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Tuesday 11 June 2013

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 11 June 2013

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader today is Andy Hawthorne, founder and chief executive officer of the Message Trust.

Andy Hawthorne (The Message Trust):

Presiding Officer, thank you for the privilege of sharing a reflection here today with this great Parliament.

I work for the Message Trust, an unashamedly Christian charity that has developed a knack for reaching the hardest to reach. For the past two decades, we have been working in some of England's toughest estates, and seen crime come down, churches grow and communities transformed in places that were previously spiritual wastelands. Right now, we are exploring partnerships with Scottish churches to begin similar new projects here in Scotland.

Over the past 20 years of doing that, I have become convinced of one thing: God has not finished with us yet. I can say with conviction that Tuesday 11 June is an exciting day in the Christian church's history—perhaps it is the most exciting day in its history. That is because, almost certainly, more people will come to know Jesus Christ as lord and saviour today than on any other day since he rose from the dead. It is hard to believe that when you live in Scotland, one of the very few places in the world where the Christian church has not been growing recently, but if we lift our eyes, it is obvious that God is well and truly on the move.

As recently as a century ago, two thirds of the world's Christian believers lived in Europe. Now, the vast majority live in Africa, South America, Asia, India or China. In my lifetime, the world has been turned upside down spiritually.

When Jesus Christ said, "I will build my church and Hell itself will not be able to stop it," I am sure that the religious leaders watching him suffer and die thought, "Sure thing, you're going to build a church. You've never set foot outside of a country smaller than Scotland; you've never written a book; you've got no money, and you've got hardly any followers any more. You're dying a criminal's death and yet you claim you're going to build a church that will spread throughout the world and go on into eternity."

Well, I have good news. Jesus Christ keeps his promises—all of them. And today, Tuesday 11 June, more people than ever will discover what I discovered almost 40 years ago: a God who delivers on his promises for his planet, and his promises for individual faithful people. Promises of peace, joy and love for him and for others; a confidence of a glorious hope for the future. Now, that is what I call good news.

Topical Question Time

14:02

2011 Climate Change Target

1. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its 2011 climate change target. (S4T-00390)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): Official statistics on emissions of greenhouse gases in Scotland were published on 7 June 2013. Unadjusted figures show that Scotland's direct emissions fell by 9.9 per cent between 2010 and 2011, and that that was the largest year-on-year decrease since records began in 1998. However, once the effect of emissions trading is factored in, the net Scottish emissions account fell by only 2.9 per cent. The result is that Scotland's statutory climate change target for 2011, which is expressed as an absolute figure in tonnes, and which was set based on Parliament's understanding of Scotland's baseline emissions at the time, has been missed by 0.848 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

The Scottish ministers plan to publish the finalised second climate change report on proposals and policies, or RPP, later this month. That report will set out how the Scottish Government intends to meet our targets to 2027 and will show how we can compensate for the excess emissions in 2010 and 2011 in the long term.

It is worth bearing in mind that, since 1990, Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 21.59 megatonnes of CO₂ equivalent, which equates to more than the total 2011 emissions of Northern Ireland of 20.42 megatonnes.

Claire Baker: The failure to meet the second emissions target is deeply disappointing but perhaps not surprising. The failure to meet the 2010 target was dismissed as being the result of a cold winter, and the failure to meet the 2011 target is being spun as a complicated data change. The minister says that we are still on target for 2020, but the adjusted baseline from 2010 data makes the target more difficult. We are relying on circumstances rather than firm policy and leadership. Over the past 48 hours, the minister has received a volume of messages calling for improvements to RPP2. Will the revised RPP2 clearly demonstrate which policies have been introduced to compensate for the Government's annual missed targets?

Paul Wheelhouse: As I explained to the member in my answer, RPP2 will look at how we will address the shortfall in abatement in 2011 and

recoup it in the long term. As the member will appreciate, we have had about a week since the data was first notified to the Government and it was published on Friday. The process of preparing RPP2 has been a lengthy one, involving parliamentary consultation. We will do what we can to adopt the figures that were published last Friday in the new document that will be published on 27 June. I hope that that will set out the path that will set Scotland fair for achieving the target.

It is worth pointing out that, as at 2011, we expected to have a fall of 23.9 per cent in emissions to this date but have actually achieved 25.7 per cent. I hope that Claire Baker will recognise that the baseline having moved by 1.2 megatonnes has made the task of achieving a fixed target more difficult.

Claire Baker: In scrutiny of RPP2, the parliamentary committees confirmed Stop Climate Chaos's analysis that we will meet all our annual targets only if all the policies and proposals are implemented and the European Union increases its emissions reduction target to 30 per cent. Will the revised RPP2 address the reliance on the EU emissions target? Under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, the Scottish Government must give a formal report when an annual target is missed. The report on 2010 was wrapped up into RPP2. Will there be a formal report on the 2011 target or will it just be wrapped up? It is not really good enough to include the formal report in RPP2 when it is due within a week.

Paul Wheelhouse: Claire Baker ought to realise that a separate document was produced that explains why we missed the target in 2010; a similar format will be produced for 2011. For the RPP2 document to which Claire Baker referred, we had the opportunity, given the timescales involved, to look at how to address our emissions targets in the longer term. Claire Baker is incorrect in assuming that it is only in the circumstances of the EU moving to 30 per cent that we can achieve a 42 per cent reduction in our climate emissions. As we have shown, we can achieve 42 per cent in RPP2 if this Government implements its policies and proposals even in the absence of an EU move to 30 per cent. We are making great strides to ensure that we can achieve targets through domestic effort rather than just relying on the EU. Clearly, if the EU moves to 30 per cent, our task will become a lot easier and we will have a substantial overshoot in abatement of the order of 18 megatonnes by the end of 2027.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful that the minister has not used the phrase "world leading" so far in this exchange, but I think that it is regrettable that he has also not used the word "sorry". What actions does he think that he should have taken that would have allowed us to

reach the target last year and this year? In which policy areas has the Government not been doing well enough?

Paul Wheelhouse: As the member knows, we are referring to figures in 2011, so in fact we are talking not about last year or the year before but about the year before that. Knowing Patrick Harvie reasonably well, although I have been in the Parliament for only a short time, I am sure that he has looked at the figures in some detail. All sections of the economy are now making progress in emissions reductions. For example, those for transport are lower than they were in 1990, if we exclude international aviation and shipping. Clearly, we want to do more. As I set out in the draft RPP2, we are aware that transport and residential emissions are areas that have further to go. However, the Government is doing all that it can and is making substantial investments to achieve the targets.

For the maturity of the debate, it would be nice to have it recognised just how challenging the targets are. They are world-leading targets, and this country has shown greater ambition in that regard than any other nation in the world. It would be nice to see other members in the chamber showing some concern for the fact that we are trying to achieve the most ambitious targets in the world and recognising that we have to do that together.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Is the minister aware that the climate change legislation law that the Scottish Parliament passed says that the

“Scottish ministers must ... ensure that the net Scottish emissions account for each year in that period does not exceed the target set for that year”?

Given that the law has now been broken for the second year, what is the point of the law and who is taking account of it?

Paul Wheelhouse: I appreciate Tavish Scott's point that absolute targets have been missed, which I fully recognise, but we need to take some confidence from the fact that percentage changes are happening faster than was originally assumed when the targets were set based on old data and methodology.

With regard to the 2009 act and the targets that came from it, with the benefit of hindsight we can say that there was a misunderstanding of the scale of emissions in Scotland at that time and, indeed, in 1990. We have to take into account that the goalposts have shifted to some extent but we still have to achieve absolute targets. We are striving to achieve those absolute targets, irrespective of the fact that the task has become more difficult. I would hope that the member would join us in trying to achieve that.

I highlight that none of the Opposition parties—with the possible exception of the Greens, who I acknowledge have some policies that have made clear what alternative investments they would make, although I do not agree with them 100 per cent—have come forward with costed plans with alternatives to RPP2. There is a dearth of information from the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats about what they would try to do instead.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I beg to differ from the minister about a dearth of policies from Scottish Labour. We have made a range of proposals on transport and energy efficiency in housing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): We need a question.

Claudia Beamish: If we are to meet our future targets, transport is a key area but, with a reduction of only 0.2 per cent between 2010 and 2011, we are not seeing the necessary progress. At the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's scrutiny stage, concerns were raised over the wishful thinking of the abatement measures. How will that be addressed in the redraft?

Paul Wheelhouse: Claudia Beamish is incorrect, I believe. I need to look up the figure, but I believe that there was a drop of 2 per cent in transport emissions between 2010 and 2011. She is quite right that the overall decrease between 1990 and 2011 was 0.2 per cent.

In the draft of the RPP2 that we are preparing this month, we hope to demonstrate that we can achieve our long-term target of a 42 per cent reduction by 2020. It is not correct that, as some people assume, 42 per cent needs to be across every sector. In an ideal world, that would be possible, but we can take the economy and the public with us only as fast as they can go in a reasonable timescale.

It is worth bearing in mind that when the Committee on Climate Change set the annual targets, it did so in the context of what it thought was reasonably possible for a country of this size to achieve. In the event, the EU moved to 30 per cent. That we are continuing to press to the 42 per cent target in light of the fact that the EU might not move as far as we would like it to shows this Government's commitment to achieving our climate change targets.

Disability Living Allowance

2. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the new system for disability living allowance will have on poverty in Scotland. S4T-00394

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Analysis by Inclusion Scotland estimates that the changes from disability living allowance to personal independence payment, together with the real-terms cut in the budget, will significantly reduce the number of people in receipt of disability benefits in Scotland. Those changes, along with other coalition welfare cuts, will have a significant detrimental impact on poverty in Scotland and undermine our efforts to tackle its causes. The solution for that is for the Scottish Parliament to have control over its own welfare matters, so that we can devise policies for the benefit of the Scottish people.

Linda Fabiani: Is the minister aware that despite “Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland” showing that spending on social protection as a share of gross domestic product is estimated to have been lower in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom in each of the past five years, practitioners such as Capability Scotland warn that the changeover to PIP could have a catastrophic effect on the Scottish economy while hitting the most vulnerable in our society?

Margaret Burgess: The Scottish Government analysis that was published earlier this year estimated that the UK Government’s welfare reforms, including the change from DLA to PIP, could reduce welfare expenditure in Scotland by up to £4.5 billion in the five years to 2014-15. Today we published the expert working group on welfare’s report and the Scottish Government’s response to it. In our response, we mentioned “Scotland’s Balance Sheet”, a report that we published in April, which highlighted that expenditure on social protection as a share of GDP is estimated to have been lower in Scotland than in the UK in each of the past five years.

The Scottish Government is aware of that and we are aware that we have powers only to mitigate, not to change. Mitigating the full impact of the cuts will not be possible until the Scottish Parliament has full control and can put in place policies that benefit the people of Scotland.

Linda Fabiani: Is the minister also aware of the worrying evidence that the Welfare Reform Committee has heard during open sessions with those who are already directly affected by the welfare reform cuts: that work capability assessments are not fit for purpose, as shown by the number of successful appeals; and that those assessments are causing great stress to those who are already dealing with the effects of ill health? Does she share my concern that such bad practice has been further extended to those on disability allowance?

Margaret Burgess: I certainly share the member’s concern and am very much aware of the cases and the stories that the Welfare Reform Committee has heard, which are a concern to all of us.

We know that the work capability assessments are causing a great deal of distress to many people. Lessons have to be learned from a process that is currently being carried out by Atos Healthcare. That process is flawed, and it has been flawed for a considerable time.

The UK Government must ensure that it takes the necessary steps to make the PIP assessment process fair and effective for all, and the Scottish Government will continue to monitor the implementation of PIP in Scotland, because we are extremely concerned about the anxiety that people currently face. It is not only the Welfare Reform Committee that has heard about that; I think that every MSP has heard about it in their surgery.

