would like the number of people who have Gaelic in



Scotland in 2021 to be back at the 2001 level. Secondly, I would like to see people with Gaelic being prepared and willing to use the language more often, and for there to be opportunities and places for them to do so. The only way to achieve any of that is to have an unapologetic strategy for growth. The national plan is such a strategy.

The board has listed a number of development areas, which are grouped under the headings: “Home & Early Years”; “Education: Schools & Teachers”; “Education: Post-school Education”; “Communities”; “Workplace”; “Arts & Media”; “Heritage & Tourism”; and “Corpus” development. As we make progress with the plan, it will enable us to demonstrate commitment to our Gaelic manifesto commitments. In addition, the priorities in the plan will contribute to other manifesto commitments in areas such as language learning, Scottish studies, early years education and literacy.

The plan also says something more fundamental. As many members are aware, there was a recent study into Gaelic in the community of Shawbost in Lewis. I have no reason to believe that the picture in Shawbost is much different from that in other areas of the traditional Gàidhealtachd. Bluntly, the survey is a wake-up call. The community was broadly highly in favour of Gaelic, but a proportion of the Gaelic speakers who were surveyed believed that it was possible to be strongly in favour of Gaelic while seeing no need to speak Gaelic very much. That is a good example to communities where Gaelic is strong: use it or lose it, and do not wait for others to save the language.

For the Government and Gaelic bodies, the study highlights the importance of giving communities control over how the language should be developed. That is why I was pleased to be involved in the launch of Shawbost’s Gaelic language plan. It is the first plan of its type to be published and I am very pleased to see the community take such a positive step.

We must ensure that other communities see their important role in the survival of the language.

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** Tha mi duilich, ach chan eil Gàidhlig agam.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I am sorry, I do not have Gaelic.

*The member continued in English.*

Does the minister agree that the national Gaelic language plan would be enhanced by support for the promotion of educational and visitor materials on significant characters in the long history of Gaelic civilisation, such as the great north coast 18th century poet, Rob Donn Mackay, who was

the Gaelic Robert Burns? That would put communities and their landscape to the fore in the revival of Gaelic.

**Dr Allan:** Tha mi a’ tuigsinn gun robh rudeigin a’ tachairt dìreach an-dè airson a bhith ga chuimhneachadh, agus tha mi gu math taiceil dhan a h-uile oidhirp a tha ann ann an Alba air fad sin a dhèanamh. Bha mise aig rudeigin anns an sgìre agam a’ cuimhneachadh bhàrd na sgìre—na Mic Mhuirich—agus tha an aon seòrsa leasain ann an sin cuideachd. Air sàilleibh sin agus rudan eile, tha mi toilichte a bhith an sàs ann am pròiseactan den t-seòrsa sin. Feumaidh sinn a-nis a bhith a’ dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil coimhearsnachdan mothachail mu dheidhinn nan rudan seo.

Bhon a thàinig sinn do Riaghaltas ann an 2007, tha sinn air ar taic do ar cànan a dhearbhadh. Mar eisimpleir, chuir sinn stad air gearraidhean airson cànan dùthchasach aig àm an sgrùdaidh air cosgaisean, a’ sealltainn gu bheil comas aig ar cànan piseach a chur ris an eaconamaidh ann an iomadh dòigh, a’ gabhail a-steach craoladh, cosnadh agus turasachd.

Tro stòras calpa nan sgoiltean Gàidhlig, tha sinn air sgoiltean agus aonadan Gàidhlig a leasachadh air feadh Alba. Tha sinn a-nis ag obair air stiùireadh ùr airson foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus tha mi an dòchas gum bi seo deiseil san fhoghar 2013.

Tha Gàidhlig ri faicinn ’s ga cluinntinn anns gach ceàrnaidh de dh’Alba. Tha an obair shoirbheachail MG ALBA agus BBC ALBA air a bhith uabhasach cudromach a dh’ionnsaigh seo. Mar as àbhaist, tha Sabhal Mòr Ostaig agus Fèisean nan Gàidheal agus am mòd ag obair air iomairtean ùr a bhios a’ neartachadh a’ chànan. Am bliadhna, bha fiù ’s Disney a’ cur ri luach agus inbhe na Gàidhlig leis an fiolm ùr “Brave”.

Ach, leis a seo, tha mi mothachail gu bheil dùbhlain shònraichte air thoiseach oirnn. Tha oifigear-trusaidh luchd-teagaisg Gàidhlig a-nis ag obair aig a’ bhòrd, agus mar sin tha barrachd tidsearan ùr againn am bliadhna na bha againn riamh ron seo. Le iarrtas foghlam Gàidhlig a’ sìor-fhàs, tha feum ann airson tuilleadh tidsearan a tharraing agus a chumail ann am foghlam Gàidhlig cho mòr ’s a bha e riamh. Tha sinn mothachail air na trioblaidean an lùib seo a dhèanamh agus is ann air sàillibh seo a tha am bòrd air buidheann-obrach a stèidheachadh airson coimhead air a’ chùspair seo. Dhà-riribh, tha làn fhios agam gu bheil duilgheadasan ann le cuid de dh’ùghdarrasan ionadail a tha a’ cleachdadh nan tidsearan a tha aca airson Gàidhlig a-mhàin airson teagasg sa Bheurla, agus feumar seo a cheartachadh sa bhad.

Ged a tha e sgoinneil gu bheil sgoiltean Gàidhlig stèidhichte ann an Glaschu, Dùn Èideann, Inbhir

Nis, Port Rìgh agus an Gearasdan, tha sinn ag aideachadh gum feum adhartas tachairt ann an àrd-sgoiltean cuideachd. Tha sinn mothachail gu bheil àitichean timcheall na dùthcha le deagh ùidh agus iartras sgoiltean Gàidhlig a bhrosnachadh, ann an Òban, Obar Dheathain, Peairt, Condobhrait agus eile. Tha e deatamach nach e pàrantan a-mhàin a bhios a' toirt seo air adhart agus gum bi sinn a' soilleireachadh do dh'ùghdarrasan ionadail na buannachdan an lùib a' chàinain.

Cuideachd, ann am mòran sgoiltean beaga air feadh na Ghàidhealtachd agus anns na h-eileanan, tha aonadan Gàidhlig a' fàs. Ma tha a' chuid as motha de phàrantan ga iarraidh, is e an ath cheum sgoil Ghàidhlig a stèidheachadh dhaibh. Tha mise deiseil agus deònach airson còmhraidh leis na comhairlean agus coimhearsnachdan sin, agus tha mi an dòchas gum bi rudeigin a' tachairt leis a seo air feadh na dùthcha.

Thàinig am Pàrtaidh Nàiseanta don Riaghaltas le dealas iartras airson foghlam meadhan na Gàidhlig a chur dhan lagh. Ged a tha sinn fhathast aig ìre gu math tràth leis a seo, tha mi an dòchas gun teid seo tron Phàrlamaid ann an 2014.

Gu dearbh, chan eil e uile mu dheidhinn sgoiltean idir. Feumar dèanamh cinnteach gum bi Gàidhlig air a bruidhinn agus a cleachdadh gu cunbhallach gach latha anns an latha an-diugh. Tha mi den bheachd gu bheil planaichean Gàidhlig air leth cudromach ma tha sinn a' dol a libhrigeadh seo. Bu mhath leum taing a thoirt seachd do gach buidheann poblach a tha air plana Gàidhlig ullachadh.

Is dòcha gu bheil seo cunnartach do mhinistear a ràdh, ach tha mi a' toirt cuireadh an-diugh do choimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig a bhith radaigeach anns na rudan a tha iad ag iarraidh agus ag ràdh. Tha mise làn dòchais airson na Gàidhlig, ach cho fad 's a tha mi ag obair air planaichean tha mi a' tuigsinn nach eil planaichean ag obair no a' soirbheachadh fa-leth no nan aonar. Tha pìos bàrdachd le Maoileas Caimpbeul a' tighinn a steach orm. Tha e ag innse sgeul mu oilthigh nam boiteagan far an robh an roinn Ceilteis aca a' deasbad nàdur de ghnìomhairean mì-riaghaltach fad an latha. Mar a thuirt am bard "thàinig lòn dubh an seo".

Oifigear Riaghlaidh, tha mi a' tighinn do chodhùnadh. Tha plana làidir agus freagarrach againn, ach chan eil an obair againn airson na Gàidhlig seachad an-diugh—chan eil ann ach toiseach toiseachaidh. Tha mi a' cur mo thaic ris a' ghluasad seo.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I recognise that an event took place yesterday to remember Rob Donn. I am very supportive of

every effort that is taking place in Scotland. In my own area of the country, there was an event in remembrance of the MacMhuirich bards and there is a lesson for us there. I am happy to be involved in such projects.

We must ensure that we are in clear support of the language and, since we came to government in 2007, we have proved that we are. We stopped the cuts to indigenous language budgets and showed that languages can improve the economy through such things as broadcasting and tourism.

Through the Gaelic schools capital fund we have been able to support the development of new schools and units while helping with improvements at other schools. We are working on the development of new guidance for Gaelic-medium education, which I hope will be available in the autumn of 2013.

We now have better support for Gaelic learning at all ages. Gaelic is more visible in Scotland through MG Alba and BBC Alba. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Fèisean nan Gaidheal continue to go from strength to strength with new initiatives. The Mod now has a very impressive number of young people attending and participating. Even Disney has added to the status and prestige of Gaelic with the inclusion of the language in their new animated production "Brave".

With those successes come particular challenges. We have a designated Gaelic teacher recruitment officer at the board, and that has helped us realise the highest number of Gaelic teachers qualifying in a single year. However, we clearly require more teachers to meet growing parental demand. We are aware of the difficulties in recruiting and retaining individuals in Gaelic-medium education, which is why the board has established a short-term working group to look into those challenges. I am aware that in some local authorities Gaelic probationers who have been allocated specifically to deliver Gaelic-medium education are being used in the English stream. That needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

It is very good to have Gaelic schools in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Portree and Fort William, but we also need to ensure that progression is available to secondary school pupils. We know that other communities, such as Oban, Aberdeen, Perth, Condorrat and many others, have shown great interest in encouraging the development of Gaelic schools. It is essential that that should not just be parent led and that we take steps to encourage local authorities to see the benefits of the language and to provide those learning opportunities.

There are many examples of small schools throughout the Highlands and Islands with growing

Gaelic units. If it is the wish of the majority of parents, the next step is to establish a Gaelic school for them. I am ready and willing to discuss that with councils and those communities. I hope that something will happen with regard to that throughout the land.

The SNP came to power with a commitment to look at legislation to deliver a parental right to Gaelic-medium education. We are at the early stages of the process but I hope that we will see a bill taken through Parliament in 2014.

Of course, it is not all about schools. We need to ensure the vitality and acceptability of the language in everyday life. The Gaelic language plans deliver in that regard and must be supported. I commend the public bodies that have produced plans. Gaelic language plans should be embraced, not feared. They need to be seen not as a burden or something that attracts additional cost but as a better use of resource.

The aim is clear: to reverse the fortunes of Gaelic in Scotland. That is not something that the Scottish Government or Bòrd na Gàidhlig can achieve by itself.

I am full of hope for the future of Gaelic but I fully understand that plans alone will not be enough to make the difference. A piece of poetry from Maoileas Campbell springs to mind. He tells a story of a university in which worms in the Celtic department debated the nature of irregular verbs all day. As the bard said:

“a black bird came here”.

We have a strong and appropriate plan, but the work for Gaelic is not done. This is merely a start. I commend the motion to the Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the principal and urgent need of Gaelic in Scotland is to see an increase in the number of people learning, speaking and using the Gaelic language; notes that the development areas and strategic priorities contained in the National Gaelic Language Plan have been identified and selected by Bòrd na Gàidhlig for the purpose of securing this aim, and further agrees that this plan should, therefore, be regarded as a strategy for growth that will encourage the Gaelic communities of Scotland to promote the language and speak it in more settings.

15:51

**Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to add to this important debate on the future of the Gaelic language in Scotland.

Unlike the minister, who spoke fluently in Gaelic, but perhaps luckily for members, translators and Gaelic speakers across Scotland, I will not attempt to deliver any of what I have to say on the national Gaelic plan in our ancestral mother tongue. To say

that I would mangle that beautiful language would be an understatement.