Common Fisheries Policy Reform

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a statement by Richard Lochhead, which will be an update on common fisheries policy reform. He will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions while he makes the statement.

14:16

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I am grateful for the opportunity before the summer recess, which is near, to make a statement to update members on the reform of the common fisheries policy.

Following intense negotiations, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union have reached historic political agreements on the basic regulation of the CFP and the regulation that addresses the common organisation of the market for fisheries. Those agreements still remain to be ratified, but few, if any, further changes are expected. Formal adoption by the Council and the European Parliament is expected next month or this autumn at the latest. Before the end of this year, we also expect agreement on a new European maritime and fisheries fund, which will underpin the reformed CFP with financial support.

I confirm that, within the constraints that we face, our key priorities appear to have been achieved. We have a better framework to support sustainable fishing and protect fish stocks and an ambitious but workable discards package to phase out the scandal of discards. We have secured a regional approach to fisheries management, which I hope will at long last bring key decisions much closer to home.

In true European Union fashion, the CFP reform negotiations have been slow, tortuous and bureaucratic. Nevertheless, we have seen the process as a golden opportunity for radical reform that was to be grasped with both hands, given how badly the CFP has failed our fishing communities, our fish stocks and the wider marine environment.

Our fishers are not short of challenges. Only last week, I chaired a meeting with the industry to address the acute pressures that our nephrops fishery faces as a result of biological changes in the prawn grounds. We are working on an action plan to alleviate those pressures where we can. That acutely demonstrates why we need a CFP that supports our fishers in facing those biological challenges—never mind the bureaucratic challenges—rather than hinders them at every turn.

The agreement that has been reached is a product of compromise, and it was never going to fulfil all our wishes. We have had to negotiate with 754 MEPs and 27 member states, with their diverse views, and on a number of occasions we have had to fight with the United Kingdom Government for Scotland's interests—for example, in ensuring that a strong position was maintained on transferable fishing quotas and on regionalisation.

Although the deal that is on the table is not perfect, it could move us substantially forward. In short, if we realise the opportunities that it offers, it should allow us to take significant strides forward in developing a sensible and sustainable fisheries management framework for the whole of Europe.

We are a nation whose identity, culture, heritage and economy are shaped by the seas that surround us. Those seas have long provided for our people, and they now support an industry that catches more than 70 per cent of the UK's key quota stocks, provides more than 5,000 coastal jobs and contributes £500 million to Scotland's economy. That is why I was determined that Scotland's voice would be heard loudly during the reform process, to ensure that regionalisation, discards and the commitment to sustainable fishing were key features of the final agreement.

Reducing micromanagement from Brussels and returning greater responsibility for fisheries management to Scotland have been my main priority from the start. That is why I expended significant energy in ensuring that the UK position stayed firm on our key objective of decentralising the one-size-fits-all CFP. Without that, we would not have the tools to do the job of moving to a discard-free fishery that is fished at sustainable levels.

I am pleased to report that a regional approach to fisheries management has been agreed, which we must accept is historic. It does not go as far as I would like, and time will tell the extent to which it really will loosen the grip of Brussels on management of our fisheries, but I will work to make it a success.

The agreed model should give member states more flexibility to manage their fisheries by working regionally to develop detailed management measures, in consultation with key stakeholders, that will deliver the high-level objectives that will be agreed at European level and set out in multi-annual plans. The Commission will then be expected to legislate to enable implementation of the actions that have been agreed at regional level, to monitor progress and to support member states in achieving the high-level targets. For example, with the agreement of member states in the region and the Commission's support, we could establish our own

rules for determining days at sea or fixing the composition of catches, which would enable us to cast off the hated straitjacket of the cod recovery plan.

Crucially, that framework will focus on achieving outcomes by whatever routes member states believe are necessary. That is in contrast to the current inflexible fixation on micromanaging the whole process—down to the size and width of nets—from Brussels, as witnessed through the Commission's current one-size-fits-all CFP approach.

Key among those outcomes is the commitment to achieving discard-free fisheries. I hope that an end is now in sight to the scandal whereby a million tonnes or more of fish are discarded in Europe's waters every year. We, the industry and our environmental groups all agree on that objective. Dumping perfectly edible fish is ecological madness and is horrendously wasteful. However, the issue is complex and challenging to tackle, which is why it was important to negotiate a discard ban that is ambitious but workable for fishermen and managers, particularly in Scotland's mixed fishery.

From January 2015, the discard ban will commence for all pelagic species, while the ban for other stocks, including nephrops, cod, haddock and whiting, will be phased in between January 2016 and 2019. It is important that the discards package is supported by a number of measures to aid practical implementation. Vessels will be able to bank or borrow up to 10 per cent of additional quota in a stock from one year to the next. They will also be allowed to transfer up to 9 per cent of quota from a target species to cover any unwanted bycatch of another species, although only if the non-target species is within safe biological limits. Additionally, there are exemptions for some species that are more likely to survive after being discarded, such as skates and rays, and for species that cannot be caught and landed, such as sharks.

It is important that a maximum de minimis level of discarding will also be permitted, which will reduce from 7 per cent of the total annual catch in years 1 and 2 to 6 per cent in years 3 and 4 and to 5 per cent thereafter. However, that will be allowed only for species that are agreed at European level and when it is justified on the ground that total elimination of discards is unachievable scientifically or because of disproportionate costs to the industry.

Importantly, as Scotland demanded, the discards package includes provision for an uplift in quotas. That is absolutely necessary as we move from quotas being based on what is landed to quotas being based on what is taken out of the sea. It also means that vessels can benefit from

landing much of what would have otherwise been discarded.

The anti-discards package will be challenging for our complex mixed fishery. It will mean moving to yet more new methods of fishing and more selective gear. However, we have some time in which to make the transition, and I firmly believe that the change is desirable—not only environmentally, but from an economic perspective—and deliverable. It is simply inefficient to catch unwanted fish that have to be thrown back over the side. By avoiding that, we can add to the environmental and the economic bottom lines. To their huge credit, our fishermen have a strong track record of achievement on discards. We will continue to work with them to make good on the new commitment.

Moving to discard-free fisheries that are based on catches rather than landings will also help us to achieve our other key goal of fishing our stocks at what is referred to as maximum sustainable yield—that is, a rate that allows the stock to reproduce. It is important that fisheries management follows the best available science and is not driven by short-term self-interest or political objectives. I am therefore pleased that the reform agreement recognises the need to set fishing levels that will rebuild depleted stocks and maintain them at sustainable levels, which will sustain the fishing communities that depend on them. The limits will be applied by 2015, where possible, and by 2020 at the latest for all harvested stocks. In Scottish waters, we already fish at such levels across many of our commercial stocks and, in time, that will lead to better and bigger stocks and to more stable and plentiful seas.

I remind colleagues that we have successfully fought off the unacceptable element of the Commission's original proposals—the establishment of a mandatory system of transferable fishing rights across Europe, which posed a direct threat to our historical fishing rights. I hope that all members believe that our fishing rights belong to Scotland and that they must not be sold to those with the deepest pockets in Europe. We fought vigorously against that from day 1. We had to show forceful leadership not only to overcome a threat from Brussels but to make the UK Government see sense on the issue. We welcome its volte-face. I am pleased that our work has paid off and that we can move on to better debates.

Our fishermen face not only a daily struggle while at sea but a bewildering and often contradictory tangle of European regulations. The existing CFP has been no friend to Scotland and I have no doubt that it will continue to make life challenging for our fishing industry. However, a

door has been opened to better times through the reform. We might not have the giant leap forward that we wanted, but the reform is a big step forward that we should welcome.

The Scottish Government will work in close partnership with stakeholders and the industry, onshore and offshore, to maximise the potential of our fantastic industry, protect our amazing marine environment and our rich fish stocks and bring benefits to all those connected with our fishing communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I intend to allow about 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of his statement. Last month's agreement on the basic regulation of the common fisheries policy is to be welcomed. Good progress has been made on discards and the regional control of fisheries and, if the measures are implemented sensibly, they will benefit Scottish fishing and help to secure a sustainable future. In the UK, the cabinet secretary has played his part, but I also welcome the work of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union in securing sensible agreement.

Ensuring that fish stocks are at a healthy level is beneficial not only to the environment but to our fishing industry. Achieving maximum sustainable yield, via the best scientific advice, is vital to ensure a sustainable future. Although the final agreement contains a strong commitment to follow scientific advice and an end to overfishing, there is no clear deadline for when full stock recovery will be achieved. How will the regionalisation element of the CFP aid stock recovery in Scotland? Will clear timetables for the achievement of full stock recovery be set at a regional level or will that be limited by multi-annual plans?

Richard Lochhead: I thank Claire Baker for her comments and the way in which she has approached this important issue.

First, regionalisation should help stock recovery because many of the measures under the current one-size-fits-all approach of Brussels are counterproductive. For example, vessels are often forced into areas where the juvenile fish are—the fish that we want to grow—as opposed to other areas of the sea. That is down to ill-fitting regulations. I hope that, if such details are decided at regional and local levels, we will get them right and we will not have counterproductive consequences for fisheries conservation.

The targets will be laid down in the multi-annual plans, which will be agreed between the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. I hope—and we take it from the reform proposals—that the

high-level objectives will be set at European level but that the management and detail will come to the regions. In that way, we will be able to progress the debate.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for an early copy of his statement. I agree that a door has opened to better times through the reform.

I have two points. First, will the cabinet secretary give more detail on how the new discards policy will work in practice at Scottish landing ports? In English ports, Government officials have already helped to plan how to use discards and previously unwanted fish. What provisions has he organised for Scottish ports?

Secondly, on nephrops, which the cabinet secretary mentioned, will he guarantee that he will make it a personal priority to persuade the Commission that there should be an exemption from the effort limits in the cod recovery plan for inshore prawn vessels that can document a minimal bycatch of cod? That would make a huge difference to our artisanal prawn fishermen on the west coast.

Richard Lochhead: In preparing for the discard ban, our first objective is to minimise the unwanted catches that are brought back to shore—that is why it is useful to have the flexibilities that the agreement provides for. When unwanted catches are brought back to shore, they will no doubt make their way to fishmeal and there will be cost recovery for fishermen, but we must ensure that there is no profit and that there is a disincentive to bring back unwanted catches.

Most of the fisheries management measures will take place at sea, so that people avoid catching fish that are not wanted in the first place. As members know, Scotland is very much blazing a trail on closed areas, real-time closures and other forms of spatial management, catch quota schemes and so on, and we want to build on such approaches to minimise unwanted catches.

On the interaction between the cod recovery plan and the nephrops fishery, we are currently experiencing a biological problem, in that the prawns are simply not appearing. That is particularly the case in the Fladen ground, but it is also a west coast issue, with landings 50 per cent down, despite the quotas there. We have found it difficult to find flexibility to offer vessels other fishing opportunities, because of the cod recovery plan. If such decisions are taken closer to home, we will be able to build in better flexibilities and to balance fisheries conservation with measures to allow vessels to fish elsewhere when the prawns do not appear. I hope that that is one big difference that the new approach can make.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I welcome the CFP quota adjustment process to accommodate the new discard-free policy. Will the cabinet secretary expand on his views about plans to survey fishing effort to confirm the effectiveness of the new discards regime at sea?