I am pleased to take the opportunity again to pledge the Scottish Conservatives' support for the Gaelic language. As members of different parties have pointed out in the Parliament on a number of occasions, it was the Conservatives who ignited the Gaelic revival, in the early 1980s, by delivering £16 million of funding support for that purpose. We continue to work in co-operation with our partners to ensure that that impetus is sustained.

As we heard, the Gaelic language forms an intrinsic part of Scotland's history and culture. The temporal reach of Gaelic is not limited to the past; the language connects us to our future and informs the evolution of our society, our identities and our characters.

Gaelic was a thriving language with more than 230,000 speakers in the late 1800s, but the number of speakers dwindled to just under 60,000 at the most recent count. Although the Gaelic decline has been less pronounced over recent decades, the language's designation by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2009 as a world-endangered language adds a new level of importance and urgency to the Gaelic debate.

When it comes to language, there is very much one guiding principle: use it or lose it, as the minister himself said. The national Gaelic plan underlines that simple truth and correctly identifies the key role that education plays in the survival of Gaelic. In that connection, I wonder whether it is worth exploring nursery education. I vividly remember visiting a nursery in Paisley some years ago where children were learning elementary French from an early age. The children had the most remarkable, sponge-like capacity to absorb words and phrases. Knowledge acquired at that age sticks with us—just as nursery rhymes do. In many communities, there are older Gaelic speakers who might be interested in contributing their knowledge at that level. Perhaps the minister will reflect on that.

It is encouraging that Bòrd na Gàidhlig has said that it will play a crucial part in Gaelic teacher recruitment as well as improving

“workforce planning ... and education of Gaelic teachers.”

However, that is not in itself a fully formed strategy; it is merely a statement of how things should be and how we would like them to be. Time and again in the national Gaelic plan, essential detail about the realisation of the stated outcomes is missing.

Therefore, I ask the minister to elaborate on what the board's new role in teacher recruitment, planning and education will entail and what will be

done to achieve the board's ambitious outcomes of doubling the annual Gaelic-medium education intake to 800 by 2017, increasing the number of pupils who are engaged in Gaelic learning education and expanding the availability of Gaelic-medium subjects in secondary schools.

Education in itself is by no means sufficient to save Gaelic from further decline, as the minister acknowledged. UNESCO has noted that

"the most crucial factor is the attitude of the speaker community towards its own language."

Gaelic speakers must therefore be encouraged to optimise the use of Gaelic and to foster its growth outwith as well as within their communities. With there being more than 90,000 people in Scotland with an ability in the Gaelic language but only 60,000 who actually speak it, the Government and the board still have plenty of work to do in harnessing the unrealised potential of that silent 30,000.

Identifying strategic priorities and listing outcomes that are to be achieved show ambition and are part of an important strategy, but we need creative collaboration between communities and Government, and inventive solutions for how best to engage those who have an interest in learning the language. Once again, the detail on how that will be achieved is made conspicuous by its absence from the plan.

It is also imperative that the ambitious language of the proposed strategy and the outcomes that are identified in the plan translate into tangible achievements. That is particularly true given the increased cash funding for Gaelic that was announced in last month's budget. That is welcome, but in times of limited budgets and scarce resources the Scottish Government as well as the board must be able to show that money is being spent wisely and effectively by delivering material outcomes. That might mean focusing spending on areas and in communities in which increased teaching provision matches identified interest from learners, so that the combination of the two can reasonably be expected to contribute to an expanded awareness and use of the language.

It is for that reason that the Scottish Conservatives have lodged an amendment that the Government should devise a mechanism to measure whether the national Gaelic plan is delivering the specific outcomes that it identifies and that we all want to see. Although the board will monitor the implementation of development activities, the importance of the issue—not to mention the considerable sums of public money that are at stake—requires the Government to undertake an assessment of how the board and the plan are working. Our amendment is intended

to be constructive, and I hope that it is seen as such.

I end by underlining the fact that we in Scotland do not exist in isolation, and the problems that the Gaelic language faces are by no means exclusive to Scotland. UNESCO's endangered languages programme supports communities and Governments in promoting endangered languages by providing services such as policy advice, technical expertise and training, and a platform for the exchange and transfer of innovative ideas and good practice between countries that are threatened with the loss of a language. We should take full advantage of that expertise, and I invite the minister to comment on the role that he envisages for international collaboration in the implementation of the national Gaelic plan—the plan is silent on that.

Although the national Gaelic language plan should not be seen as a panacea for all the Gaelic language's woes, and although it is imperative that words on the page are translated into tangible outcomes, the plan is to be welcomed for charting a course in the right direction to ensure the continued survival of Gaelic. That is what we all want.

I support the motion and I move amendment S4M-04313.1, to insert at end:

"and that the Scottish Government should devise a mechanism to measure whether or not the strategy is delivering improvement against the outcomes and priorities that it identifies in the plan."

15:58

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** I commend the minister for his contribution to the debate.

When we travel abroad on holiday, we often marvel when we hear young people switching from their native language to English and we say how wonderful it is to hear youngsters being fluent in more than one language. However, we often overlook the fact that, in Scotland, many thousands of young people are fluent in more than one language. The recent wave of immigration means that many youngsters are fluent in Urdu or Punjabi and English, and many are fluent in Polish and English, but we give scant recognition to the many thousands of young people who speak Gaelic and English and can interchange between both languages fluently and seamlessly.

There is a growing recognition of the value of being able to speak more than one language. It gives youngsters the ability to learn and become adept at other languages, and it contributes to their overall learning ability and experience. In that context, we should not see the exhortation for young people to learn and speak Gaelic as

something of an imposition or an abstraction. We should see the language as something that it is fundamental for many young people to learn.

Annabel Goldie spoke about the attitude of speaker communities to their own language. Her comment echoed the minister's example of the survey in which some people saw it as possible to be supportive of Gaelic but not to use it. He said that people should use it or lose it. The surest way in which to lose a language is to allow it to wither on the vine by becoming complacent and lazy about its use. If it is not a living language, it will surely die.

There are examples of how a language that is rooted in its community and its background can wither and die. Many people in my community came to this country speaking Irish as their first language. Many came from the hills of Donegal, but their children did not continue to speak or to learn Irish, and the language is now completely alien to them, even though their parents and grandparents might still have a knowledge of it. When people are taken away from their background, their heritage, their culture, their roots and their environment, languages can surely die.

Gaelic has made a huge contribution to the cultural, social and indeed economic life of Scotland. As the minister and others have said, we need to encourage more Gaelic speakers. The fact that some 1,000 Gaelic speakers are dying every year means that there is an urgency in replacing those who have Gaelic as their first language, and the fact that many people in Scotland can understand and read Gaelic but cannot speak it fluently means that there is more to be done with them.

Equally, however, unless we can persuade young Gaelic speakers that there is a purpose to their speaking Gaelic, they will lose their initiative and their enthusiasm. We need to encourage healthy, vibrant communities in the heartlands of Gaelic so that those who remain can see the benefit of continuing to participate and to speak Gaelic. We know that many people move and, as they do so, they sometimes lose their willingness to continue with the language, although it is interesting to note the statistic that 19 per cent of Gaelic speakers live in the greater Glasgow area.

There are now huge pressures on young people. Many of them are still fluent in more than one language, but we know the challenges that the introduction of satellite television, such as Sky, has created. Even where households and the community encourage use of the language, there are external pressures on children, and when they are playing with each other they mimic and reflect what they see and hear on television. That should warn us that the challenge is a significant one, and it cannot be met cheaply or easily.

Irrespective of our backgrounds and our culture, we should recognise the distinct and unique place that Gaelic has in Scottish life. We should all commit ourselves to ensuring that everything possible is done to ensure not just the survival but the flourishing of a language without which Scotland would be a much poorer place.

#### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

That brings us to the open debate. Speeches should be of four minutes.

16:04

**Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** Taing, Oifigeir Riaghlaidh. Tha mi a' cur fàilte chridheil air plana nàiseanta 2012 gu 2017 a tha Bòrd na Gàidhlig a' cur air bhog. Is e plana dòchasach a tha ann, a tha a' dol a thogail air bunait shoibheachail a' phlana a bha ann roimhe agus a tha a' dealbh lèirsinn airson fàs na Gàidhlig.

Tha àite cudromach aig a' Ghàidhlig ann an dualchas agus cultar na h-Alba agus tha a cuid seasmhachd, cuide ri Beurla agus Albais, a' daingneachadh inbhe na h-Alba mar choimhearsnachd trì-chànanach. Tha pailteas fhianais againn gu bheil dà-chànanas na bhuannachd do chloinn; tha e a' cuideachadh le slàinte eanchainn agus, mar thoradh air an sin, slàinte seann dhaoine le bhith a' cur bacadh air tinneas mar Alzheimer's.

Gheibhear fianais cuideachd gu bheil dà-chànanas a' cruthachadh buannachdan eaconomach. Faodaidh clann a thèid oideachadh tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a bhith fileanta agus litreach ann an dà chànan ro aois 10 bliadhna agus, mar sin, bidh e furasta gu leòr dhaibh an treas cànan ionnsachadh.

Eadar 2010 agus 2011, chuir sinn fàilte air fàs sònraichte san àireamh de dh'oileanaich ann am foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Is e amas a' phlana-gnìomha ùr am fàs seo a ghlèidheadh agus a mheudachadh. Is e am prìomh amas gun tig dùblachadh air an àireamh de chloinn a tha a' tòiseachadh ann am foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig ro 2017 gu 800 sa bhliadhna.

Tha am plana nàiseanta a' toirt prìomhachas do foghlam ro-sgoile, foghlam sgoile agus obair coimhearsnachd airson na h-amasan sin a choileanadh. Tha obair sa choimhearsnachd a' ciallachadh a bhith a' brosnachadh luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig gu bhith a' cuideachadh le bhith a' misneachadh dhaoine eile agus cuideachd a' cruthachadh àrainneachd bogaidh airson luchd-ionnsachaidh. Chaidh obair a dhèanamh a chum seo anns na dhà no trì bliadhnaichean mu dheireadh, eadar a bhith a' meudachadh cleachdadh na Gàidhlig am measg bhuidhnean

poblach, gu bhith a' cur ris an àireimh de shoighnichean rathaid Gàidhlig.

Tha na sgoiltean Gàidhlig sònraichte san iomairt seo. Bu mhath leam fàilte a chur air an £7 millean a chuir Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd an seilbh airson sgoil Ghàidhlig ùr a thogail sa Ghearasdan. Bidh pàirt sònraichte aig an sgoil seo ri chluich san iomairt airson na h-àireimh de chloinn a tha a' faighinn teagasg tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a leasachadh.

Is e a' bhuannachd as motha a tha aig na sgoiltean Gàidhlig gu bheil iad a' tabhainn àrainneachd bogaidh, oir tha seo a' brosnachadh na Gàidhlig mar chànan seach cuspair acadaimigeach. Tha e riatanach gun glèidh na sgoiltean an fheallsanachd seo agus gum mair iad mar sgoiltean bogaidh; bu chòir gur e a' Ghàidhlig a bhithear a' cleachdadh chan ann a-mhàin san t-seòmar-teagaisg ach tron togalach gu lèir, eadar fàilteachas gu na trannsaichean agus na bùird-fiosrachaidh dhan àite-bidhe agus an raon-cluiche. Chan eil àite ann airson a bhith a' lagachadh a' phrionnsabail seo, no thèid bunait foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig fhèin a lagachadh.

Tha mi a' creidsinn gu bheil an dreach as ùire seo de phlana nàiseanta na Gàidhlig a' tabhainn ro-innleachd dhuinn airson fàs na Gàidhlig thairis air a' chòig bliadhna a tha romhainn. Is e dìleab an t-seann phlana gu bheil barrachd ag ionnsachadh Gàidhlig agus tha Bòrd na Gàidhlig misneachail gun urrainnear togail air an seo san àm ri teachd. Feumaidh sinn uile spàirn chruidh a dhèanamh an adhartas seo a chumail a' dol agus a' chànan a chur air an t-slighe a chum fàs maireannach.