Richard Lochhead: I pressed hard in Europe on ensuring that we have the enforcement capability to ensure that the flexibilities in the agreement, in relation to the discards de minimis rules, are not exploited. Some countries wanted the biggest possible de minimis and the ability to discard a huge percentage of fish of all kinds of species; they also wanted some species to be exempt from the discard ban. I was pleased that those countries were defeated in the negotiations and did not get their way—I pushed hard on that. A compromise was reached, and in my statement I gave the percentages that we got to. The flexibilities will be useful, given Scotland's circumstances, because we have a complex mixed fishery.

Over the next year or two, before the bans come into place, there will be much effort and learning on how we monitor and enforce the discard rates. Of course, the de minimis rules are not a blanket provision. States that want to use flexibility must present evidence that there are good scientific reasons for doing so.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I understand from the statement that we expect agreement on a new European maritime and fisheries fund before the end of this year. Will the cabinet secretary give details of discussions on the fund, particularly to take account of the need of fragile coastal fishing communities to achieve social and economic sustainability, including sustainability through diversification when appropriate?

Richard Lochhead: I can say to Claudia Beamish that those issues were discussed in the negotiations. A major priority for Scotland is to ensure that the funding is aligned with the need, to make the transition from where we are with discards to the discard ban and to help the fleet to adapt to the new circumstances. The resources that come from the fund should be aligned with the need to adopt new measures—new nets and gear and so on.

It is also important that we support our onshore sector in adapting to where quotas might go in the future, in relation to different species, for example. We are taking account of not just the offshore sector but the onshore sector.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): The welcome decentralisation of the hugely damaging one-size-fits-all CFP is crucial if we are to protect

the Scottish fishing fleet's future. Will the proposed decentralisation allow, for example, scientific research on spur dogfish, which can be unintentionally caught by vessels that trawl for nephrops on the west coast? Such catches are currently discarded, but the industry is concerned at the loss of income from the bycatch. Will decentralisation allow a sustainable bycatch fishery for spurdog to reopen, particularly in the months from October to December?

Richard Lochhead: The member may be aware that the on-going scientific advice for spurdog is that the species has to be protected, given that the state of the stock indicates that it is under threat. We are working with the industry to develop measures to avoid that bycatch.

On decentralisation, it is hoped that the detail of some measures will be decided at a more regional level. However, if the scientific advice continues to be that a stock is below safe levels, we will have to take that into account.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for a copy of his statement. Will he accept that there is the width of the North Sea between the rhetoric on discards and the practical implementation of the policy, which could be extremely difficult in a mixed fishery? Will he also accept that, in implementing that policy, he needs to get the balance right between achieving the policy on discards and ensuring that boats have a sustainable future? Will he assure Parliament that the policy will include the full flexibility to allow us to achieve that?

Will the cabinet secretary ensure that, when the regionalisation elements of the new common fisheries policy are implemented, no Scottish boat will have a stricter or more onerous regime applied to it than will be applied to other EU vessels in our coastal waters?

Richard Lochhead: On the member's latter points, I have continually said that, under regionalisation, member states must have the power to ensure a level playing field in their own waters. As the regional discussions and negotiations are taken forward, I will continue to press for that. Under European regulations, we cannot have vessels fishing side by side to which different rules apply, although member states have different stocks and different priorities, which we have to take into account.

In the overall debate during the negotiations, it was clear that implementing the discard ban will be problematic in some circumstances, given the complexities of operating in Scottish waters, where we have perhaps 30 commercial stocks being fished together. That is why the flexibilities that were secured are important.

As the Parliament will be aware, during the negotiations, some countries—which perhaps had a minimal interest in fisheries—said that they wanted no flexibilities; other countries wanted the maximum flexibilities, which would have amounted to no discard ban. We have reached a reasonable compromise, which the industry in Scotland has warmly welcomed as something with which it can work in the years ahead. The environmental non-governmental organisations to which I have spoken also recognise that there must be an element of flexibility, given the complexities of Scotland's mixed fisheries.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement and in particular the recognition of the problems on the west coast with prawns, crabs and so on. More generally, it is important that people know where their food, especially their seafood, comes from and that they can make an informed choice when they buy quality and sustainable Scottish produce. What agreement has been reached on improving the labelling of fishery and aquaculture products? What is the timetable for implementing those measures in Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: The timetable for introducing the new CFP is 1 January next year, although it will take some time for some measures to be implemented thereafter. Labelling is a feature of the common market organisation regulation. The labelling of fish products must include the area of sea in which the fish are caught and the method of gear used—for instance, "Caught by trawl in west of Scotland waters." There was a proposal to make the inclusion of the date and time of capture on labels mandatory, but we felt that that should be voluntary, given the bureaucracy involved.

The origin of fish products is an issue that I am pursuing. In the average supermarket, it is difficult to tell where fish are from. That must be rectified, because it is unacceptable in this day and age that, when people buy fish products from supermarket shelves, they cannot tell where those products came from or in which country they were processed.

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement. Reference has been made to the implications for the onshore processing industry. Will he give us a wee bit more information about how he will engage with that industry as we move forward with the changes?

Richard Lochhead: We have worked with the onshore sector through the sea fisheries partnership, which is the advisory group that we set up. The industry and NGOs are members of that group.

Part of that work is to ensure that we have the marketing right. We have just received proposals from the group about how we can better market Scottish seafood and use the Scottish branding to more effect. The onshore sector is centre stage in those discussions.

We have also had a lot of dialogue with the sector on moving forward with the discard ban and other fisheries management measures to ensure continuity of supply for our processors. We will ensure that that continues to be the case.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): How will the banking and borrowing of quota across adjacent years be administered in Scotland? In particular, will it be possible, after the end of a year, to borrow or bank back across to the year that has just passed?

Richard Lochhead: The short answer is yes. That is one of the flexibilities.

It is worth pointing out that we have always had the ability to bank and borrow quota so that the take-up of quota from year to year is balanced efficiently. The new measure is that quota can now be swapped for quota to help with the discard ban. In other words, if fishermen do not have quota for what they catch, they can surrender other quota and convert it into the quota that they need to land the catch legally without it going to fishmeal, provided that the country meets its overall quota limits and the catch is within sustainable limits. There are some new flexibilities that will be important for implementing the discard ban in Scotland.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I am glad that the threat of tradeable rights has been seen off. What are the Government's intentions for allocating fishing opportunities in Scotland? Article 16 in the new regulation allows for those who fish in more sustainable ways and contribute to coastal communities to get priority access. Will the cabinet secretary take advantage of that new provision? Will rights be allocated to those who can fish most sustainably and best support the local economy, instead of just to those who have fished the most in the past?

Richard Lochhead: There is a genuine debate to be had on that. We recently commissioned research into quota management issues in Scotland to understand who holds the quota and how it is being used.

No right is more God given to Scotland than the fishing rights for our own waters. That is the birthright of our fishing communities, and we do not want that to leave Scotland or get into the hands of the wrong people, who are not active fishermen. Unfortunately, the pre-1999 Administration introduced the current system, which is far from perfect. If we were starting with a

blank sheet of paper, we would design a different quota-management system.

Alison Johnstone raises legitimate issues for the debate moving forward.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary consider that the Scottish fleet might have been in an entirely different position today if Westminster Governments had not regarded Scotland's fishing interests as expendable? A Scottish Office memorandum from 1971, which was released under the 30-year rule, said:

"in the wider UK context, they"—

that is, the Scottish fishing industry—

"must be regarded as expendable".

Richard Lochhead: I completely agree that, if the Tory UK Government had not taken Scotland into the common fisheries policy back in the early 1970s, the country would have many more thriving fishing communities. Although the reform package is welcome because it certainly improves matters—greatly, I hope, in some cases—we will still have the CFP to contend with, and the situation will still be complex and difficult. Much of that could have been avoided if the Tory party had not taken Scotland into the CFP and sold out our fishing communities.

Youth Sport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06921, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a sporting nation—celebrating and building on Scotland's success in youth sport.

14:45

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison):

I am delighted to address Parliament on youth sport. I am sure that members agree that it is an important subject, but I will spend some time outlining why I believe it is important.

The benefits of sport for those who take part in it are clear and we know that meeting the physical activity guidelines can deliver dramatic improvements in managing and preventing disease. In Scotland, inactivity contributes to nearly 2,500 deaths each year and leads to significant financial costs for the national health service.

However, the benefits of being active are not limited to the physical. Participation can help young people to develop self-discipline and self-confidence, and can help in their ability to develop relationships with peers and adults and in their success at school.

Getting things right in relation to youth sport can create the basis for lifelong habits of being active. We know that 73 per cent of children already meet the physical activity guidelines, but getting more young people active is, I am sure, something that every member in the chamber supports.

On top of the developmental and health benefits, youth sport can contribute to Scotland's sporting success. We are all aware of the fantastic success that Scottish athletes had in last summer's Olympics and Paralympic games in winning 13 medals, which was more than in any previous games, but that must not be the high-water mark. If we take the right actions now, elite success in the future can be greater still, and I am confident that we will see that next year in Glasgow.

All that explains why I am determined that we raise our ambitions for youth sport. I am also determined that our actions on youth sport are informed by the widest possible set of experience and knowledge. The young people's sport panel has already made a valuable contribution and will continue to be involved with other stakeholders.

This debate is an opportunity for members to bring forward their ideas and suggestions, and I look forward to hearing them. I intend to publish a draft youth sport strategy in September and to give

Parliament a further opportunity to debate, discuss and make suggestions on the subject at that time.

It is important that we begin to look beyond the current targets and the horizon that we are currently aiming for to consider what we might want to do around youth sport in the future. I look forward to continuing that dialogue with members from throughout the chamber, but I will outline what I see as being some of the key elements in ensuring success in youth sport.

It starts pre-school, because we need to provide a strong foundation. We know that play is central to how children learn, for both cognitive and softer skills, and that outdoor play in particular can be a major contributor to improving outcomes around physical activity and healthy weight. Scotland's first national play strategy, which will be published later this month, will set out our vision for play and the action that we are going to take to achieve it. Of course, actions are already in place. The go2play fund provides £3 million to promote the benefits of free-play opportunities and good-quality play spaces for children. Among other things, it has supported the deployment of play rangers, which has allowed children to play in spaces that are familiar to them, such as their street or local park, while giving parents peace of mind and encouraging positive interaction between children and their local community.

School age provides the opportunity to build on the early foundations. Once children learn to throw, catch, run and jump, a world of different sport and physical activity opportunities is available. School often provides young people with their first taste of structured sport and access to local sports clubs. It also provides an opportunity to try a range of different activities and sports. That includes swimming, and I hope to announce shortly what additional support will be made available through the successful swimming top-up programme.

I am convinced that quality physical education provision is the bedrock for ensuring that every child has access to structured PE. That is why we committed about £6 million last year to put in place support mechanisms for schools throughout Scotland to meet the commitment to deliver at least two hours of PE in primary schools and at least two periods of PE in secondary schools for pupils in S1 to S4 by 2014. That is a commitment that, interestingly, the UK Government dropped in October 2010, which makes the Tory amendment a little rich and which is why, as Alex Johnstone will not be surprised to hear, we will not be supporting it.

The Government's commitment is delivering results—we saw that in the healthy living survey results for last year, which showed that 84 per cent of primary schools and 92 per cent of

secondary schools were meeting the commitment, up from 3 per cent and 46 per cent respectively, in 2004-05. There are also now more PE teachers than at any time since 2006, so we are hoping to see continued success when the next results are published on 25 June. We hope to complete the journey by 2014.

Of course, as well as staff, the provision of high-quality facilities plays an important role in provision of PE in schools. The Scottish Government is supporting substantial investment in sporting facilities in new schools across Scotland through the £1.25 billion Scotland's schools for the future programme. On that basis, I am happy to accept the Liberal Democrat amendment.

To date, local authorities, supported by Government funding, have invested around £24 million in sporting facilities in the 18 schools that have been completed or are under construction. As the Liberal Democrat amendment says, it is important that those schools are easily and widely accessible to the public.