Tha buannachdan mòra ann do dhaoine fa leth, do choimhearsnachdan agus do dh' Alba san fharsaingeachd mar phàirt de choimhearsnachd gnìomhach, dà-chànanach, agus tha mi a' moladh plana Bhòrd na Gàidhlig mar cheum cudromach air adhart.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I very much welcome Bòrd na Gàidhlig's national Gaelic language plan for 2012 to 2017. This positive plan looks to build on the success of the previous action plan and outlines a vision for growth of the Gaelic language.

The Gaelic language is an important part of Scotland's heritage and culture, and its continued presence along with English and Scots ensures that Scotland is an active trilingual community. There is growing evidence of the benefits of our children speaking more than one language: it improves the working of the brain and, therefore, health in old age by helping to delay the onset of diseases such as Alzheimer's. It has also been shown to provide economic benefits. As children educated in a Gaelic-medium education environment can be fluent and literate in two

languages by the age of ten, they will find it easier to learn a third language.

Between 2010 and 2011 there was a welcome growth in the number of people entering Gaelic-medium education, and the national Gaelic plan's aim is to preserve and increase that growth. Indeed, the main aim is to double by 2017 the number of children starting Gaelic-medium education to 800 per year.

The national plan gives priority to pre-school education, school education and community action to meet those aims. By community action, I mean that we should use Gaelic speakers to promote the language and create an immersive environment for learners. Over the past two or three years, a lot of work has been done on that, from increasing the use of Gaelic in public bodies to increasing the number of Gaelic road signs. As the Gaelic schools are especially important in this initiative, I welcome Highland Council's £7 million investment in a new Gaelic school in Fort William. That school will play a special part as we seek to increase the number of children taught through the medium of Gaelic.

The biggest benefit and influence of the schools is that they create an immersive environment that encourages and develops Gaelic as a language instead of it being just another subject. It is important that Gaelic-medium education schools retain that immersive ethos. Gaelic should be not only the language spoken in the classroom but used throughout the school in the reception areas, in the corridors, on noticeboards, in the playground and in the canteen. If we dilute that principle, we will dilute the very essence of Gaelic-medium education.

I believe that the latest national Gaelic language plan offers a template for the continued growth of the Gaelic language over the next five years. The legacy of the previous plan is that more people are learning Gaelic, and Bòrd na Gàidhlig is confident that it can build on that. We must all strive to continue the progress made in the past five years and continue to use the language. After all, being part of a bilingual community has many benefits for individuals and the community, and I commend Bòrd na Gàidhlig's plan as a major step forward in this journey.

16:09

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Today is an important opportunity not only to recognise the importance of the Gaelic language to Scotland, but to identify how best we can expand the range of opportunities available for people to use and experience the Gaelic language and culture. Given the current economic climate, the obvious challenge is to identify ways in which that can be

done creatively and effectively. As is stated in the national Gaelic language plan, Gaelic is an official language of Scotland and investment in Gaelic initiatives has the potential to produce educational, social and cultural benefits. The plan's headline aim of attaining stability in the number of people speaking Gaelic is an aim that I join previous speakers this afternoon in welcoming.

This summer, I was fortunate enough to make my first visit to the Western Isles. When I was there, I was struck not only by the beautiful scenery but by the very important role that the Gaelic language has in those areas—not just in the past, but in the here and now, as a living language. We must support those communities to protect that heritage and Gaelic as a living language.

Moving from one beautiful part of the world to another, it would be remiss of me not to mention that the Royal National Mod is coming to Paisley in 2013. The festival—famous for celebrating Gaelic linguistic and cultural heritage—provides opportunities for people of all ages to perform across a range of competitive disciplines, including Gaelic music and song, Highland dancing, drama and literature.

Having been once before, I know that Scotland's premier Gaelic festival will not only be a very enjoyable event for local residents to attend, but will act to raise awareness of Gaelic language and culture in an area where the language is not readily spoken. I am certainly looking forward to going again when it comes to Paisley next year.

I spoke in the chamber earlier this year about the importance of introducing children to modern languages at an early age and the same applies here. If we are to see an increase in the number of Gaelic speakers, it is essential that early years development should be considered a priority.

The plan identifies a number of strategic priorities for the early years development of Gaelic, including strengthening links

“between the use of Gaelic in the home and Gaelic”

pre-school

“provision”

and

“Improving the quality and availability of voluntary-led Gaelic pre-school activities”.

Those areas have to be considered as priorities, but I would also like to see further details and specific plans for how we achieve each of the priorities identified in the plan, as well as an outline of the resources required to make the plan a success.

Although I was not a member of the Education and Culture Committee at the time, it is important

to recognise the points that were raised in the committee report that was published in December 2011. The committee welcomed the plan but did express a concern that the plan is so wide ranging and broadly focused that it was

“difficult to identify ... and ... determine the most important priorities”.

To avoid falling into the trap of becoming another strategy that sounds great on paper but fails to have any real impact on the ground, I hope that that concern is taken into account. It is essential that key priorities are established and specific plans are outlined for how those priorities are to be achieved. I also hope that the Scottish Government will monitor closely the progress that is made in achieving the plan's aims.

If the plan is to be successful in its overarching aim, it is clear that collaborative working will be required. A number of bodies have an important role to play, particularly in the development of the Gaelic language in the early years. There is an opportunity for public authorities in Scotland to deliver elements of this national Gaelic language plan through their own strategies. However, it is essential that the Scottish Government takes the lead and provides the necessary support and resources to allow the Gaelic language to continue to play an important role in a modern, multicultural and multilingual Scotland.

16:13

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):**

Tha mi à Clunes, baile beag faisg air a' Ghearasdan. Cha robh Gàidhlig aig mo pharantan. Chuala mi rud beag Gàidhlig bho na seann daoine anns an sgìre nuair a bha mi òg aig dannsaichean, cèilidhean agus air an tuathanas far an robh mi ag obair.

Nuair a chaidh mi dhan àrd-sgoil, dh'ionnsaich mi Fraingis. Cha do thaghadh ach duine no dhà Gàidhlig mar chuspair. Carson? Airson a' mhòr-chuid de dhaoine, cha robh Gàidhlig, na Gàidheil no cultar na Gàidhealtachd cudromach. B' e seo an suidheachadh tro eachdraidh na h-Alba. Nam bheachd-sa, b' e rud sgriosail sin. Is e rud cianail a tha ann agus feumaidh sinn uile ga cheartachadh.

An-duigh, tha cuisean nas fheàrr. Tha daoine ag aithneachadh dè cho prìseil 's a tha ar cànan ach tha tòrr againn fhathast ri dhèanamh. Tha an rathad fada.

Is ann an Inbhir Nis anns an robh a' chiad bun-sgoil Gàidhlig. Tha sin math. Tha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd a' togail bun-sgoiltean ùra ann an Gearastan is Port Rìgh. Tha seo fiòr mhath. Feumaidh sinn barrachd tidsearan trèanadh.

Dh'ionnsaich an nighean agam Gàidhlig aig bun-sgoil ann an Inbhir Nis agus tha ise fileanta.

Tha an dithis nighean aice a' dol dhan Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu agus tha iad comasach a bhith "cheeky" ann an dà chànan.

Is urrain do chloinne air feadh Alba pàirt a ghabhail ann an foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Bidh fios againn gu bheil ar cànan laidir is beò, ge-tà, nuair a tha a h-uile duine a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig, chan ann dìreach anns na sgoiltean ach air feadh na coimhearsneachdan.

Is toil leam am plana—airson rudan a leasachadh, tha feum againn air plana. Tha planaichean cudromach, ach, airson rudan atharrachadh, chan eil planaichean gu leòr. Gach latha, bu chòir dhuinn oidhirp mhòr a dhèanamh Gàidhlig a bhruidhinn agus a bhrosnachadh.

Chan eil ach beagan Gàidhlig agam—as is apparent—ach tha mi smaoineachadh gum feum sinn Gàidhlig bruidhinn a h-uile latha. Feumaidh sinn sabaid airson Gàidhlig ann am Pàrlamaid na h-Alba.

Tha mi toilichte a' cur fàilte air a' phlana nàiseanta 2012 gu 2017. Is e rud cudromach airson na Gàidhealtachd, agus Alba gu lèir, a tha ann.

*Following is the translation:*

I am from Clunes, a village near Fort William. My parents did not have Gaelic. I used to hear a little Gaelic when I was young from the old folks in the area at ceilidhs, parties and on the farm where I worked.

When I went to high school, I learned French. Only a few people picked Gaelic as a subject. Why? For most people, Gaelic, Highlanders and Highland culture were not important. That has been the situation throughout Scotland's history. In my opinion, that is a travesty. It is a terrible thing that we must all put right.

Today, things are better. People recognise the value of our language but there is much still to do. The road is long.

The first Gaelic primary school was in Inverness. That is good. Highland Council is building new primary schools in Fort William and Portree. That is really good, but we need to train more teachers.

My daughter is a fluent Gaelic speaker. She learned at primary school in Inverness. Her daughters attend the Glasgow Gaelic school and are able to be cheeky bilingually.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Children all over Scotland can receive their education in the medium of Gaelic. However, we will know our language is truly alive and kicking when everyone is speaking it not just in the schools but throughout the community.

I like the plan—to develop we need a plan. Plans are important, but to change things plans are not enough: we need action. Every day we should make a huge effort to speak and promote Gaelic.

I have only a little Gaelic—as is apparent—but I think that we must speak Gaelic every day. We must fight for Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament.

I am pleased to welcome the plan. It is important for not only the Highlands, but Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Apologies for the slight technical difficulties that meant that we did not get an interpretation of some of that speech—a translation will be included in the *Official Report*.

16:17

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I come to the debate as a native of the Western Isles; as a frequent traveller there by land and by sea; as the son and grandson of people who are fluent and learned in the Gaelic language; and, most immediately, as the father of a child who, unlike most of my generation, has had access to a Gaelic-medium education.

I took part in the first parliamentary debate on and partly in Gaelic on 2 March 2000. As well as being a milestone in the history of the relationship between Gaelic and the state, whether Scottish or British, that day also happened to be my younger daughter Iona's second birthday. From the age of three to the age of 12, she was able to enjoy a Gaelic-medium education at sgoil-àraich agus bun-sgoil Gilcomstoun, learning through the medium of Gaelic in the Gaelic unit of an inner-city nursery and primary school in Aberdeen.

We have come a long way in the era of devolution, but there is still a long way to go. Too often, a vibrant nursery and primary education in Gaelic is followed by a narrower experience at secondary level. In Aberdeen, studying Gaelic at Hazlehead academy limits the opportunities to study other modern languages and at that secondary school nothing is taught through the medium of Gaelic apart from Gaelic itself.

Hazlehead and schools like it do a great job with the resources that are available, but if they are to do even more I hope that ministers will recognise that Gaelic-designated secondary schools in Scotland's cash-strapped councils require adequate resources as well as words of encouragement, important though those are.

After learning comes earning, so the national Gaelic plan is right to highlight the importance of the workplace. Targets are not really met just by counting the number of people who have learned the language at school—I learned Latin but I am



not a Latin speaker. Gaelic will be part of young people's lives after they leave school only if it is a living language, which is used in and by Gaelic speaking communities.

The workplace is key to that and the largest workforce in many Gaelic-speaking communities is the local CalMac ferry. Ten per cent of CalMac's workforce speaks Gaelic. That includes not just people who work directly with the passengers who travel to and from the islands but, as I have heard many times, people who work in the engine room and on the bridge. CalMac provides a rare example of workers, managers and customers alike speaking Gaelic. Consequently, its ferries are among the most important workplaces, if Gaelic is to have a future as the first language of people at work.

CalMac has a Gaelic language plan that is as good as that of any other public body. It has—rightly—spent time and money on developing that. The company's proactive support for Gaelic delivers huge benefits to the culture and language of the Hebrides and to the employment of local men and women. No other shipping or passenger transport company does more.

The Scottish Government will soon put out to tender the contract for operating Clyde and Hebrides ferry services. It must not judge bids by considering only which bidder offers the lowest price. If ministers want to strengthen Gaelic in the workplaces that matter most, they should make it a requirement of the forthcoming procurement exercise that every bidder has in place a properly designed and resourced Gaelic language plan before the tendering exercise begins. In that way, CalMac will suffer no competitive disadvantage from its commitment to Gaelic, and nobody will be able to separate the jobs and services from the communities and the culture to which they rightly belong. Mòran taing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have a little time in hand, if anyone wants to take interventions.