Our flagship active schools programme builds on that core provision by providing opportunities for children and young people to participate in sport before, during and after school. Unlike other areas of the UK, we chose not to reduce our investment in school sport and, since 2007, sportscotland has invested more than £80 million in that programme. Last year alone, the programme provided around 5 million opportunities for young people to take part in more than 70 different sports and activities. We know that there is a particular issue around participation in sport by girls. The active girls programme provides £500,000 a year to increase participation among girls and young women in PE, physical activity and sport, and is delivering for key outcomes. The programme is doing very positive work, a lot of it around dance, which has attracted a lot of girls back into being active in the school environment.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The minister said that there would be no cuts to school sports facilities. Does that include PE teaching staff?

Shona Robison: If Jenny Marra had been listening, she would have heard me say that the number of PE teachers has increased over the past few years. If she were to pay attention, she might hear such things.

It is important to celebrate the successful models that are already in place in primary and secondary schools. With that in mind, I previously announced the introduction of the school sport awards, which will recognise schools' achievements in increased PE delivery, in accessibility of schools' facilities to their local

communities and their greater offering of extracurricular sports activities. The awards will be introduced first in North Lanarkshire, West Lothian and Argyll and Bute from the start of August 2013—the next school term—with a view to their being rolled out nationally in August 2014. I hope that Parliament will welcome that, because I think that it is important to recognise in a visible way the good work that schools are doing when they do all the things that we ask them to do. I look forward to seeing schools gaining the awards.

We are continuing to improve Scotland's sporting facilities and have invested more than £70 million to deliver some world-class venues. Members will be aware that the First Minister announced today a new cashback for pitches fund of £3.15 million to help to install a Scotland-wide network of full-size 3G pitches for youth football and rugby. That is an example of where the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 is helping to support young people in areas that experience problems with antisocial behaviour and crime.

With more than 2,500 schools in Scotland, there is an opportunity to ensure that communities can benefit from year-round access to the facilities. Clearly, many schools excel at that. Members will be aware of our commitment to ensuring that at least half the proposed 150 community sports hubs will be located in schools.

The latest of the 114 hubs that are currently being developed is in Callander. The McLaren community sports hub will bring together McLaren high school, McLaren community leisure centre, Active Stirling and Stirling Council, along with more than 15 local sports clubs and will help to improve the sporting offer in Callander.

I think that we can go further. I want to explore with partners the possibility of reaching a position in which all secondary schools have the opportunity either to be a community sports hub or to have access to one. We will be discussing that as we take forward the youth sport strategy.

It always amazes me to hear that in Scotland more than 195,000 people volunteer within the 13,000 sports clubs, thereby helping to support the 900,000 registered members. Those are amazing statistics, but we want to build on that. The Commonwealth games provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make lasting improvements in Scottish sport and to bring wide-ranging benefits to individuals, businesses and communities throughout the nation. We are all aware of the fantastic part that was played by the Olympic games makers in the London Olympics; we must harness the enthusiasm of volunteers here to deliver an inspirational Commonwealth games to secure a long-lasting legacy.

I discussed volunteering at length at last week's Health and Sport Committee. I do not have time to go into all the details here, but a lot of very exciting activity is going on within our communities. However, we have a real opportunity to use the excitement of the Olympics and the Commonwealth games to do even more, which is why sportscotland is providing a package of further support, which includes regional development managers to work directly with clubs and governing bodies to help local clubs to grow and thrive. That work will continue beyond 2014 and will therefore be yet another example of how we are delivering a lasting legacy.

We already have a number of legacy programmes under way, which are using the games to inspire a generation of young people. Let me mention just a few. The youth legacy ambassador programme is engaging young people throughout Scotland in creating a positive and meaningful legacy for local communities. There are currently, across 25 local authorities, 83 youth legacy ambassadors who are fuelling community pride and passion in the games.

Game on Scotland, the national education programme for the Commonwealth games, is helping our children and young people to develop as responsible global citizens and will transport them to the heart of the games, providing a wide variety of rich learning experiences and opportunities.

We have the lead 2014 partnership, which harnesses the enthusiasm of our young people to help to create the next generation of young sport leaders, and through which 80 student deliverers were trained in each of the years 2011 and 2012, training around 800 pupils in schools in each of those years.

We are also working with NUS Scotland and the further and higher education sector to focus on making a positive impact on the future of young people through the wealth of volunteering and training opportunities that will be available in the run-up to the games.

Would it not be fantastic to continue that track record of hosting events by hosting the youth Olympics in 2018? We want to propel the youth Olympic games and the Olympic values across the globe, while providing the safe and warm welcome for which Scotland is renowned. Thanks to our proven ability to deliver and plan for world-class sporting events, the Glasgow games can focus on global youth outreach and we can project the youth Olympic games across the world, while inspiring the young people of Scotland to become champions in their lives. It is a tough competition, but the Scottish people have backed the bid in their thousands. That support is vital to persuading International Olympic Committee members of the

merits of our bid, as is the welcome cross-party support in this place.

We are grateful for that continued support as we get ever closer to decision day on 4 July in Lausanne. I fervently hope for a successful outcome; I am sure that members all hope that, along with me.

I have outlined my intention to publish the draft youth sport strategy in September and for that to be informed by the widest possible knowledge and experience. I hope to hear some new ideas today from members, but I would be very happy to involve members over the summer in that process and to bring the draft youth sport strategy back for members' comments.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the important role that sport plays in the lives of children and young people by helping to create a lifelong habit of being active; recognises the potential that youth sport can have in improving physical and mental wellbeing and establishing sporting success in Scotland; agrees that every effort should be made to harness the motivational potential of the Commonwealth Games in promoting youth sport; notes the Scottish Government's commitment to publish a draft youth sport strategy in September 2013, and recognises Glasgow's bid for the Youth Olympics in 2018 as evidence of the commitment to delivering a sporting legacy.

15:00

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): With just 407 days to go until the start of the 20th Commonwealth games in Glasgow, it is fitting that we take stock to consider whether we will achieve the legacy, particularly for our young people, that is so much part of our ambition for the games.

As someone who was closely involved at the very beginning of the planning for Glasgow 2014, I can tell members that, even before the decision to bid was made, we knew that there would have to be a lasting and measurable legacy from the games if we were to make the investment of time and money worth while. There were people then who said that a legacy of anything more than a few additional venues could not be achieved, but I believed then that they were wrong and I maintain that position to this day.

However, we recognised that we would achieve a legacy of improved health and physical fitness only if planning began the minute we made the decision to bid. In other words, the legacy would need to be delivered even if the bid was unsuccessful. I am pleased that the current Scottish Government has indicated that it also takes that approach, and I give it credit for that.

When I read the motion for today's debate, I was a little bit disappointed by its content—if the minister will forgive me—because it seems to

suggest that the Commonwealth games will motivate young people to get involved in sport. I am sure that the games will do that, but every year during Wimbledon the streets and parks are full of young people carrying tennis rackets, which are quickly consigned to a cupboard after the men's final. The Government's motion does not explain how it plans to harness that motivation to make sporting activity the norm rather than the exception.

That said, the minister's speech has gone a considerable way towards reassuring me, and I welcome what she said. The opportunity to contribute to the youth sport strategy, which will be published in September, will be helpful and will no doubt be taken up by interested members.

It is vital that we get this right, because the games provide an opportunity to influence a generation—and beyond—of young people to live healthy and fulfilled lives through sport; that opportunity must not be squandered. The investment of money, time and reputation will be repaid not just by Scottish success on the track or in the arena, but by a step change in physical activity levels in this country from now on. We know the difference that an active life makes to our health, but we must not discount the effect that it has on the quality of life or on the opportunities that it can open up to individuals and communities.

So how do we do that? Well, I probably agree entirely—just about—with the minister. In my view, we should begin in nursery schools. As the minister said, it is important that children learn to be physically literate: to run, to jump, to throw and to catch. To that short list, I would add “to swim”, which we should encourage at the earliest opportunity. Any skill that is learned early becomes second nature and is more likely to be carried into future life, so I am pleased to hear the minister say that we are to have a play strategy, too. Often, play is discounted as something that is just about fun, without its inherent benefits being considered. Some really good progress is being made in that area.

Speaking of education, I welcome the progress that has been made on achieving the physical education targets, but I must say that the targets are supposed to provide a minimum requirement. PE must be supplemented by other activity, if it is to have the desired effect.

We should also ensure that the minimum standard applies to school pupils who have a disability. Although some activities may need to be adjusted to take account of their requirements, disabled young people also need to be physically active. Research that has been carried out by Scottish Disability Sport suggests that disabled youngsters do not currently attain the recommended levels. That is just not good

enough. I hope that the youth sport strategy that the minister is due to publish will address disability sport.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit Scotstoun leisure centre to see some of the young people who take part in sports that are specifically designed for young people with disabilities. I have mentioned this in the chamber before in an entirely different context, but let me mention it again. We all know that participating in sport can be expensive, but the cost of a walking cycle for a disabled 10-year-old is more than £1,000, whereas a regular bike for a 10-year-old costs less than £200. That makes it clear just how expensive it is to encourage the involvement in sport and activity of disabled young people, who already experience other barriers in their daily lives.

The minister was quite right to identify that more work needs to be done to encourage the involvement of girls in sport. We know that the level at which girls participate in sport and activity drops off at around the age of 12, so it is welcome if additional effort is being put into encouraging girls to be active, at least, if not to be involved in sport.

If we ever doubted the importance of sport in relation to health, a quick look at the helpful briefing from the Scottish Sports Association would put us back on track. It includes some interesting statistics from the chief medical officers of the United Kingdom, who tell us that there is a strong correlation between regular physical activity and reductions in the risk of many health conditions, including a 20 to 35 per cent lower risk of cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease and stroke; a 30 to 40 per cent lower risk of metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes; and a 20 per cent lower risk of breast cancer.

Those are diseases with which Scotland is all too familiar. If the generation that follows us can, by remaining active, reduce the incidence of just those three conditions, it does not take much thought to appreciate the benefit to their lives that that could bring and the money that could be saved in the long term from the health budget. To my mind, investment in sport and physical activity is investment in preventative medicine.

The basic skills that I said should be learned by all in childhood must continue to be encouraged throughout a child's education and beyond. As a keen walker, I would be the first to say that it is not always necessary to have world-class facilities to stay active, but there are many sports for which facilities are necessary. That is particularly the case as people progress through the ranks, and there is no doubt that a well-trained, experienced and committed coach makes a real difference to a sporting career. Therefore, we must invest in facilities in schools and in communities.

In that respect, I heartily agree with the amendment of my Liberal Democrat colleagues. Indeed, I would go further and say that sportscotland should be involved in planning new schools because, over the years, the organisation has built up a wealth of experience on how facilities can be organised and run, and that expertise could usefully be harnessed.

I have lost count of the number of people who have told me that they took up coaching not because of their own interest in sport, but because their son or daughter wanted to take part in a sport that was not on offer in their area. The coaches who dedicate themselves to supporting young people in their communities must in turn be supported in their efforts. Becoming qualified and putting in the time can be an expensive business, so the idea of employers giving volunteers paid time off bears further consideration.

As the minister mentioned, school sport awards have an important role to play. I think that that idea will prove to be extremely popular in our communities. I sincerely hope, too, that the youth sport strategy will provide pathways for our young people and will join up the efforts of all the organisations that can help them along that path.

Some years ago, the idea of an entitlement to culture for every young person was developed but, unfortunately, it did not make it through the change in Government. I think that there is merit in suggesting that there should be an entitlement to sport and activity for our young people—something tangible to which they know they are entitled that is a legacy that they can take from the Commonwealth games.