16:21

**Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Tapadh leibh, Presiding Officer. Unfortunately, I cannot replicate the language skills of my party colleagues the minister, Dave Thompson and John Finnie, all of whom are far more proficient in Gaelic than I am. However, as a fellow MSP for the Highlands and Islands, I know how important the continuing encouragement and development of Gaelic as a vital part of the nation's identity are.

Last weekend, Gaelic singer Julie Fowlis followed her magnificent work for the film "Brave", which has been referred to, with a stunning performance in front of a worldwide audience to

herald the beginning of Scotland's Ryder cup 2014 preparations. She was brought up in North Uist in a Gaelic-speaking community but, like others, she was not a fluent Gaelic speaker. She benefited first from the fèis movement and she went on to be a student of the language at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, which is Scotland's Gaelic college in Skye.

As with many lesser-spoken languages, the spread of Gaelic has been inhibited as English and other languages have become the lingua franca. Fewer than 60,000 Gaelic speakers, who are concentrated in the Western Isles, Argyll and Bute and the Highlands, are estimated to remain in Scotland. They represent just over 1 per cent of the population. That must be a concern, given that, in comparison, more than 20 per cent of the population in Wales can speak Welsh.

If we are to witness a dramatic upturn in the number of Gaelic speakers across Scotland, we require a comprehensive and holistic approach to be taken by all the agencies whose remit is the furtherance of Gaelic. I particularly welcome the focus on early years and education in the national plan's key outcomes. Evidence of success from that comes from my neighbour, nine-year-old Ruairaidh, who attends the local Gaelic school. He said:

"We don't learn Gaelic, we live it—like the way you get to speak English".

Promoters of Gaelic-medium education now focus on the benefits of bilingualism rather than the direct benefits of Gaelic, but we must never lose sight of the links to the past, people and places. We can think of all the effort that goes into curating artefacts that are of historical value. How much more precious is a living language? Common sense dictates that we must continue to focus on Gaelic-medium teaching in schools or at least on facilitating Gaelic lessons to maintain the language.

The role that artists and musicians such as Julie Fowlis play in promoting Gaelic is another reminder of how important the language is. Others acknowledge its importance. A local teacher who assumed that two Polish immigrants had arrived for an English as a foreign language course was amazed when they said that their English was fine and that they were interested in signing up to learn Gaelic.

We must never underestimate others. Scots sometimes have to be convinced by somebody else that something is a really good idea. I suspect that, across Europe, we would get massive support for our plan. In Europe, there is a determination to retain languages such as Gaelic, and we must endorse that.

I found out earlier today that the last speaker of the Cromarty dialect, Bobby Hogg, had died aged

92, removing one of the more colourful threads of Scotland's linguistic tapestry. I sincerely hope that the plan that we have will prevent similar headlines about the last Gaelic speaker in the years to come. As Ruairaidh said, we have to live it.

16:25

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** Good afternoon. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. Although I do not speak Gaelic, I come from a bilingual family, meaning that I have an understanding of the value of languages. As a councillor, I was delighted to be at the opening of Glasgow's first Gaelic-medium school, in my ward of Woodlands, in 1999. Such was its success that the school had to be relocated to a larger premises in 2006. I am sure that members will join me in commending Glasgow City Council's commitment to Gaelic-medium education.

With that in mind, I will focus on the education sector. Members have already mentioned that the national Gaelic language plan sets three main targets for the schools sector: a doubling of the number of children enrolling in Gaelic-medium education by 2017; a year-on-year increase in the number of pupils learning Gaelic in primary and secondary schools; and an expansion in the availability of Gaelic-medium subjects in secondary schools. Although I welcome those objectives and do not doubt the commitment of members of all parties to Gaelic, the reality is that providing Gaelic-medium education is the responsibility of local authorities, and everyone knows that local authorities are having to make tough spending choices as their budgets get squeezed. I would like to hear more from the minister about how the resource to meet those targets will be found.

I welcome the commitment to promoting more opportunities for communities and networks of Gaelic speakers to use Gaelic in their day-to-day lives. I am regularly involved in community activities that use Urdu or Punjabi, and I can testify to the effectiveness of such activities in making those languages living languages in our communities.

I am interested to know how the minister is going to support local authorities up and down Scotland to achieve those goals. They are nice things to have and nice targets to reach, but how are we physically going to resource them? I remember Glasgow City Council struggling to provide those facilities when things were good and we are now in challenging times. I would like to hear the minister's views on that.

**John Finnie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Hanzala Malik:** Please allow me to finish this sentence.

I will be very proud and happy, the day I walk down Allison Street, Maxwell Road or the Great Western Road and, as well as Punjabi and Urdu, I hear Gaelic being spoken. Achieving that will require a huge commitment.

**John Finnie:** Does the member agree that, regardless of who forms the Government centrally or the local authorities, there is a challenge to be faced in the fact that we have more than 400 Gaelic-speaking teachers who are trained, but we still have difficulty in recruiting people to posts?

**Hanzala Malik:** I absolutely agree with the member, and I want to work to achieve the goal of recruiting those people. That is a challenge for us as a nation. It is not only about language; it is also about culture and heritage, and language plays an important role in that. However, it is a fact of life that, to do what we want to do, we need to find the resource for that, and I want to know where that resource is coming from.

16:30

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** Feasgar math. Tha mi toilichte a bhith a' bruidhinn anns an deasbad mu phlana cànan nàiseanta Gàidhlig, ach tha mi duilich nach eil Gàidhlig gu leòr agam fhathast, ged a bhuin mi do Steòrnabhagh. Mar sin, leanaidh mi ann am Beurla.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Good afternoon. I am pleased to speak in the debate on the national Gaelic language plan but am sorry that I do not yet have enough Gaelic to proceed in the language, though I have ties to Stornoway. I will therefore continue in English.

*The member continued in English.*

I am pleased to contribute to the debate though, to my shame, even though I hail from Stornoway, I do not speak Gaelic. One of Gaeldom's best singers, the late Ishbel MacAskill from Lewis, used to say that she hated coming in from the Point area to that great metropolis of Stornoway because the "townies" did not speak Gaelic. As a townie, that is my excuse and I am sticking to it for the time being.

I may not speak the language properly—something that I intend to sort in future—but I am a staunch supporter of the Gaelic language and culture and am firmly of the belief that everything should be done to protect our indigenous language, which is still in a fragile condition.

It is quite appropriate that we are discussing the Gaelic language just one week before the Royal National Mod starts in Dunoon. Four years ago, in 2008, I was the convener of the National Mod in Falkirk, which not only raised awareness of Gaelic and traditional culture in Falkirk district, but gave the local economy a £1.5 million boost, just when the economic downturn began to kick in. I would therefore urge members to encourage their local authorities to bid to host the National Mod, as there are major cultural and economic benefits from doing so. My colleague George Adam was instrumental in bidding for the Mod to come to Paisley next year.

The Mod has left a lasting legacy in Falkirk district but that is never enough. Last week, Falkirk Council approved its Gaelic language plan for submission to Bòrd na Gàidhlig. While the Gaelic language plan compels local authorities to improve access to Gaelic, there is very little appetite, certainly in the central belt, to do any more than has to be done. That must change, and I look forward to more initiatives from Bòrd na Gàidhlig to encourage greater understanding and participation.

That is why, following the 2008 Mod, I was instrumental in founding the Falkirk Gaelic forum, which has been tasked with lobbying for the introduction of Gaelic-medium education in Falkirk district, starting with a cròileagan, or nursery. Although we still have a way to go, in-house delivery of GME is much preferable to farming out GME to the neighbouring local authorities of Stirling and North Lanarkshire, which should be commended for their past commitment to the language. GME provision in the Falkirk Council area is an issue that still has to be addressed.

While the launch of the national Gaelic plan is whole-heartedly welcomed, a couple of issues still need to be addressed. There is a great deal of focus on the number of Gaelic speakers. I welcome the goal of growing the number of adult Gaelic speakers by increasing the number who acquire Gaelic from 2,000 to 3,000 by 2017, and I hope that I will be one of them. However, we need to have confidence that they will be useful or committed to the language in future, post-2017.

Clearly, GME equips young people with two languages without any detriment to other subjects, and it is certainly worthy of increased investment. Therefore, I welcome the ambitious target in the plan to increase the number of children benefiting from GME by doubling the current annual intake to 800 by 2017.

Unfortunately, the perception of Gaelic and GME, in particular, results in the language being regularly undermined by the press, some education authorities and even small sections of the Gaelic community. Everyone must join

together and support GME. However, there needs to be further focus on adult learning needs, which should include native speakers who may have lost their Gaelic or who are dependent on a particular location or dialect to function in Gaelic properly. There are so many aspects to this subject that four minutes' speaking time does not really do it justice.

Before I close, I want to pose the question of whether an independent voice for Gaelic is needed. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is funded by the Scottish Government, but should there not be an independent body overseeing the myriad Gaelic-supporting organisations out there, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig? Fundamentally, it should be a body to which Bòrd na Gàidhlig is accountable, outwith Government.

I am sure that the cross-party group on Gaelic will visit those and many other issues over the course of this session of Parliament. Nevertheless, I welcome the fundamental thrust of the plan, which is a strategy for growth with the core aim of ensuring that, by 2021, the proportion of Gaelic speakers is back up to 2001 levels.

16:35

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

I commend all those who have spoken in Gaelic. They have brought back fond memories of John Farquhar Munro and, indeed, Alasdair Morrison.

Hugh Henry mentioned Ireland and Donegal. I am, of course, a daughter of Donegal. My mother and her family spoke Gaelic all their lives, and when I go there, they still all speak Gaelic until the English—as they would call us—walk in the door. They do not pronounce it as Gallic or Gaylic, however; they speak Irish.

When the minister mentioned what we could do to encourage more people, including children, to speak Gaelic, I thought about the summer schools. When I go over to Donegal in the summer, the summer schools in Ranafast and Gweedore are absolutely stowed out with children from all over Ireland who are there to learn the Irish. I am not sure whether that provision is available in Scotland, but it would be worth consideration where there is not a critical mass of Gaelic speakers or access to Gaelic.

I have just spoken about my mother, so I will say something about my granddaughter. Annabel Goldie spoke about the early years.

My granddaughter's mother is Spanish and, at three years old, my granddaughter asked me politely why I do not speak Spanish. She was a fluent Spanish and English speaker and thought that that was quite normal, so she could not understand why I could speak only English.

Annabel Goldie and others made a very good point: the earlier people have access to language, the better.

I would also like to put on my Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body hat, given that its Gaelic language plan comes under my remit. The SPCB was among the first public bodies to be invited to submit a Gaelic language plan under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, and Bòrd na Gàidhlig approved our plan in May 2008. Public authorities are required to review and update their plans within five years, so our plan is due for renewal by May 2013. The plan forms part of the SPCB's provision to support the use of a number of languages in the Parliament's work, as described in our languages policy.

As a result of operating a Gaelic service since 2000 and of the development work that has been achieved since 2008 under the SPCB's first Gaelic language plan, the SPCB already has an outstanding range of services that are available in or that promote the visibility of Gaelic. Those services enable members to use Gaelic in parliamentary business—through support such as that for today's debate—and allow the public to communicate with members and engage in the work of the Parliament in Gaelic when they wish to do so.

I believe that, on a day in April next year, there will be a pilot in which security officers are asked to welcome people in Gaelic, which will be interesting. Perhaps we should all do that.

The services offered demonstrate that the SPCB is actively promoting Gaelic across its operations and leading on good practice. The proposal under the SPCB's new Gaelic language plan is to continue to offer the current services.

Last month, the SPCB approved a draft of the second plan, which is currently available for public consultation. Many issues, concerns and points have been raised today. I call on all members to look at the plan, respond to it and let us know what could be done better. The consultation will end on 4 November. The focus will be on the development of good practice and encouraging the uptake of services. In agreeing the proposed core commitments for the new plan, the SPCB was mindful of the excellent range of services that are already in place to support members and the public to use Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament and the opportunity to promote the better uptake of the current provision. To reflect that, an introductory section has been included in the draft plan that highlights all the ways in which Gaelic is or can be used to access SPCB services and parliamentary business.

With my Conservative hat on now, I very much welcome the short-term working group that the

minister mentioned, which will look into the provision of Gaelic teacher posts. We heard the translation of only some of John Finnie's Gaelic speech, but I acknowledge that he mentioned that issue.

Annabel Goldie's amendment, which I believe is in my name, seeks to do more than just welcome the increase in funding for Gaelic. It is important that we consider how the funding is spent, whether it is spent in the most effective way and whether it will achieve the aims and objectives that each of us has referred to today. We welcome the spending, but we all know that unless the outcomes and achievements are measured, they could go almost unnoticed.

We fully support the motion and I hope that other parties and their members will support our amendment, which we think is constructive, to ensure that the Gaelic plan does indeed deliver.

16:41

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):** This has been an interesting debate about the Gaelic language plan that Bòrd na Gàidhlig has published as part of the requirements under the 2005 act. I thank Bòrd na Gàidhlig for its considered work. In particular, I thank Arthur Cormack, who has provided so much inspiration to so many. I am sure that many of us share Arthur's aspirations for the language, but few share his level of passion for or his commitment to Gaelic, or indeed his knowledge of its history and culture.

I firmly believe that if the language is to flourish and not just survive, it is to our children that we must primarily look. Languages are more easily learned in childhood, and Gaelic-medium education seems to me to give young people the opportunity to learn the language in a comprehensive way while, importantly, equipping them with the confidence and ability to use the language. As others have said, children are also likely to be more comfortable with other languages as their education progresses, which is a point that Hugh Henry discussed in his contribution.

For a time, my constituency played host to a Gaelic-medium primary school. In fact, it was the one to which Hanzala Malik referred in his speech, as it was in his ward. The school was located in an ethnically diverse area and it was always a pleasure to visit the school and to see and hear the progress that the children were making. However, the greatest joy was to visit the nursery school that was attached to the primary school—Annabel Goldie and Mary Scanlon might be particularly interested in this point—because there we could meet children, some as young as two or three years old, who at home might have spoken

Punjabi, Mandarin, Polish or English, but who at nursery all spoke Gaelic. It was their common language and because they wanted to play and interact with their friends, they picked it up quickly and within a few short weeks thought nothing of it.

The importance of Gaelic-medium education was brought home to me by a constituent who chose to have her child educated at that particular school. Neither my constituent nor her husband has Gaelic, but her parents did. They were of a generation that was actively discouraged from speaking their native tongue at school, so their use of the language did not develop and they did not have the confidence to pass it on to their children; now, however, they take great pride in their grandchild's fluency. In my view, Bòrd na Gàidhlig is right to prioritise that area. However, as Lewis Macdonald pointed out, it is also important that young people then have the opportunity to use the language in their further education and in their wider life.

I am convinced that another great spur to the stability of Gaelic and its encouragement is the development of BBC Alba. I thought so in government when I announced the initial funding for the channel and I still strongly believe that to be the case. If we take the language seriously, it is important that it is reflected throughout the cultural world with which we engage. Although many of us do not speak Gaelic, I am sure that we all now value the channel and its influence. I understand that the supporters of a certain football team have recently developed a particular interest in BBC Alba. Of course, I mean the supporters of Glasgow City women's football team, whose UEFA cup away game will be broadcast live tomorrow night. It is worth watching.

Talking of BBC Alba, I congratulate Alasdair Morrison on his four-year tenure as chair of the organisation and I wish Maggie Cunningham well in her new role as Alasdair's successor.

There have been many interesting speeches in the debate and I have enjoyed listening to them. I apologise to John Finnie that, because of translation difficulties, we heard only the last few words of his speech. John indicated that he has learned Gaelic and is not a native speaker, so I say to him that, although we heard only the end of his speech, the language is so beautiful that it was actually a pleasure just to listen and to hear the enthusiasm that he has brought to learning it.

It occurred to me that although the minister has great fluency in the language, we do not have any native speakers in the Parliament now—we used to have native speakers in Alasdair Morrison and John Farquhar Munro. That tells us a lot about the way in which the language has developed. I hope that, 10 years from now, we will look round the chamber and see many Gaels speaking fluently

because they have learned the language from an early age.

Lewis Macdonald made a powerful point about the importance of people being able to use the language in their community, workplace and life. I say constructively that the Scottish Government might like to think about what encouragement it could give to employers in the Gàidhealtachd who want to encourage Gaelic in the workplace, so that we can help to strengthen communities and keep people with the language in their communities. Jean Urquhart is absolutely right to point out that many languages have been lost across Europe and to encourage us to ensure that Gaelic is not also lost.

Hanzala Malik was correct to draw attention to the work that is being done in Glasgow not just on Gaelic but on other languages. At present, more than 100 languages are spoken as a first language by the children in schools in Glasgow. It is a great responsibility for a local authority to have to cope with the demand that that puts on the education system. We must never forget that although those languages must be encouraged, young people need to be supported as they learn to speak Gaelic—sorry, I mean English, although I hope that they will speak Gaelic, too. They need support as they learn to speak English so that they can fit into local communities and begin to make their way in education. That does not come cheaply.

We in the Labour Party think that there is little point in producing a plan that seeks to deliver particular outcomes unless we can measure those outcomes. I was reassured that the bòrd included in its report a section that outlines how it will monitor results. However, to emphasise the importance of the point and the responsibility that the Scottish Government has in that regard, Scottish Labour will support the amendment in the name of Mary Scanlon at decision time this evening.

The Parliament clearly supports the Gaelic language and wishes it to flourish. To misquote the minister, we want it to be used and not lost. I believe that, on that, we can unite.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That brings us to Dr Alasdair Allan, who will wind up the debate. Dr Allan, you have until 5 o'clock.

16:49

**Dr Allan:** Tapadh leibh, Oifigear Riaghlaidh. Chan eil fhios agam dè a' Ghàidhlig a tha air "filibuster" ach nì mi mo dhicheall.

Anns an samhradh seo fhèin, bha mi air a' phlèana eadar Steòrnabhagh agus Glaschu air feasgar ciùin soilleir—bha aon feasgar ciùin soilleir ann am bliadhna-sa—agus bha am plèana thairis

air taobh an iar na h-Alba. Bha taobh an iar na h-Alba air fad ri fhaicinn.

Tha cuimhne agam gun tàinig e a-steach orm nach robh ann ach 100 bliadhna bhon a bhiodh a' mhòr-chuid de dhaoine anns a' chuid as motha de na sgìrean fon a' phlèana agam a' bruidhinn anns a' Ghàidhlig, anns na h-Eileanan an Iar, an Eilean Sgitheanach, Muile, Ìle, Colla, Tiriodh, Rois. Bha a' Ghàidhlig aig cha mhòr a h-uile duine anns na sgìrean sin agus aig a' chuid mhòr cho fada a-steach air an dùthaich ri Loch Abair, Loch Nis, Cataibh, Bràigh Mharr agus sìos tro Earra-Ghàidheal gu Cinn Tìre agus faisg air Dùn Omhain eadhon.

Fiù 's ann an Glaschu fhèin, bha na mìltean mòra de Ghàidheil ann bho Innse Gall agus, mar a chuala sinn bho Uisdean Henry, bho Dhùn nan Gall cuideachd.

Dè thachair? Uill, mar a chuala sinn, tha sin furasta a ràdh. Bha a h-uile pàirt den stàit gu follaiseach agus gu tur an aghaidh na Gàidhlig, agus gu sònraichte anns na sgoiltean, far an robh e air a dhèanamh gu math soilleir dhan chloinn nach cuireadh a' Ghàidhlig biadh air a' bhòrd. Tha an deasbad seo ag innse, tha mi an dòchas, nach eil Alba—no an luchd-poilitigs ann an Alba—a' smaoinichadh mar seo anns an latha an-diugh. Agus, bho na rudan a thuit na buill, bha sin furasta fhaicinn agus a thuigsinn.

Aig an aon àm, tha mi an dòchas gu bheil an deasbad ag innse nach eil sinn den bheachd gu bheil a h-uile rud ceart agus dòigheil mu staid na Gàidhlig. Tha tòrr againn ri dhèanamh fhathast. Tha misneachd a dhìth air cuid de dhaoine aig a bheil a' Ghàidhlig gus Gàidhlig a chleachdadh. Tha tidsearan a dhìth airson cumail suas leis an iarrtas a tha ann am-measg phàrantan airson foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig.

Rinn tòrr bhuill puingean gu math feumail mu dheidhinn nan cuspairean sin. Mar eisimpleir, rinn Annabel Goldie puingean gu math feumail mu dheidhinn craoladh, eachdraidh agus tidsearan. Bha mi dìreach an-diugh aig cùrsa sreap a tha ann airson tidsearan a tha ag obair air na sgìlean Gàidhlig aca, agus tha an Riaghaltas a' bruidhinn ris na colaistean cuideachd mu dheidhinn cùrsaichean ùra a stèidheachadh airson oileanaich a tha a' dol a-steach airson a bhith a' teagasg tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig.

Rinn Uisdean Henry puingean gu math feumail cuideachd mu dheidhinn na buile mhaith a tha ann bho fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus an ceangal a tha ann eadar a' Ghàidhlig agus an eaconamaidh.

Bha Dàibhidh MacThòmais a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn Alba mar dhùthaich tri-chànanach agus thuit e cuideachd gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig a' dèanamh feum dhut nad sheann aois. Chì sinn dè

thachras—uill, seansa gum bi daoine eile a' faicinn dè thachras ma tha a' Ghàidhlig a' dèanamh feum sam bith dhan inntinn ann an dòigh mhath ann an seann aois.

Thuit Niall Bibby gu bheil easan a'coimhead air adhart ris a' Mhòd ann am Pàislig. Tha mise a' coimhead air adhart cuideachd; bidh an còisir againn a' seinn ann.

Rinn Niall Bibby puingean cudromach mu dheidhinn an fheum a tha ann airson fiosrachadh ciar a bhios an Riaghaltas a' cur am plana ri chèile. Nochdaidh sin, ach tha mi a' smaoinichadh gum bi a h-uile duine ag aontachadh gu bheil feum ann airson clachan-mìle air an rathad eadar far a bheil sinn an-dràsta agus a' bhliadhna 2021, far a bheil amas mòr againn airson na h-àireamhan a bhios a' bruidhinn a' chànain.

Rinn Iain Ó Finnaí puingean mun teaghlach aige fhèin, ciar a bha a' Ghàidhlig làidir agus ciar a tha i a-nis, leis a' ghinealach òg, làidir anns an teaghlach aige fhèin.

Bha Lewis Dòmhnallach a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn an teaghlach aige fhèin cuideachd. Is e teaghlach gu math foghlamaichte a tha ann; is ann às an teaghlach aigesan a thàinig am bàrdachd aig Raibeart Burns tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Cuideachd, rinn e puing gu math "inventive", mar a chanas iad, mu dheidhinn a' cheangail eadar a' Ghàidhlig agus an tairgse airson CalMac. Seo puing mhath mu dheidhinn cho cudromach 's a tha a' Ghàidhlig.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

Thank you Presiding Officer—I do not know what the Gaelic is for "filibuster", but I will do my best.

This summer, I was on the plane between Stornoway and Glasgow on a lovely evening. The plane was flying over the west coast of Scotland—all the coast could be seen—and it occurred to me that it was only 100 years since the majority of people in the areas that the plane was flying over could speak Gaelic, including the Western Isles, Skye, Mull, Islay, Coll, Tiree and Ross-shire, and that it extended to the majority of people in mainland areas, including Lochaber, Inverness, Sutherland, and Braemar, down into Argyll and Kintyre and near Dunoon. Even in Glasgow there were thousands of Gaels from the Outer Hebrides, and some from Donegal, too.

So what happened? As we heard today, it is easy to see that every part of the state was obviously against Gaelic—especially the schools, where it was made clear to the children that speaking Gaelic never put food on the table. The people of Scotland and Scottish politicians do not

think that nowadays, as is clear from what members have said today.