Through clubgolf, we already offer all primary school children the opportunity to experience golf. Perhaps a similar system could be put in place for sport more generally that would give young people an entitlement that offers them the chance to have a broad but meaningful experience of sport and allows them to follow their own pathway to whatever level it happens to take them.

I welcome the minister's announcement about pitches and cashback for communities, but I have argued previously in Parliament that money that is raised from the cashback for communities scheme should be distributed such that the communities that are most affected by crime receive the greatest proportion of the money that is recouped from criminals. Those areas are also the areas where young people are least likely to have the opportunity to participate in sport, so it seems to me that we could better target the proceeds of crime at those communities, to ensure that all children have good experiences as they grow up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):
Draw your contribution to a close, please.

Patricia Ferguson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The 2011 Commonwealth youth games had a legacy plan, which was good to see. That will carry through to 2014, and I am delighted to hear about the good work that is being done by the legacy ambassadors and by others. However, it is important to remember that that work also links to the Glasgow 2018 youth Olympics bid and, as the minister said, it is now less than a month until we hear the announcement on that.

This is an exciting time for young people in Scotland to have an interest in sport and to be involved in sport, and I hope that our enthusiasm will help to motivate them to make a lifelong commitment to it.

I move amendment S4M-06921.2, to insert after second “youth sport”:

“and recognises that access to quality sporting facilities and trained coaches help to motivate and encourage continued participation in sport”.

15:10

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

This week, I had the pleasure of attending an international karate festival in Aberdeen run by the National Karate Federation. The event attracted some 200 athletes from home and abroad, and nearly 600 spectators were packed into a limited viewing area. I thoroughly enjoyed the display of high-quality karate, and I commend Mr Ronnie Watt OBE, who also holds the order of the rising sun for his work with martial arts, for devoting so much of his time and energy to making the event a resounding success. The event benefited charity, too, with a collection at the door for the Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association.

Let us compare and contrast that success, which was achieved with no financial assistance from outside sources, with the Scottish Government's performance on sport. In its 2007 manifesto, the Scottish National Party pledged

“To help Scottish children develop the habit of physical fitness we will ensure that every pupil has 2 hours of quality PE each week delivered by specialist PE teachers.”

However, it emerged in 2010 that only 35 per cent of primary schools and 17 per cent of secondary schools were providing two hours of PE a week. That led to another policy sidestep from the Scottish Government, which decided to change the focus—for secondary schools, at least—from two hours to two periods a week, and which set a target for achieving that by the 2014 Commonwealth games. The target may ultimately be achieved, but it is outrageous that even that modest ambition has taken a full seven years to be delivered.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way on that point?

Alex Johnstone: I am sure that the minister will get the opportunity to reply at the end.

The fact is that the Government just cannot get kids into sport for a paltry two hours a week, even where, using the historic concordat with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, it has the greatest potential influence. The motion is therefore an exercise—if members will pardon the pun—in anodyne self-congratulation.

In reality, there is grave concern that too much of the sports industry remains unregulated and that sportscotland is too concerned with introducing English-style coaching excellence regimes into elite sport, while doing too little to address the pseudo-commercial businesses that are left to indulge themselves in whatever sporting practices they see fit.

Sports coaches are so concerned about practices in some clubs that I was prompted to put three written questions to the minister last year about coaching standards and unregulated facilities. The answers disappointed me, as they did the coaches concerned, and they failed to address the real concerns about the low level of qualification and expertise required to start up a sports club.

One such example that has been shown to me is that of a franchise opportunity that involves the franchisee doing a five-day course that qualifies them to open their own sports club. I am sure that the majority of people would agree that five days appears to be an extremely short period of time to turn someone who may have little sporting experience into a fully qualified instructor, especially given the possibility of injuries to young athletes arising from poor-quality coaching.

I want greater participation in sport, which not only brings health benefits but teaches discipline and team working and comes with great socialising opportunities. Sports clubs, especially in rural areas, are extremely important for those reasons.

I am deeply concerned that, while NHS Scotland encourages parents to get their children active and into sport for the long-term benefit of our population, the education minister tinkers with the curriculum for excellence and the sports minister promises glossy strategies and programmes for the people while delivering only for a sporting elite in the hope that it might inspire others. The Scottish Government's record to date would hardly put it on the winner's podium. Considerably more can and must be done to encourage greater participation in sport.

It is also vital that the Scottish Government takes on board the concerns of highly qualified coaches about the lack of regulation among those who operate outside the system. The bottom line is that, when an individual or family decides to take up a sport, they must be able to have confidence that what is on offer is of suitable calibre and is taught appropriately.

Like everyone else in Scotland, I am very much looking forward to the Commonwealth games and I am certain that they will be a great success. There is no doubt that the investment in facilities will benefit young Scots for a long time to come, but the greatest service to the people of Scotland would be a regulated and supported sporting pathway, starting in schools and being progressed via a properly regulated sports industry that is fit for a modern Scotland. If the Scottish Government is capable of delivering that, it will have delivered a legacy that will benefit young Scots for years to come.

I move amendment S4M-06921.3, to insert after "Scotland":

"; notes with concern however that, six years on, the Scottish Government has still not delivered on its pledge to ensure that all school pupils have access to two hours of PE per week".

15:16

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am happy to speak in this useful debate on youth sport. The starting point for me was when I was reading my papers for tomorrow morning's Public Audit Committee, in which the committee will consider the "Commonwealth Games 2014 Progress report 2: Planning for the delivery of the XXth Games", which is one of the standard reports that the committee gets.

The report specifically mentions legacy and I am sure that the minister is familiar with the contents of the following paragraph from the Auditor General:

"There is no specific funding for legacy but the strategic partners have aligned their existing initiatives".

She goes on to say:

"In the current economic climate other public and private organisations may find it difficult to invest to achieve a long-term legacy."

That suggests the challenge that there is in relation to legacy. For there to be significant and long-term progress in youth sport, the Government, all the agencies and local government will have to make a long-term commitment to face the challenges.

That is why I wanted to pick up the point about schools in our amendment. Schools are where the debate about the long term should be. As the

minister said, the Government is investing considerably in a new school building programme. In many ways, it is doing no more than previous Governments did, but that is as it should be. One or two councillors of no political persuasion have observed to me that the approach is in, in effect, private finance initiative by the back door—but that is for another day and another debate.

Patricia Ferguson made a point about sportscotland. Surely we should be using our leading agency, with all the expertise that it has put together since 2000, when it produced a paper on the school estate being widened out for community sport in its "Guide to community use of school sports facilities". Sportscotland should be integral to the process, but from my quick bit of research into the way in which the Scottish Futures Trust is building schools, and the way in which the hubcos around Scotland are acting, that does not appear to be the case. As Patricia Ferguson mentioned, sportscotland is not therefore directly involved, which is a mistake.

If the minister takes one idea from me for the strategy that she will publish in the autumn, it would be to change that approach. After all, the organisation is currently carrying out a research study on sports facilities across the school estate in Scotland. The research is being done by Sheffield Hallam University, which is due to produce its findings this summer. I would have thought that that would be an integral part of assessing where we are and what needs to happen.

It is one thing to make the very welcome announcement about cashback for pitches as the minister did—or was it the First Minister?—but if we look closely at what the Scottish Futures Trust is doing on school buildings, we find out that it does not directly involve sportscotland, as I believe it should, in an assessment of what the correct facilities should be for the development of sport in schools.

The Parliament considered the issue through its Health and Sport Committee's pathways into sport inquiry back in 2009. The committee recommended that sportscotland should be a statutory consultee for any proposed development of a school. That might be an academic point, because a statutory consultee will be consulted at the end of a process rather than the beginning. I would prefer that, instead of following that recommendation, the minister ensured that sportscotland is involved not only in the future but from now on—I cannot believe that it is not happening now, although I have heard from the horse's mouth that it is not.

In addition, a closer relationship with the Scottish Futures Trust should immediately be put in place for what is our premier sports body.

Sportscotland is also responsible for implementing the active schools policy that started under the previous Government and has rightly been carried on by the present Government. I understand that the sportscotland board will consider an extension of the policy in the coming months. If we believe in the active schools programme, logically we should take forward active consideration of how sportscotland works with local government to achieve the right facilities in our schools.

The minister referred to community sports hubs. I forget her figures and she will correct me if I have them wrong, but my figures are that 75 per cent of the hubs are expected to be in the school estate. If the minister is aiming for all to be in the estate, I completely agree with that as it is eminently sensible and the way to go. However, we are some way away from some but not all education authorities—to say nothing of some headteachers—accepting that schools are a complete community asset. From personal experience, I know that many still consider their schools to be a school first and a community asset second.

Shona Robison: Just to clarify, 50 per cent of the community sports hubs, which is 150, will be within secondary schools. However, we are looking at what happens next, and discussions are taking place in relation to the youth sport strategy on every secondary school being a hub or having access to one.

Tavish Scott: I am happy to accept that point and agree with that approach.

The Scottish Sports Association has given a briefing to members for this debate in which it highlights the importance of places in the same way:

“school fields, pools, halls and gyms are Scotland’s great untapped sports resource - if we can open up existing and new schools every community can be active.”

That seems to me to be the essence of what we should be achieving to ensure that we have a lasting legacy for the future.

I move amendment S4M-06921.1, to insert after second “youth sport”:

“; notes research from Join In highlighting the ongoing volunteering efforts of many Olympic Games makers; further notes the increased appetite among the public to get involved in volunteering, which, it believes, demonstrates one important way in which major sporting events can deliver a legacy benefiting grassroots sports; recognises the importance of ensuring that all new primary and secondary schools built through the Scottish Futures Trust include sports facilities that are widely and easily available to the public”.

15:22

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to be speaking in support of the minister’s motion. I believe that the Government has ambitious plans to create a lifelong habit of sporting activity, with all the social and health benefits that accompany a more physically active lifestyle.

The notable success of Scottish athletes in the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics has helped to raise the profile of sport across Scotland already, but we also have a fantastic opportunity for the whole country in next year’s Commonwealth games not only to encourage talented young sportsmen and women to succeed but to encourage all our young people to be more physically active and to see participation in sport as something for them all. I therefore warmly welcome the Government’s commitment to deliver a youth sports strategy.

We know that physical activity is important and that around 48 per cent of Scottish adults actively undertake the recommended minimum weekly levels of physical activity. However, 73 per cent of our children meet the minimum levels, a figure which includes an increase in the percentage of girls doing 60 minutes of moderate activity every day, which is encouraging. That is important since, as the minister said earlier, physical inactivity contributes to 2,500 deaths a year, which has a significant financial cost to our NHS. Indeed, it would be fair to say that increasing their levels of physical activity is one of the most effective measures that anyone can take to help protect their long-term health prospects. It is key to our preventative health agenda.

I want to reflect on what some of the national policy direction looks like at a local level, since it is at that level that young people can most readily engage in sport. In Dumfries and Galloway, the local authority has integrated its active schools and community sports programmes, so that, where there was once a division between what was provided in a school setting and what happened in the wider community, there is now a joined-up approach.

Active school officers are responsible for sporting activity from pre-school fun to working with teenagers and community sports clubs. I am advised that that arrangement is the first of its sort in Scotland, and I hope that the minister will consider it when preparing the draft strategy.

Using that structure, Dumfries and Galloway is already embracing the spirit of the Olympics and the Commonwealth games through its active games, which took place for the first time last year. Active games, which are badged “A Games for Dumfries and Galloway”, are linked to both the

London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 legacies. The 2012 active games saw 450 children compete in eight sports across three venues, and the events received funding support from EventScotland, Legacy 2014 and high-profile local sponsors. The games were designed to involve all of a geographically widespread region, with every cluster of primary schools competing in the qualifying events and heats. This year, children will compete in athletics, cycling, badminton, swimming, gymnastics, netball, tag rugby and swimming. The final will be held on Saturday 7 September in Dumfries, and I very much hope that it will eclipse last year's success.

Dumfries and Galloway is not only off to a good start with its active games. Working with sportscotland, the local authority is rolling out 3G artificial sports pitches in strategic locations, all of which have an element of community sports club involvement in the administration and operation of the facilities as well as in their use.

The use of school facilities, to which the minister referred, is also taking shape. For example, the new Dalbeattie learning campus is likely to have a climbing wall built into its specifications because there is currently no such facility anywhere in the region. Community use will be specifically designed into the new campus.

In addition to all that, Dumfries and Galloway has been establishing itself as a destination for international competition in its own right. The Dumfries ice bowl, which is an absolutely fantastic facility, will host the world mixed doubles curling championship and world senior men's and women's curling championships next year. More than 30 senior teams from around the world are expected to compete, along with a similar number of mixed doubles teams.

The same venue will host the under-20 world ice hockey championship this year and the under-18 world ice hockey championship next March, having successfully hosted the women's under-18 world championship qualification tournament in October last year—an event that I remember very well, as I was there for the opening game. I am sure that all those responsible for the hard work that has secured the growing reputation as a venue for international events would be pleased to welcome the minister at one of those events, should her diary allow it.

That is an important achievement for Dumfries and Galloway and one that I fully support. It is also important because, like the Commonwealth games, it brings elite-level sport closer to home, which is important for our young people.

I believe that encouraging our young people across the board into greater participation in sport is a valuable and worthwhile aim. It will be good

for our health and wellbeing and will show clear benefits in long-term health prospects for the population. It is also fun, and I cannot think of anything better than encouraging our children to have fun.

There is good work under way already. The examples that I have highlighted demonstrate that that is the case. We are approaching 2014 with solid local activity already enthusing our children and young people. I very much hope that Glasgow's bid to hold the youth Olympics in 2018 is successful on 4 July. I believe that that is a positive starting point and I am happy to support the motion in Shona Robison's name.

15:29

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, given the national significance of next year's Commonwealth games.

I see this as the perfect time to highlight the great work done in my region by North Ayrshire Council, which, under previous Labour administrations, put in place many programmes and initiatives that have benefited individuals across the local area.

North Ayrshire Council, KA Leisure and NHS Ayrshire and Arran have placed an emphasis on jointly providing opportunities for everybody in North Ayrshire to be active, involved and inspired. With more than 50 sporting clubs in North Ayrshire, it was worrying that, in 2008, the local authority held a worse-than-average position in relation to 38 of the 61 indicators of the health and wellbeing profile.

In 2010, KA Leisure launched the fit for the future strategy to meet the national outcomes in the national performance framework. More importantly, the strategy aims to tackle health inequalities, especially given that the estimated cost of physical inactivity in Scotland for 2010-11 was £94.1 million. That money would be better spent on early intervention, as prevention is better than any medicine.

I call on the Government to ensure that it is taking steps to support future generations into success in youth sport, the legacies of the Olympic and 2014 Commonwealth games, and the legacy that can be provided if Glasgow is successful in winning its bid for the 2018 youth games. However, there has to be more than a legacy for Glasgow; the Government must take steps to ensure that the legacy can be enjoyed across Scotland. We must ensure that my constituents who live only 40 minutes from Glasgow can benefit from the governmental spending that Glasgow will get. What legacy arrangements has the Government put in place for other areas to

ensure that the benefits extend far beyond the location of the games?

In 2012, I noted that the sports minister announced the funding for a national sports centre, with an investment of £25 million. I was delighted to support my Labour colleagues on the council with plans to place a bid for a football academy to be established in Largs at the existing Inverclyde sports centre, especially given its links with world-renowned football managers such as Sir Alex Ferguson and José Mourinho. However, it seems that the Government's change in the criteria from a football academy to a national performance centre means that Largs is no longer a contender, even though officials in North Ayrshire Council had begun to prepare a bid. It seems that the real reason why the council was dissuaded from placing a bid is that the decision had been taken out of its hands by the continual moving of the goalposts—if members will excuse the pun—in altering the criteria.

Shona Robison: Does the member not welcome the fact that more sports will be involved in the national performance centre rather than the centre just being about football? The sporting world in Scotland certainly welcomes that fact; surely the member welcomes it, too.

Margaret McDougall: Yes, but it would have been useful if that had been clear in the criteria from the outset.

The three sites that are now being considered for the academy—in Edinburgh, Dundee and Stirling—are all on the east coast or are central. As much as I welcome the investment for any future sporting heroes whom we may produce, it is disappointing that the project will join a long list of sporting investments lost to the west of Scotland.

I am honoured to represent an area that has many successful junior teams and clubs that are run by the hard work of thousands of dedicated volunteers. I am delighted when I hear of their sporting successes and when they have been successful in gaining Big Lottery Fund funding, but I know that it is a constant struggle for those clubs to remain solvent, despite their hard work and dedication. The continuation of those clubs and the opportunities that they provide for young people across the region often depend on the capacity of their members to complete funding applications. Perhaps the minister can give some thought to providing support to help people to complete funding applications.

It is true that many well-established organisations, such as Kilwinning Community Sports Club and the Evolution Skatepark in Stevenston, have become social enterprises to try to become self-sufficient, but they are still largely reliant on grants to update and enhance their facilities for

members. I call on the Government to consider putting more support into aiding the viability of local clubs that provide sporting opportunities and inspiration to our young people every day, particularly in areas where there are clear health inequalities, such as North Ayrshire. We need to ensure that grass-roots sport funding is both constant and available, because to truly ensure a future legacy there needs to be real and long-term investment in everyday sporting opportunities.

I look forward to the publication of the youth sport strategy in September this year.

15:35

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I welcome the forthcoming Scottish Government strategy on youth sport. I also welcome the fact that it will be a draft strategy, which will give all interested stakeholders the opportunity to work constructively to develop the strategy in a collegiate way. That is the right way in which to proceed.

We all want to ensure that the potential legacy from Glasgow's Commonwealth games is maximised, as it should significantly increase youngsters' interest in getting involved in sport. However, just as significant, as the motion states, is that we want to create a lifelong habit of being active. It is not just about getting young people active; it is about keeping them active. If I have time later, I will say more about that.

Undoubtedly, investment in sporting infrastructure and funds for specific initiatives to support schools and sports clubs to get many more young people active are crucial. I will note one or two of the investment priorities alongside community sport hubs, which deliver a significant cash saving to many clubs that work together. The £7.4 million capital spending budget to transform local sports facilities throughout Scotland is money that local clubs can access, and the £10 million legacy 2014 active places fund has already awarded cash to 24 community projects. Those are two examples of funding being leveraged in.

I want to talk about how we should direct future investment. We need a full audit to determine where there are lower levels of sporting participation among young people. Just as important is how we tackle the problem that exists. Is it an issue around volunteers or the range of sports clubs and sporting opportunities that are available? Is it a lack of access to qualified coaches? Is it a facilities issue? Is it to do with the cost of access? Is it down to the fact that there is a weak sporting culture in some areas? Those are potential barriers to participation in sport, and we must have that information before we can direct funds at tackling the issues through the

opportunities provided by the Commonwealth games.

We need a baseline against which to measure any future success in terms of sporting participation and, crucially, to inform future investment. As part of that baseline to inform future investment, we should consider how we can prioritise investment in areas of particular deprivation and areas with particularly poor health outcomes. Unfortunately, those are often the same areas, but those are two clear criteria for the direction of funding to get young people more physically active.

There have been some really good signs. For example, there has been an investment of £2.2 million in developing a paddlesports centre at Pinkston in Glasgow, with £1 million coming from the Scottish Government. That crucial initiative is driving regeneration in a deprived area. Just as important, a network of youth clubs in the area are now forming their own canoe club to get physically active. Those are opportunities that would not otherwise be available to the people of Maryhill, Springburn and beyond. I am delighted by the joint work that Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government are doing on the bid to host the youth Olympics in north Glasgow. We will see 400 new social rented houses delivered in that part of the city because of the Scottish Government's commitment, irrespective of whether the youth Olympics bid is successful. We all want the bid to be successful, but it is important that that investment is leveraged in irrespective of that.

I will say a little bit about the cost of accessing sports facilities. I recently met the football club North Kelvin United, which told me that it was trying to keep costs as low as possible. However, even if the club charges only £3 or £4 a week for young people, the cost for a family with two young boys to get them actively involved in sport can add up to £10 a week if they are bought a can of juice as well, and a lot of families on benefits do not have that money. We must think carefully about that. I give credit to that club because, for the first time, it is launching a girls' football team. We all want young girls to get more physically active.

We need to consider how we support success in deprived communities, where there are examples of sports clubs that are doing well, and how we help them. It is incumbent on me to mention the formidable Alex Richardson, from the Gladiator weightlifting project, who gave quite dramatic evidence to the Health and Sport Committee. He has informed me that, in the recent championships in Austria, young kids from the east end of Glasgow won two gold, four silver, and four bronze medals and that others were highly placed. He pointed out that, should the 2018 youth Olympics bid be successful, many of those young people will

qualify for it. However, those young people should be taking part in the 2018 youth Olympics irrespective of where it is held. Therefore, my plea is that sportscotland, the Scottish Government and others work strategically to ensure that young people who could be sporting icons in their local communities can excel at the highest level. In Gladiator, we perhaps have an example of how that could be done.

My final point concerns the oldies. We want young people to get physically active, but they eventually get old. I therefore suggest that Glasgow should put in a bid for the 2021 world masters games for the over-35s. Young people will—we hope—reach 35 at some point in their lives, so I hope that the minister will back that bid. I have written to Glasgow City Council about that, too—I have asked that it sees those games as part of the legacy to keep people physically active throughout their lives—so that we can work in partnership to deliver for the city and for Scotland.

15:41

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

Dundee has been campaigning for nearly two years to bring the national football academy to our city—the ideal chance to encourage youth participation in sport in our city. We expect a decision this summer. The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport has passed responsibility for the decision to the Deputy First Minister, so we look forward to Nicola Sturgeon's decision.

Dundee's bid, which is excellent, meets all the stage 1 criteria and beyond. Dundee City Council is working hard to secure the academy for our city at the final stage this summer. Dundee's competition is from the other two finalists, which are Heriot-Watt University and the University of Stirling. I was keen to find out how much capital investment each of the three finalists had had over the years since devolution. However, I was told that the Scottish Government does not hold information on how much capital or sports investment has gone into each constituency or postcode.

Shona Robison: It might have helped had Jenny Marra named the right constituency. In her request, she named Dundee City East; she should have named Dundee City West, which is where the NPC would be based were the bid to be successful. Perhaps the member needs to be a bit more careful when drafting her questions.

Jenny Marra: I understand that the Scottish Government does not hold investment figures for Dundee City East or Dundee City West, or any other constituency in the country. However, the Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport will

know as well as I do that we could pull together the information and make educated estimates of the amount of support that each community has received. Stirling and Heriot-Watt universities have received millions of pounds of central Government investment, but the minister will be acutely aware, as I am, of the general lack of investment in Dundee and in the area where we have proposed that the football academy be located, at the back of Lochee.

The strength of the Dundee bid is that it is a community bid. It is backed by everyone whom I speak to in the city—I am sure that the Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport would agree that she would struggle to find someone in our city who does not want the football academy to be located there. Six thousand people have taken the time to sign up to the campaign, and there is cross-party support from Labour and the Scottish National Party.