However, the debate tells us at the same time that not everything is okay or as it should be with Gaelic, and that there is a lot yet to be done. People require confidence to use the language and we require teachers to keep up with the demand among parents for Gaelic-medium education. Many points were made on those subjects; for example, Annabel Goldie made useful points about broadcasting, history and teachers. I attended a course, which is on-going, for teachers who are working on their Gaelic skills. The Government is looking at the colleges and is establishing new courses for students who wish to teach in Gaelic.

Hugh Henry made useful points about education in Gaelic and the link between Gaelic and the economy. Dave Thompson spoke about Scotland as being a tri-lingual country and about how Gaelic helps people in their old age. There is a chance that other people will look at what happens to see whether Gaelic is of any use for the mind in old age.

Neil Bibby said that he is looking forward to the Royal National Mod in Paisley. I am looking forward to that, too, because our choir will be singing there. He referred to important points about the need for information and how the Government will put the plan together. The plan will appear, but I think that everyone will agree that there is a need for milestones on the road between where we are now and 2021; we have huge ambition on increasing the number of Gaelic speakers by then.

John Finnie made a point about how Gaelic is strong in his family's younger generation and Lewis Macdonald talked about his family, too. His is a very educated family; indeed, the translation of Robert Burns's poetry came from his family. He also made inventive points about Gaelic in relation to operating the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services and how important Gaelic is to CalMac.

**Lewis Macdonald:** I thank Dr Allan for his positive comments about my speech. Although I recognise that CalMac and the conditions for procurement are not his responsibility, does he agree that that is a matter worthy of his discussion with the responsible ministers?

**Dr Allan:** Tha mi ag aontachadh leis a sin.

Cuideachd, bha puingean eile sa deasbad agus, ma thà ùine gu leòr agam, tillidh mi dha na buill sin.

Tha mi an dòchas gu bheil an deasbad feumail airson tòrr adhbharan, ach tha mi airson mo thaing a thoirt dhan a h-uile duine a tha air pàirt a ghabhail ann—tron fheasgar tha mi air èisteachd

gu furachail ris na puingean a thog buill eile eadar na pàrtaidhean agus thairis air na pàrtaidhean gu lèir. Anns an spiorad sin, tha mi glè dheònach taic a thoirt dhan atharrachadh air a' ghluasad bho na Tòraidhean. Mar a bha Màiri Scanlon ag ràdh, tha e cudromach gu bheil sinn a' cumail sùil air ciamar a tha na poileasaidhean seo ag obrachadh a-mach.

Rinn Màiri Scanlon cuideachd puingean inntinneach mu dheidhinn sgoiltean samhraidh agus ciamar a tha iadsan ag obair ann an Èirinn. Ann am fasan, tha rud no dhà den aon seòrsa a' tachairt ann an Alba. Chunnaic mi rudeigin den aon seòrsa a' tachairt aig Fèisean nan Gàidheal ann an Carlabhagh anns an sgìre agam fhèin. Mar a tha an t-atharrachadh air a' ghluasad ag innse, tha e feumail dha-rìribh gu bheil sinn a' faighneachd fad na tìde dè na poileasaidhean a tha ag obair agus dè na poileasaidhean a tha gun fheum. Tha e cudromach nach eil poileasaidh na Gàidhlig dìreach a' ciallachadh gu bheil sinn ag ràdh ruinn fhèin, "Is math a rinn thu nach eil a' Ghàidhlig marbh." Feumaidh amas pragtaigeach a bhith againn mu na tha sinn airson a dhèanamh leis a' Ghàidhlig.

Tha an t-amas sin againn. Tha liosta de phrìomachasan Gàidhlig anns a' phlana far a bheil sinn an an dùil barrachd adhartais fhaicinn. Gun teagamh, is e an fhìrinn gun deach mòran a choileanadh mar-thà ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig ach gu bheil tòrr fhathast ri dhèanamh. Tha e deatamach gu bheil gach neach, coimhearsnachd, ùghdarras agus buidheann ann an Alba a' tuigsinn gu bheil àite aca anns an obair seo agus gum faodadh na poileasaidhean agus prògraman aca a chur gu mòr ri suidheachadh na Gàidhlig san àm ri teachd.

Bha ball no dhà eile a' bruidhinn anns an deasbad agus canaidh mi rudeigin mun deidhinn. Bha mi toilichte a chluinntinn Sìne Urchadan is i a' bruidhinn mu dè cho cudromach 's a tha foghlam anns na bliadhnaichean aig toiseach na sgoile no ron sgoil. Bha sin a' tighinn a-steach orm.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I agree with that.

Other points have been made in the debate, which I will come to if I have enough time.

I hope that the debate is useful for many reasons. I would like to thank everyone who has taken part in it—I have listened with great interest to points that my colleagues have made. In cross-party spirit, I am very happy to accept Mary Scanlon's amendment. As she said, it is important that we keep an eye on how policies work out.

Mary Scanlon also made some interesting points about summer schools and how they work in Ireland. There are one or two things like that

happening in Scotland. I saw something similar happening at Fèisean nan Gàidheal in Carloway in my constituency. It is true that we are looking at the policies that are working and those that are not and it is important that the Gaelic policy does not involve just saying to ourselves, "Well done—Gaelic is not dead." We need to have practical aims for what we will do with Gaelic. We have such aims. We must give priority to Gaelic in the plan and we would like to see more progress being made. It is true that much has already been achieved, but there is a lot still to be done. It is essential that individuals, communities, Scottish local authorities and other bodies recognise that they have a role to play, and that their policies and programmes can have a significant effect in shaping the future of Gaelic.

I would like to mention one or two other members who spoke in the debate. I was happy to hear Jean Urquhart talk about how important pre-school education is.

**Hanzala Malik:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Dr Allan:** Sure.

**Hanzala Malik:** I reiterate what I said in my speech. Does the minister agree that we need to find more resources for education in our schools? If so, where will those resources come from?

**Dr Allan:** Uill, mar a thuirt mi, tha an Riaghaltas seo air am buidseat airson na Gàidhlig a dhion agus airgead a chur a-steach a Ghlaschu cuideachd. Bha mi toilichte a cluinntinn mu dheidhinn Maxwell Drive ann an òraid a' bhuill, oir bha mise a' fuireach ann am Maxwell Drive nuair a bha mi nam oileanach agus canaidh mi gun robh Urdu agus a' Ghàidhlig air am bruidhinn air an aon sràid. Tha leasan ann an sin airson a h-uile duine. Cuideachd, tha fhios agam gu bheil còmhraidh a' dol eadarainn mu dheidhinn cànanan coimhearsnachd ann an Glaschu agus dè cho cudromach 's a tha e gu bheil cothroman anns na sgoiltean cànanan eile ionnsachadh cuideachd.

Tha mi ag ràdh seo a-rithist ris a' ghinealach òg aig a bheil a' Ghàidhlig: bithibh radaigeach. Na bithibh a' feitheamh air Bòrd na Gàidhlig no ormsa, ged a bhios sinn gur cuideachadh. Bithibh làn misneachd, bithibh moiteil gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig agaibh agus gu duine sam bith a tha a' faighneachd fhathast carson a tha mise agus daoine eile a' bruidhinn anns a' Ghàidhlig no carson a tha sinn a' bodraigeadh Gàidhlig ionnsachadh, chan eil ach aon fhreagairt agam: carson nach biodh? Chan eil ach dusan gnìomhaire mì-riaghailteach cumanta ri ionnsachadh anns a' Ghàidhlig.

Agus gu duine sam bith a bhios a' faighneachd carson a tha mi a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig an seo an-diugh anns a' Phàrlamaid, canaidh mi seo:

dìreach anns an aon dòigh nach eil cù ga thabhasnn airson na Nollaig a-mhàin, chan eil cànan sam bith ann airson a' mhòid no airson Bòrd na Gàidhlig no airson planaichean Gàidhlig. Tha cànanan ann airson cleachdadh agus bruidhinn, agus ma tha a' Ghàidhlig agaibh, bruidhinnibh i.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

As I said, this Government has a budget for Gaelic, which it has protected. Money has gone to Glasgow. I was happy to hear the member mention Maxwell Drive. I used to live on Maxwell Drive when I was a student, and I can say that Urdu and Gaelic were spoken on the same street. There is a lesson there for everyone. I know that conversation is going on between the communities in Glasgow and I know how important it is that schools provide the opportunity for children to learn other languages.

I have a message for the young generation who have Gaelic, which is that they should be radical. They should not wait for Bòrd na Gàidhlig or for me, although we will help them. They should be full of confidence and proud that they have Gaelic. To anyone who asks why I or other people speak Gaelic and why we bother to learn it, there is only one answer: "Why wouldn't we?" There are only 12 irregular rules to learn in Gaelic. To anyone who asks why I am using Gaelic in Parliament today, I say that, just as a dog is not just for Christmas, the Gaelic language is not just for the Mòd, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Gaelic plans. The language is there to be spoken. If you have the language, speak it.

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Before we move to the next item of business, I remind members of this evening's members' business debate on motion S4M-04204, in the name of Liam McArthur, on no to nuisance calls. I am sure that as many members as possible would like to stay for that debate and have an input to it.



## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S4M-04298, in the name of Dave Thompson, on the "Scotland Act 2012 Standing Order rule changes—Legislative Competence Statements", be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 5th Report 2012 (Session 4): Scotland Act 2012 Standing Order rule changes—Legislative Competence Statements (SP Paper 190) and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annex A of the report be made with effect from 15 October 2012.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-04314.1, in the name of Ken Macintosh, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04314, in the name of Angela Constance, on the women's employment summit, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

### Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 35, Against 73, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-04314, in the name of Angela Constance, on the women's employment summit, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes that the Women's Employment Summit, held on 12 September 2012 in partnership by the Scottish Government and Scottish Trades Union Congress, recognised the significant contribution that women make to sustainable economic growth; recognises that, for many women, a range of barriers to achieving their full potential still exists and welcomes the Scottish Government's work with partners across Scotland to address those barriers, which include the pay gap, occupational segregation, childcare and difficulties in business start-up, and agrees that the Scottish Government should now work with partners to draw up and implement a cross-government approach to help achieve its short, medium and long-term ambitions for the women of Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-04313.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04313, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on the "National Gaelic Language Plan 2012-17", be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-04313, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on the "National Gaelic Language Plan 2012-17", as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the principal and urgent need of Gaelic in Scotland is to see an increase in the number of people learning, speaking and using the Gaelic language; notes that the development areas and strategic priorities contained in the National Gaelic Language Plan have been identified and selected by Bòrd na Gàidhlig for the purpose of securing this aim, and further agrees that this plan should, therefore, be regarded as a strategy for growth that will encourage the Gaelic communities of Scotland to promote the language and speak it in more settings and that the Scottish Government should devise a mechanism to measure whether or not the strategy is delivering improvement against the outcomes and priorities that it identifies in the plan.

## Nuisance Calls

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-04204, in the name of Liam McArthur, on the no to nuisance calls campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament understands that nuisance calls blight the lives of many people in Orkney and across Scotland; believes that these calls are particularly distressful for older, vulnerable people; is concerned that a quarter of a billion nuisance calls are made to Scots each year and that complaints about silent or abandoned calls in the UK have trebled in 2012; believes that poor regulation is failing to address the problem and that the rise in companies offering redress for mis-sold payment protection insurance and a lack of consumer knowledge are exacerbating the situation; considers that more must be done to tackle nuisance calls and other forms of unsolicited contact, and would welcome a single, simple point of contact for any individual wishing to protect their privacy from unwanted calls, texts, faxes and emails.

17:03

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I thank the Presiding Officer for the bit of advertising that she did for this debate.

In bringing this debate to the chamber, I am painfully aware that politicians complaining about those who make nuisance calls may strike many as being a bit rich. Like most MSPs, I imagine, I have played my part in interrupting the odd family mealtime over the years—and not just in the McArthur household.

However, the issues that underlie the campaign are serious and deserve proper recognition, so I warmly congratulate the *Sunday Post* on its leading role in highlighting nuisance calls and texts. My Liberal Democrat colleague, Mike Crockart, has spearheaded the campaign at Westminster, but I believed that it was important for this Parliament's voice to be heard in saying no to nuisance calls. I am therefore grateful to the very many colleagues who signed my motion and to those who have stayed to participate in the debate. That show of support demonstrates the cross-party nature of the campaign and the nationwide extent of the problems created by nuisance calls and texts.

The aim of the campaign is to bring an end or at least to reduce significantly the number of nuisance calls and texts that are made. I am hopeful that that can be achieved. In a little more than a month, more than 11,000 people have signed up to the campaign, which is testimony to the strength of feeling about the issue. Many of my constituents in Orkney have been in touch to tell me how fed up they are of nuisance calls to their

mobiles and home phones and to family members' phones—not to mention the deluge of unsolicited texts.

Cold calling has been raised in constituency surgeries for years. In the past, the energy companies were guilty of overstepping the mark in a bid to persuade customers to shift supplier. Thanks to many local campaigns, most of the big six energy companies have stopped doorstep selling, but progress elsewhere has been slow. I recently met a constituent whose elderly mother, a dementia sufferer, was repeatedly called by a company and badgered to take out a broadband package. She finally signed up for the expensive offer, despite not having a computer. It took months to rectify the situation and get the money reimbursed, but at least that case ended positively. Many thousands more cases do not end so positively.

The bottom line is that people should not have to put up with the menace of nuisance calls, which put many vulnerable and elderly people at risk of fraud. The calls and texts can seem threatening and intimidating. To many people, they are just as worrying as the appearance of someone unannounced and uninvited on their doorstep.

It is astonishing that 650 million silent calls were made in the United Kingdom last year alone, which works out as around 50 nuisance calls a year to each Scot. Across the UK, 3 million people will be scammed out of an average of £800 this year, as a result of obtrusive calls.

Something must be done. It is clear that the measures that are in place to shield people from nuisance calls are not up to the job. Like many people, I know that I have not had a fall in the past five years—at least, not one that was not down to some calamitous defending on the football field—I am not entitled to payment protection insurance compensation, and I certainly do not want a payday loan. That does not stop the offers coming thick and fast.

There is no escape, even for people who have signed up to the Telephone Preference Service. According to the Office of Communications, complaints to the TPS about unwanted marketing calls jumped to almost 10,000 in July, compared with just over 3,200 in December last year. In an online poll of more than 4,000 individuals for *Which* magazine, 76 per cent of respondents said that despite signing up to the TPS they still received lots of nuisance calls. Only 1 per cent rated the service “excellent”; most said that it made no difference.

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I think that lots of people know about the Telephone Preference Service, but I understand that the TPS relates only to calls

that are generated in this country and that people need to phone the Call Prevention Registry on 0800 6527780 to get overseas calls stopped.

**Liam McArthur:** I thank Maureen Watt for that relevant point, which demonstrates the extent to which increasing awareness of the steps that can be taken is part of the solution. However, more needs to be done to crack down on the phenomenon.

The *Sunday Post* concluded recently:

“It’s clear from the overwhelming response we have had from our readers this problem plagues our daily lives. And yet regardless of asking for them to stop—and sometimes taking steps to halt them—the onslaught continues. The will is there from people to put on an end to this once and for all. Now is the time for the Government to act on that will and strengthen existing legislation.”

Readers of the *Sunday Post* and the thousands who have backed the campaign want their voices to be heard. People feel under siege and it is time that we gave them the tools to fight back. It is time for the Information Commissioner’s powers to be strengthened to take in all forms of unsolicited contact, and for there to be a single point of contact for an individual who wants to protect their privacy from unwanted calls, texts, e-mails and so on.

Yesterday’s announcement by the Information Commissioner’s Office that it is issuing fines of more than £250,000 to two illegal marketers who distributed millions of spam texts is evidence that the ICO will act, where it can do. However, the figures that I provided make it clear that the ICO lacks the tools that it needs for the job.

Progress can be made through joint working between Scotland’s two Governments and I hope that the minister will agree to work with his counterpart at Westminster to put in place measures to protect millions of Scots from nuisance calls.

I simply do not understand why we continue to allow such calls to be made and why we are so permissive about telephone contact. If the marketing was happening face to face, and payday loan sharks or PPI litigators were knocking on the doors of elderly and vulnerable people in our communities—whether they then ran away or bullied people into making claims—we would, rightly, be up in arms. The fact that the constant barracking, intimidation and hectoring happens after pushing buttons on a phone rather than pushing a doorbell does not make it okay or any less frightening to vulnerable people throughout Scotland. However, that is the everyday reality for too many people. It cannot continue; it must stop.

I thank everyone who has shown support for the campaign and for my motion, and I look forward to

hearing what members from other parties and the minister, in particular, have to say.

17:10

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** I thank Liam McArthur for bringing the debate to the chamber and the *Sunday Post* for the campaign that it has been running. It is good that a problem that affects people in every constituency across the country, including my own, is being recognised.

Nuisance calls can be broken down into three broad types. First, there are the persistent and annoying calls from people who are trying to sell something, which impact on our busy lives or valuable personal time.

Then there are the alarming calls, when a caller tries to frighten people into buying something. For example, the call will start with the words, "This is an urgent message", which is clearly meant to make the recipient believe that something is wrong. I have been contacted by a family in my constituency who complained that that had happened to them. They thought that it was bad news about a sick loved one, but, of course, it was about PPI, which did not affect anyone in the household. A number of companies now appear to be willing to spread fear and alarm if they think that it will end up in a sale. I find that astonishing and deeply depressing.

Another form of call is the fraudulent call, when the caller is just trying to rip off the recipient. Such calls can take the form of claims of an entitlement to some sort of refund, but the person will have to purchase a voucher or code to redeem first. Citizens Advice Scotland has had a number of complaints about that type of call. For example, one client reported that his elderly mother had received a cold call to say that she was entitled to a tax rebate of £8,000. She was told that, if she wanted to get the rebate, she would have to buy a cash voucher and hand it over in advance.

Another client received a cold call from a claims handling company, claiming that it could get her £500 in refunded bank charges if she bought a cash voucher for £200. The company told her not to speak to any bank officials.

One of the disturbing aspects of such calls is that they often involve someone calling around to the person's house. Not only can they contact people by phone; they might end up coming to the door, and the threat of that hangs over people.

Two other forms of nuisance call claim that something is wrong. I recently received a call saying that there was a problem with the Microsoft software on my computer, and I stayed on the line—I don't have a clue—and logged on to my

computer so that the caller could help me with a serious problem. Of course, all that they were looking for was access to my computer and important personal information so that they could use it for their own nefarious devices. Then there are the calls that seek personal and banking information that would allow the caller to access bank accounts and take whatever they liked.

There are a number of ways of dealing with nuisance calls, and some of them have already been mentioned. Numbers can be ex-directory, or we can have caller display and choose the calls that we want to answer. The TPS should stop unwanted sales and marketing calls but, as Maureen Watt said, that service does not cover them all. The police can deal with malicious and harassing phone calls, and people can contact myriad telephone service providers, each of which has a separate number—although approaching them can be too complicated for many people and does not always work.

The people who are most affected by nuisance calls are often the desperate and the vulnerable—the same group that is less able to tackle the complex and confusing systems that currently exist to tackle the problem. That is why I welcome the idea of a single and simple point of contact where people's concerns could be answered or where they could be given the correct number to contact to have the problem solved and their minds eased. More must be done to simplify the means of addressing a growing problem, and a single point of contact sounds like a good starting point.

The other pieces of the puzzle are legislation and enforcement. Unfortunately, the Scottish Parliament does not yet have the powers to legislate to bring an end to these obscene practices. Until such time as we do, I ask the minister to contact the Westminster Government and work closely with it to urge it to bring in stronger legislation and ensure that any existing legislation is fully enforced.

17:14

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I congratulate Liam McArthur on securing tonight's debate, even if the timing is slightly unfortunate for those of us who are of a particular footballing persuasion. [Interruption.] For a split second, I thought that I was going to get an update, but it turns out that this piece of paper is information about a far more important parliamentary procedure.

I signed the motion and stayed behind to speak in the debate, partly because I get numerous calls every day from companies telling me that I am owed thousands in mis-sold PPI, that they can

magically write off all my debts, or that they can get me compensation for an accident that I have never had. Those are examples of the nuisance calls that frustrate us all, but, as I said, they are only part of the reason why I signed the motion. As Mr Dornan highlighted, there are much worse operators than the PPI teams that call people up and down the country.

Just over a year ago, an elderly constituent phoned me, almost in tears, about a contract that they thought they had committed to over the phone. An alarm company had called and told her about various break-ins in the local area. The salesman said that the company would be happy to come and fit an alarm for my constituent free of charge to give her peace of mind. He repeatedly went over in graphic detail exactly what had happened to other properties in the area and what the people in those homes felt like after they had been burgled. Although I have no doubt that being the victim of a burglary is extremely upsetting and that it leads to people feeling unsafe in their own homes, there is no justification for representatives of sales companies to use scare stories to push their products.

After a long phone call, my constituent eventually agreed to the free alarm installation and a date was agreed for it to go ahead. At the end of the call, the salesperson dropped into the conversation that an engineer would call round next week and bring the paperwork so that my constituent could sign the annual maintenance contract, which would run into hundreds of pounds every year. The conversation ended quickly.

My constituent called me as she was worried that the engineer would turn up at her door and install the new alarm and that she would have to go ahead with the expensive maintenance contract, which she could not afford. I was able to reassure her that she had not committed herself to anything and that she could just call the company back, forcefully cancel any appointment that she had made and ask the company to remove her details from its records. Fortunately, that resolved the problem, but only after considerable upset for my constituent. Who knows how many others the company had been calling? Perhaps some of them even went ahead with the arrangement.

A matter of days later, I happened to receive a call from the very same company. The caller offered me the same free alarm and said that I should take advantage of it because of the increasing number of break-ins on my street. Now, I know my neighbours quite well and I think that I would have picked up on any break-ins that had happened on my street. I was a councillor at the time, and like other councillors I received monthly updates on crimes that happened in my ward, so I was able to open the latest report and say, "I can't

see the crimes that you're talking about. Where is your information coming from? Can I speak to your manager?" The phone was quickly put down on me, but I was able to pass the information on to the trading standards department. It pursued the matter, and happily that saw the company named and shamed in the *Daily Record* about a year ago, which saw to its demise.

Such calls, which go beyond nuisance, can cause genuine upset and worry, and can persuade people to waste money on expensive services that are not as urgently needed as is suggested. I would like to see such calls screened. In line with the motion, I would welcome

"a single, simple point of contact for any individual wishing to protect their privacy from unwanted calls, texts, faxes and emails."

17:18

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** I begin by declaring an interest, which goes beyond acknowledging that, for many years, I worked for the publisher of the *Sunday Post*, whose role in highlighting the problem is to be commended. In common with other members, such as Mark Griffin, I have been and continue to be a victim of nuisance calls, both to my constituency office and to my home number. For several months, my constituency office has been bombarded as often as three, four or five times a day with automated PPI-related calls, and in common with many people my home phone number seems to be a magnet for unwelcome calls.

Generally speaking, it is the standard stuff—double glazing, kitchens, changing energy supplier or that friendly person who just happens to be conducting a quick survey in my area. At least, that was until last weekend, when we were targeted by an Indian call centre that wanted to discuss the use of a computer software package. During the first of the calls, all of which my young son took, we were told that we owed the company money for using the service, which we did not. It was told not to call back again, but it did so on multiple occasions.

Eventually, the company admitted that we owed nothing at all. However, in a bizarre twist, it literally pleaded with us to purchase the software for £29.99. When my son refused, the person at the other end went a stage further in the begging process, telling him that where we came from £29.99 was a sum that we could easily afford. My stropky 18-year-old son had enough about him to stand his ground, but how many people might have been browbeaten into purchasing internet security that they simply did not need, in the same way that Liam McArthur's constituent was persuaded to buy broadband for a computer that she did not have?

The firms that make such nuisance calls are absolutely unrelenting. Two weeks ago, my home was called twice in the space of 20 minutes by the same energy supplier trying to persuade us to move supplier. In recent months, we have also discovered how unwise it is to encourage firms offering PPI services. My wife—out of interest, she tells me—told one of these firms to send out a pack to look over. It was a big mistake. She was called repeatedly—four times on one particular afternoon—by employees of the company concerned who wanted to discuss how they might take her case forward. That sort of nonsense, along with the calls that disconnect as soon as one answers them, is at best irritating. Why should we have to contend with it in our own homes?