The campaign and bid have come from our community—sports clubs all over the city have asked for sign-up sheets for players, coaches, grans, granddads, aunties and uncles. Our proposed site is in an area that is badly in need of economic regeneration. Our bid does not have the advantage of pre-existing university facilities to build around, but that was intentional because we want Scotland's football academy and sporting performance centre to be located in a community that would feel its benefits the most.

To build around an already sophisticated sports complex at either of the two competing universities, benefiting an already privileged university community, might be a missed opportunity; to use foresight and commit to encouraging sport where it is most needed, in communities that have high levels of unemployment and deprivation, is an exciting and tempting decision for the Deputy First Minister. She could decide to put Scotland's new sports academy in a community that is crying out for change and desperately in need of investment. We in the community—in our thousands—have asked the Scottish Government to put its confidence and trust in Lochee and Dundee.

Dundee has been Scotland's forgotten city for too long. The Scottish Government's current commitment to Dundee is welcome, but it is not enough. When I ask in the Parliament about jobs for Dundee, John Swinney tells me that Dundee is getting the Victoria and Albert museum. When I ask about access to music tuition in Dundee, Fiona Hyslop tells me that Dundee is getting the V and A.

I hope that the sports minister agrees with me and with many people in our city that as wonderful as the V and A project will be for Dundee, it is not enough to address a long-term lack of investment

in our city and not enough to inspire a generation of youth sport participation. The football academy would be a major step in the right direction. It would encourage a new generation of sporting heroes in our city and it would provide a much-needed economic boost for Lochee and Dundee.

15:46

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in a debate that is about celebrating and building on Scotland's success in youth sport. I will focus on how youth sport is being supported in the south-west of Scotland, although I should say to my constituents that anything that I say will only scratch the surface of what is going on in the region.

Dumfries and Galloway has benefited from the cashback for communities fund. There has been Government investment of £1 million in three third-generation pitches, in Annan, Dumfries and Stranraer. Annan Athletic Football Club unveiled its new 3G pitch—the first of its kind in Dumfries and Galloway—in December 2012. The pitch was funded by sportscotland and Dumfries and Galloway Council, as well as the Government. The Scottish Football Association played a key role in advising the Government about where to allocate funding. I have been to Annan Athletic's ground, and the pitch is certainly being well used for community activities and youth development. Annan Athletic has first-class community engagement, and the new surface will facilitate a massive increase in capacity, enabling all sections of the club to grow.

Easy as it is to get carried away talking about football after Scotland's recent win against Croatia, I do not want to concentrate on football. I want to talk about a sport in which Scotland regularly reaches world-class heights: curling.

There is disagreement about the origins of the sport. In his 1884 book, "Curling: the Ancient Scottish Game", Dr James Taylor wrote:

"There is good reason to believe that Curling originated in Scotland, probably in the south-western district of the country, which has always been its stronghold."

However, I am aware that the Netherlands and Belgium have a strong claim as the home of curling.

What cannot be disputed is Scotland's pre-eminence in the game and the south-west of Scotland's disproportionate contribution to getting Scotland to that position. Scottish women are world champions at the moment, and the team's skipper, Eve Muirhead, is certainly in the running to be Scottish sports personality of the year.

Eve Muirhead curls with the Dunkeld Curling Club, which is based in Pitlochry. Less well known

is that her teammates all hail from the south-west of Scotland. They include: Anna Sloan, who is 18 and comes from Lockerbie, who plays third for Eve's junior rink and skips her own ladies rink; Vicki Adams, who plays second, who is 23 and comes from Stranraer; and Claire Hamilton, who is also 23 and is from Dumfries, and who currently plays lead for the Scottish champion rink. Hamilton was a member of the Anna Sloan rink that won the gold medal for Great Britain in the 2011 winter universiade. Hamilton played for the team's alternate and also played third for Sloan that year.

The girls are looking forward to the winter Olympics in 2014 in Sochi in Russia. Scotland, England and Wales all compete separately in international curling. By an agreement between the curling federations of those three home nations, only Scotland can score qualification points on behalf of Great Britain—because, obviously, we are the best. Team GB has qualified for the 2014 Olympics and is currently standing third in the world.

This morning, I was pleased to receive an email from Anna Sloan of the women's champion team, in which she reflected on the importance of good facilities in building her expertise. Anna trains at home from Wednesday to Saturday, mainly at DGOne and the David Keswick centre in Dumfries. In the lead-up to the Olympics she will be based in Stirling during the winter. Both she and her teammate Claire Hamilton said that their success in curling was due to their families and to the tradition in the south-west. She said that it seemed only natural that she curled; all her cousins did, too. She began her training at the Lockerbie ice rink, which reopened this year after receiving a sportscotland investment of £214,000 to enhance its facilities.

That shows the worth of investing in tradition. There is a tradition of curling in south-west Scotland, probably in the same way that there is a tradition of cross-country skiing in Norway or of long-distance running in the Horn of Africa. Therefore, I would welcome the minister's assurance that we will also invest in our traditional strengths here in Scotland by considering the inclusion of curling in the draft youth sports strategy.

The motion and amendments rightly draw attention to the Commonwealth games and their legacy. I want to make mention of some of the world-class winter sports events that will take place in the south-west next year, on which my colleague Aileen McLeod has already touched. In April and May 2014 the Dumfries ice bowl will host the curling world championship mixed doubles and the curling world championship senior men and women's events. Those events are expected to attract at least 7,000 visitors to Dumfries next year

and will help to build on Dumfries ice bowl's vision of striving to be the leading ice sport venue in Scotland. The ice bowl has recently seen considerable upgrading to its curling rink and its stones. It is also home to the Solway Sharks ice hockey team—the current English national league north division cup winners and division 2 champions—which has won 10 major titles since 1997.

Aileen McLeod spoke about the 2012 active games. I am delighted that the ice bowl next year will add to that, not just with curling but with the under-18 and under-20 ice hockey male championships.

I was delighted this year to attend an event that encourages local people to volunteer for ice bowl events. Those volunteering roles will include school visits, school liaison and coaching.

Curling is coming home to the south-west of Scotland next year and I am sure that everyone in the chamber will welcome that.

15:53

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I am delighted to speak about Scottish sporting success and the Scottish Government's aspirations for the nation's sporting future. With the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup due to arrive in Scotland in 2014, the issues of sport and of achieving a sporting legacy are of particular importance. It is widely hoped that those elite sporting events will inspire and encourage Scotland's youth to participate in a variety of sporting activities, thus raising social capital and benefiting communities and society as a whole.

In a bid to highlight the potential for greater sporting participation, the Scottish Government has initiated measures that seek to attract youths from all socioeconomic backgrounds to sports and physical activities that they might not otherwise have considered. The Scottish Government is developing the youth sport strategy, which is designed to encourage young people to partake in physical exercise by making sport accessible and enjoyable.

The young people's sport panel is to be a key contributor to that youth sport strategy. The panel comprises 16 young people and is formed through a partnership between sportscotland and Young Scot. It has two principal objectives: to influence and shape the future of sport in Scotland and to raise its profile. The panel hopes to harness current sporting excitement to motivate and encourage young Scots to participate by highlighting existing opportunities to those who may be unaware of the diverse sporting activities available to them.

Further, the Scottish Government is a champion of physical education in schools and has demonstrated its commitment to youth sport and fitness through two core initiatives. The pre-school children's play strategy is in development, and the Scottish Government initiated the go2play scheme in 2012. For children of primary and secondary school age, the Scottish Government aims to increase the frequency of physical education lessons to approximately two hours per academic week. It supports the implementation of that initiative with £5.8 million of funding over 2012-13 and 2013-14.

In a bid to maximise youth potential, more than 900 pupils from throughout Scotland are to participate in the youth volunteering and leadership programme, lead 2014. That programme, delivered through collaboration between the Youth Sport Trust, sportscotland and Glasgow 2014—the Commonwealth games organising committee—has been designed to encourage young people to become sporting ambassadors, and enhance skills that could be utilised in other areas of their lives. The skills gained from such participation could be invaluable attributes when they enter the labour market.

Youth volunteering opportunities such as those that are offered by lead 2014 reinforce the excellent work that is done in the community sport hubs, of which there are two in my constituency, and through the active schools network. Indeed, volunteers are an integral part of the sporting infrastructure, with 150,000 volunteers currently involved in sport in Scotland. The development of youth volunteers is vital to the continued existence of that infrastructure.

The success of the cashback for communities scheme, which was launched in 2007, must be stressed if we are to celebrate Scotland's success in youth sport. The contribution of the scheme to sport and sports facilities is by no means insignificant, with £8 million invested in sport alone thus far and a further £16.7 million committed to projects through to 2014. That initiative is unique to Scotland. By using money recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and investing it in community programmes and facilities, largely for the benefit of young people, it tackles social exclusion and attempts to re-engage disaffected youths in education and promote health and wellbeing, primarily in areas that have been affected by crime and antisocial behaviour.

The scheme funds partnerships with Scottish sporting associations to deliver projects in all local authority areas in Scotland. The programmes offered are designed to be accessible to all, irrespective of race, class, gender, economic circumstances and physical ability. They are also designed to be individually developmental, with

emphasis on the changing of behaviour and attitudes, as well as on improving personal and physical skills.

In the 2012 report into the cashback Scottish athletics programme, the most popular response when organisers attempted to discern what difference the programme had made to the lives of the 8,000 young people who took part was "stopping getting into trouble." That response highlights the requirement for such schemes. Cashback provides young people with activities to keep them socialised and engaged with the community and society as a whole.

It is hoped that the long-term outcomes of the cashback for communities programme will include young people becoming successful learners with improved life chances. Indeed, recent evidence has found that there is a link between sporting participation and an improvement in educational attainment. Therefore, sport can be used to engage young people, especially those who face further social exclusion as a result of poor educational achievement.

The Scottish Football Association schools of football programme, which is supported by cashback, attempts to re-engage such young people in areas of social deprivation. The programme has observed progress in student attendance, behaviour, academic attainment and motivation. Other sporting programmes supported by cashback have witnessed similar results. Thus, it is clear that sport can be used to prevent any future social exclusion of Scotland's youth.

I congratulate the Glasgow youth Olympics bid team on the positive impression that it has made on the International Olympic Committee's youth Olympic games evaluation commission. Scotland is one of three countries shortlisted to host the youth Olympics in 2018. If the games were to be secured for 2018, that would create further opportunity to progress the legacy of the 2014 events.

15:59

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I welcome the chance to contribute to this debate. It is important that we do all that we can to develop a passion for sport in our young people.

It was an Austrian industrial manager, Johann Rosenzopf, who suggested that we should have a youth Olympics. That was a response to growing global concerns about childhood obesity and falling youth participation in sport. I will not repeat the many comments that colleagues have made about the health benefits of being active and about preventative spend. It is sheer common sense to invest in sport at this time.

It is important that we encourage a passion for sport among our young people, so we have to do all that we can to ensure that they have opportunities to find the sport that is right for them. If someone is passionate about a sport, it is more likely that they will exercise. They will want to practise and play the games that will make them better at their sport. They will be moving rather than sitting. Some sports require more running than others, but all require some level of activity.

Involvement in sport also encourages social interaction. Young people spend time developing relationships with team mates. They might meet people from different schools, different workplaces and different areas—people they might not come across otherwise. Young people learn to work together. Sport is fun, yet they have a goal. It stops our young people constantly telling us that they are bored. It gets them away from screens and gives them something positive to do. It teaches many life skills, too: time management; getting something such as their kit ready; and goal-oriented thinking. It lets them see that if they work and practise, they can achieve something. Those transferable skills can be applied to exams, learning skills in trades and so on.