Beyond that, however, there is a deeply sinister side to the issue. Citizens Advice Scotland tells of people being scammed for hundreds of pounds at a time as a consequence of cold calling. Indeed, CAS has told me that it has heard of people receiving calls from fraudsters who claim to be from citizens advice bureaux and ask for money.

I have based my speech in this debate, for which Liam McArthur is to be commended for securing, on personal experience. However, I am not the kind of person to be exploited; my stropky 18-year-old has an even stroppier father when it comes to cold calls. I have also managed to resist the temptation to furnish that nice-sounding chap from Nigeria, whom I have never met but who wants to give me thousands of pounds, with my bank details. However, in these difficult economic times, there are vulnerable people out there who can all too easily be preyed on. For that reason, I fully endorse the call for more to be done in this area.

Of course, this is essentially a Westminster issue and, as we have heard, Liam McArthur's MP colleague Mike Crockart is campaigning there to get the relevant authorities' powers enhanced. I am sure that we all wish him well in that regard.

17:22

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

Listening to Graeme Dey, I could not help but be reminded of Neil Forsyth's book of Bob Servant's e-mails.

I thank Liam McArthur for securing this debate and remind the chamber that this is my fourth speech of the afternoon. The problem that has been highlighted is not new; in fact, I suddenly realised that we seem to have become accustomed to it. However, given the stress—and, indeed, the fraud—that can result, the issue is certainly deserving of debate.

I have also realised that in many phone calls I have made recently I start to leave a message

when I am interrupted by the person at the other end picking up the phone and saying, "Oh, it's you! I thought it was one of those nuisance callers." As a result of these calls, people have stopped answering their phones.

Even more concerning, one of my neighbours in Inverness bought a new phone because she said that there was never anyone at the other end of the line when the phone rang and she picked it up. When she got BT to check the line, it was found to be okay, so she concluded that the phone was faulty. When the same kind of calls continued with the new phone, she then thought that she was being checked out by potential burglars. She was reassured when I told her about nuisance calls; however, she had already been seriously stressed and had spent a considerable amount of money unnecessarily.

Like Graeme Dey, I get my fair share of cold calls, on subjects ranging from payment protection plans to offers for free new kitchens, free double-glazing or free solar energy installation. In fact, one evening, I was told about the fortune that I could make by selling the sunshine energy in Inverness to the National Grid. However, what is happening in Orkney is very distressing. Callers pretend to be part of a Government initiative to help those in financial difficulties write off their debts—and, of course, it all leads to the people in question giving up their bank details.

I signed up to the TPS to stop nuisance calls, but it did not make a blind bit of difference—and, after carrying out some research for this debate, I now understand why. The TPS does not cover recorded messages, not even Sean Connery when he personally called me last year to tell me to vote for the Scottish National Party.

**Graeme Dey:** Did you?

**Mary Scanlon:** I certainly did not. Even Sean Connery could not persuade me to do that.

The TPS does not cover recorded messages, market research, robocalls—whatever they are—or overseas nuisance calls. If someone is registered with the TPS, the burden is on them to identify and report nuisance callers, but try getting the number and try getting the name of the company—it is impossible.

I found some websites that offer to eliminate nuisance calls completely. I thought, "Well, that's fabulous. I'll raise that in the debate." However, that offer comes at a cost of £40 a year or £48 a year, or at a one-off cost of £60 or £100. Basic protection is free but it protects only against unsolicited sales calls and junk mail from United Kingdom companies. Given the number of overseas call centres, that is of little help. I am now so suspicious that I do not know whether those websites are an answer, or whether it is a

case of someone trying to cash in with another scam.

I commend the work that was done at Westminster by Liam McArthur's colleague Mike Crockart, which has attracted cross-party support. Mike Crockart's motion describes the current

"legislation around cold-calling via people's homes and mobile phones"

as

"confusing and overly complicated"

and goes on to say that he

"believes that people should be able to guarantee their privacy in a simple and effective way".

That is not too much to ask.

A briefing paper from the House of Commons library outlines the action taken over the years—including, in 2010, the increase in the financial penalty that is available to Ofcom from £50,000 to £2 million. Following this debate, I hope that if people can find out who is calling them—that includes Sean Connery—they could perhaps report them to Ofcom. Powers given to Ofcom were also revised in 2003 and 2008.

The figure that I found most alarming was that 22 per cent of the UK population have experienced silent calls on their landlines in the past six months—surely that is proof that more is needed to address this increasing problem.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. Perhaps we need to get Dr No on the case. I call Roderick Campbell, after whom we will move to the minister.

17:27

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** I congratulate Liam McArthur on bringing this issue to the chamber and on his well-considered opening speech. I acknowledge the contribution of the *Sunday Post* to the debate and I hope for Mr Mark Griffin's sake that he thinks that time spent in this debate is time well spent.

No doubt we have all been affected by nuisance calls at some point. Indeed, some of us may feel that we have had an inordinately large share of the quarter of a billion cold calls that Scots receive every year. There are many occasions when I avoid answering my phone at home if I do not recognise the number, such is the pervasiveness of the problem. That is not to mention nuisance texts—I received a text myself on a night out last Friday, yet again regarding mis-sold PPI. If I had had the number of accidents that companies seem to think I have had, I would be an extremely unlucky person indeed.

Unsolicited calls and texts are at best annoying. Many people have the confidence to ignore calls from unidentifiable numbers, to hang up on unwanted sales calls, or to delete unsolicited texts, but—as Liam McArthur rightly highlights in his motion—many people do not have that confidence, particularly older, more vulnerable people. Cold calls can make their lives very difficult indeed.

I have had a significant amount of constituency case correspondence related to unwanted phone calls. One man who contacted me described the calls as a plague. I have every reason to believe that that is true of many people's experience, not to mention the real irritation of the silent calls. Simply switching off or ignoring calls is often not an option. Millions of people depend on their phone for genuine communications.

The TPS is one way to limit incoming calls. The Information Commissioner's Office is responsible for the regulation of the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003—the statutory guidelines concerning the communication of marketing materials by phone, text, e-mail and fax. Regulation 21 gives teeth to the preference service, which prevents marketers from making unsolicited calls to people who are registered on the preference service.

As for the problem of identity, regulation 24, which has been referred to already, requires that callers must identify themselves and provide a business address or Freephone number on request. However, the role of the ICO is limited. It can act on complaints only when the caller is identifiable, UK based—as Maureen Watt suggested, that is a problem—and when the recipient is registered with the TPS or can prove that they asked the callers not to contact them; Mary Scanlon referred to that. It is quite a difficult test.

What other options are there? I have contacted BT on behalf of constituents to obtain information on its procedures. BT advises customers to report the source of the call to their landline—if the source can be traced—to the BT nuisance calls bureau.

I discovered that many of the major UK mobile networks operate their own nuisance or malicious calls bureaux. O2, Orange, T-Mobile, Vodafone, Virgin and Tesco are a handful of the service providers that offer such a service. Clearly, those service providers must operate within constraints, just as the ICO must do. Although those services are welcome, there is a lack of uniformity in procedure across the board.

I therefore fully understand the demand that Liam McArthur has identified for a clear, simple method of reporting nuisance calls and texts

across the board. The purpose of the Liberal Democrat campaign is commendable but, ultimately, the powers that are required to make any substantial changes in the area lie with Westminster.

If the Liberal Democrats want to make a real difference, I suggest that they should have a word in the ears of their UK Government colleagues at Westminster—even if, no doubt, the minister concerned would be happy to support their efforts.

17:30

**The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** I congratulate Liam McArthur on securing a debate on an issue that is of concern to a large number of people throughout Scotland and, indeed, the UK.

I am grateful to all members who have participated in the debate from all the parties represented in the chamber this evening. I echo and endorse their explanations of the nature of nuisance calls and the problems that they cause. It must be acknowledged that the problems are mostly of a minor nuisance nature but, as many members have pointed out, in some cases such calls can be a much more serious matter.

As many members have said, individuals have been encouraged by very persuasive people to part with money to enter into contracts that are plainly onerous, unnecessary, unwanted and unwise. I have encountered that situation, and such contracts are extremely difficult to unravel—even if the law is on the person's side—after the ink is dry on the contract or, rather, the deal is done over the phone.

Such calls can cause real hardship, especially for senior citizens, for whom these ostensibly plausible calls are of particular concern, especially those senior citizens who are alone and perhaps welcome human contact. The act of defrauding people in that situation is particularly to be deplored.

Members have made their points very well. I think that we will all agree that not everyone is as stropky as the Dey family has openly boasted about being. Not everyone has the resilience of character to resist—as Mary Scanlon revealed that she did—the blandishments of Mr Connery.

As many members have rightly pointed out, the legislative power over the matter rests with the Westminster Parliament. The Data Protection Act 1998 and the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003 are the most relevant pieces of legislation. The Ministry of Justice south of the border has policy responsibility for the 1998 act and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has responsibility for

the 2003 regulations. Both pieces of legislation are, in fact, administered and enforced by the Information Commissioner's Office, for which the Ministry of Justice is the sponsor department. The powers of the ICO are drawn from the 1998 act.

To avoid any doubt about the matter, I should point out that the Scottish Information Commissioner has no responsibility for the issue.

The ICO in England is accountable to Westminster. It is fair and useful to point out that the ICO has powers to take formal action against those who breach the 1998 act and the 2003 regulations. The powers include the ability to conduct audits, to serve an enforcement to compel an organisation to take action to bring about compliance with the 1998 act, and to serve a civil monetary penalty up to a maximum of £500,000. The ICO can prosecute those who commit criminal offences under the 1998 act, and it reports to Parliament under section 52(2).

Some members mentioned unsolicited text messages, which the regulations also cover. Prior consent is required to send such messages, unless a consumer has provided their mobile telephone number when purchasing a product or a service. When signing a contract, many of us take care to tick the box to say that we do not wish to receive calls. That is sensible; otherwise, one is bombarded.

**Liam McArthur:** I fully recognise that the responsibility for dealing with the issue rests largely with Westminster, but I was interested in a number of comments that members made and not least in the examples that Roderick Campbell gave of steps that can be taken, short of any change in the rules. Perhaps public awareness of those steps is insufficient. In its contact with many vulnerable groups, does the Scottish Government have a role in heightening awareness of the steps that can be taken now?

**Fergus Ewing:** We all have the power to raise awareness. By securing the debate, Liam McArthur has served that purpose, and all of us have done that by participating. We can and do convey messages. The debate will help with that end.

I am delighted to join people in recognising the excellent work that the *Sunday Post* has done. As far as I am aware, it has—more than any other newspaper—taken up and run with the issue. I have with me a copy of the *Sunday Post* that I will share with members, as I enjoyed reading it earlier. The front page says:

“Wrong Number: 650 Million Silent Calls A Year Just One Firm Fined”.

That is probably enough to show the *Sunday Post* that we all recognise that it has done excellent



work, as we would expect from the foremost family newspaper in this country.

The *Sunday Post* is to be praised for taking up an issue. An awful lot of the time, we feel that the press are unduly negative or are—heaven forfend—focusing on politicians' misdeeds. In this case, a newspaper has taken up and run with a campaign.

We can have more success from the campaign. I am pleased to note that the Information Commissioner's Office announced yesterday that it is set to issue two penalties that will total more than £250,000 to two illegal marketeers that are responsible for distributing millions of spam texts. We all agree that such action is required to stamp out such behaviour. I understand that the ICO also intends to publish a list of the most complained-about companies in order to name and shame them.

We recognise the legitimate role for companies to market their services. As the enterprise minister, I do not want to impede or prevent the legitimate marketing of good products—that would be wrong and a balance must be struck. However, the action that the ICO has announced is welcomed by everybody who is involved in the debate. Exemplary fines are one of the most effective measures to tackle the problem.

I welcome the debate and I thank all members for their speeches. We would like to have the powers in Scotland to tackle the issue more effectively, but we recognise that the authorities down south are taking steps. Rather than be churlish about that or score points, we welcome such powers. We would like to see more swift action.

I will arrange for the *Official Report* of the debate to be sent to the relevant UK ministers, with a letter from me, to draw attention to the fact that the debate has reflected well the concern of the public about such matters north of the border, which is also felt south of the border.

*Meeting closed at 17:39.*



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