Sport helps young people to de-stress. They can forget about school and the pressure of exams and they become mindful of what they are doing in the moment. If someone is learning the high jump, for example, they cannot be thinking about their homework or the other pressures in their life. That is healthy for our young people. Their self-esteem develops, too, through encouragement of and praise for their efforts. Whether they are experts or not, they learn that, if they strive, they can improve. That empowers them and develops a positive, healthy attitude.

As I have said before, it is important that we give children every opportunity to try out a wide variety of sports, whether that is free running, BMX or mountain biking—it might be something away from the main stream. I would like the Scottish Government to ask young people what they would like to see in the youth sport strategy and what the barriers and incentives are. Bob Doris spoke about the costs to families. Accessing an athletics track, buying some spikes and so on may be beyond some people's incomes—although I know that my local club has a second-hand policy whereby people hand in gear, and we should encourage that. However, there are opportunities in our daily lives to encourage young people to be active. The bikeability scheme whereby every child in Scotland should learn to cycle is important, but we are still relying on volunteers to come forward; we are relying on parents. It is the same with coaching.

Last week, Edinburgh hosted its traditional annual interscholastics, but not every school in the city had a team. I would like to know why, because young people are being deprived of an opportunity. If schools are relying on one teacher who is simply unavailable on that day, we have to ensure that there is a fall-back. I would like a basic commitment from local authorities that all schools will compete in the interschool competitions in their area, and if they do not, we should ask why.

It is fair to say that we are a sports-mad country, but I would like to see more people move from spectator to participator. This year, we are sandwiched between the Olympics last year and the Commonwealth games next year. We have the world athletics championships in August, and I am sure that we will see some of our excellent young Scottish athletes, such as Eilidh Child, who has already won a gold and a silver medal at the European indoor championships earlier this year, and Lynsey Sharp, the European gold medallist. They will have a chance to develop and become household names before we all have an opportunity to see them in Glasgow next year. That will have an impact. Positive role models are part of the picture of encouraging more people to take part in sport.

I welcome Glasgow's bid for the youth Olympics. It has certainly been well received in the press, and rightly so. I state also my support for Edinburgh's bid to become the site of the national performance centre. The bid has much to commend it: the site would be close to some of the less affluent city sights, which would be very welcome.

I also support Bob Doris's call for Glasgow to host the 2021 world masters games. If the bid is successful, I will ensure that I am fit to participate—no pressure there.

The amendments have much to commend them. Two hours of PE in primary school is the bare minimum that we should be considering; and high school pupils need more than two periods. High school is the point at which PE traditionally loses young people, particularly young women. I would like there to be a focus on having much more time than that. I believe that the minister realises that two periods is not sufficient.

I welcome the minister's comments on play. If we encourage play, we encourage physical literacy and self-confidence and we make it more likely that our young people will go into sport.

On the youth sports strategy, I would like us to ensure that Government bodies have funding for coaches. We are still too short of them. There should be a voucher system to enable young people to try different sports—I recommend that members consider the clubgolf model and the

work that Triathlon Scotland is doing. I would like the Government to make a commitment to ensure that every child in Scotland learns to swim by a certain age—I am not an expert, so I will not suggest an age, but we should find out the optimal age by which a child should learn to swim. We would not want our children to leave school without being able to read and write; let us make it the same for swimming.

I suggest that we organise a cross-sports coaching conference at which we can hear from the people—volunteers, largely—who support our athletes. Finally, there should also be a basic commitment from local authorities.

16:06

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to debate the positive issue of supporting a sporting nation, particularly as I am a member of the Parliament's Health and Sport Committee.

I want to start my speech by talking about what sport means to people who take part in it. Sport is something that we can all do, be it by taking a walk down the Royal Mile to Parliament in the morning, having a run around Strathclyde Park in Motherwell or making a visit to our local gym. The benefits of that type of sport and others are numerous, including improved physical and mental wellbeing, which has a number of positive knock-on effects. The benefits of sport and leisure cannot be ignored, and I am therefore delighted to note that the Scottish Government will publish a youth sport strategy later in the year. I hope that it will outline and enshrine the values and methods of sporting participation, which is of great importance to future generations. Actually, in the sunshine yesterday, my grandson was in a swimming pool—I say to Alison Johnstone that it is happening.

I want to highlight two examples of good practice and hard work in my region. The active schools network aims to improve motivation and attitudes among children and young people and, in doing so, to increase their achievements in school and their contribution to the community. It does so through sport and increased physical activity and has the added effect of increasing the number of young people who become youth leaders. The initiative is an example of good practice and helps to meet one of the targets for the Scottish Government and, more generally, this Parliament, in that it creates strong sporting foundations at pre-school level and creates physical education provision in primary and secondary schools.

My second example of good practice is the good work of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth games youth legacy ambassadors. I highlight in particular

the work of Scott Lamond, April Crane, Craig Rutherford, Julie Dobbin, Stacey Smith and Jordan Linden—six North Lanarkshire ambassadors who are working hard to promote the legacy of the games and who are ensuring that the message about healthy living and participation in sport, as well as culture, is promoted in the run-up to the games and, indeed, after the games.

Scott Lamond and Jordan Linden opened the get active Lanarkshire event at Strathclyde Park last weekend. The event was aimed at promoting the get active message to young people and all of the people of Lanarkshire. The ambassadors' role is supported by the Scottish Government and Young Scot, highlighting a commitment to ensuring that the Commonwealth games are an outstanding success and that there is a lasting legacy from Glasgow 2014.

I welcome the creation of community sport hubs in local authorities throughout the country. Last week, I complimented the chief executive of sportscotland on his vision. I also complimented the minister on the work that is being carried out. I want more sports hubs. There is one located in Bellshill in my region but I would like more.

Nowadays, community sports facilities are often built in conjunction with a new high school or a new primary school. That is a good idea. It puts across a message to young people that from a grass-roots level, sport and education—two cornerstones of a healthy lifestyle—are interlinked.

I welcome the Scottish Government's vision in the creation of at least 150 community sport hubs across all Scottish local authorities. That action, along with others, will help to deliver a sporting legacy fit for a generation.

Glasgow has placed a bid to host the youth Olympics in 2018 and has been shortlisted. Along with other members, I await with excitement the decision on the host city in 23 days' time. I am backing the bid and I look forward to hearing the decision—a decision that I hope will be in Glasgow's favour and will continue Scotland's success.

I compliment all volunteers who take part in sport on the unpaid time that they give to their sport. I also compliment a chap called Jim Hughes, who is a boxing coach in my region, particularly in the Bellshill area. Jim regularly trains more than 60 young people—girls and boys. He has given those young people self-esteem and has won various awards throughout the region.

My son never liked football and found his niche in volleyball. A number of years ago, I had the excitement of seeing him play for Scotland at Breda in Holland. We should encourage our children to participate in sport because that is what our children should do.

16:12

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I speak in support of Patricia Ferguson's amendment to the motion. I welcome the minister's commitment earlier to build further the links between sport hubs and schools. Encouraging young people to participate in sport is not just about nurturing the star athletes of tomorrow; getting children involved in sport in the long term ensures that we create a healthier and happier society for us all.

Unfortunately, Scotland has a reputation—fair or not—for having an unhealthy lifestyle, particularly with regard to food, alcohol, cigarettes and inactivity. With the 2012 Olympics still fresh in our minds and the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup coming to Scotland next year, there has never been a better opportunity to encourage people to get involved in sport and enjoy a healthy life.

As proposed in Scottish Labour's 2011 manifesto, I believe that that should start with ensuring that every pupil in Scotland enjoys at least two hours of physical education a week. I would welcome it if the Scottish Government delivered on its 2007 commitment to ensure that all pupils receive two hours of PE a week and not just, as in some areas, two periods in secondary school. I am disheartened by reports that 16 per cent of primary schools are still not meeting their target. I hope that the minister will ensure that that changes.

I acknowledge the Scottish Government's efforts to encourage young people to get active with the implementation of the take life on scheme and the provision of free swimming lessons for pupils from deprived areas. That is a tremendous development. However, we all agree that more can still be done. I believe that the best and most effective way to increase youth participation in sport is to target support at schools, teachers and—as previous speakers have alluded to—the helpers who, often acting in a voluntary capacity, support them in delivering sport. There are countless opportunities to get school pupils more involved in sport, both as part of the physical education curriculum and in external sports teams and groups.

The main barrier appears to be a lack of clear information, support and guidance for teachers who seek to access funding. From personal experience, I know that the costs involved simply in running a school football team can be very significant. Hiring transport to attend games each week can cost hundreds of pounds, without taking into account the other costs involved.

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): Does Mr Pearson have any thoughts about the public-

private partnership contracts that were signed under the previous Labour Administration? For example, when Craigmount high school was rebuilt under PPP, the school lost half its playing fields, and its only remaining grass playing field, which used to be a football pitch, is not kept to a sufficient standard because the PPP contract designated it as a green space. As a result, the school has to send its football teams, of which there are a few, to various centres around the city.

Graeme Pearson: Mr Keir will not be surprised to know that I have limited knowledge of that example, but I can tell him that, day and daily, schools throughout Scotland need to utilise bus companies either to play an away game or to receive a team from elsewhere for a home match. As I alluded to, those costs need to be met by many, if not all, schools across Scotland.

Often, teachers who voluntarily give up their time to run clubs and teams become the victim of their own success, because costs and time commitments escalate. We must ensure that teachers who are willing and able to provide pupils with the opportunities to get involved in sport are sufficiently supported and encouraged. In many secondary schools, the senior school leavers could—as some currently do—play a part in motivating younger pupils to become involved in sport. Perhaps the minister could consider whether there is an opportunity for senior school leavers to be employed on a part-time basis back in their home schools to assist educators accordingly.

If children participate in two hours of PE each week, they are more likely to get involved in sports clubs and organisations outside the school. With more and more people working in office environments these days—although the reduction in exposure to dangerous physical working conditions is obviously positive—it is more important than ever that we ensure that people develop an active lifestyle that they can maintain throughout their adult life. The need for that is illustrated by the fact that only 45 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women in Scotland currently meet the Government's targets for a healthy level of physical activity.

Participation in sport is about far more than ensuring that our national teams can compete with the world's best. As well as allowing children from all backgrounds to socialise together in a healthy, fun environment, such participation improves social skills, reduces health risks, takes the pressure off our national health system and teaches discipline, teamwork and hard work to those who might otherwise fall outside the system.

In conclusion, I remind members, if they need reminding, that literally hundreds and thousands of young people compete each week for the

Cameronian cup, the Scottish shield and the British cup championships. In addition, dance teams from almost every school in Scotland send girls to participate in the Scottish national dance championships. We should laud and encourage such developments for the future. I look forward to a healthy future for Scotland.

16:19

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): The minister must wonder why on earth I am speaking in a debate on sport—so do I; I will tell her why later.

The Scottish Sports Association said:

“Primarily, sport is fun.”

I have to disagree: sport is not fun, at least not for all of us. I am not at all sports mad. It is well known that my DNA contains not one gene that is interested in sport. I do not even like watching or listening to it, and that includes Wimbledon, so I am a hard case. There are quite a few of us about across the generations.

In my youth, it did not matter as much. We ran about the council scheme streets, played peevers, skipping and statues, climbed and balanced on high walls—we had never heard of health and safety—and did “One, Two, Three O’Leary” with our tennis balls. I will provide a glossary later. It was hard for my parents to reel me in at night to take me home. I did not sit in a dark room exercising my digits playing virtual games. I did not know why adults were in the house at all. I was out running about the streets. Therefore, there are huge issues for today’s toddlers and schoolchildren.

The word “activity” has slipped into the debate, which I prefer to “sport”. They are not the same. For me, sport was competitive, as it often should be. As someone who dropped her egg right at the start of the egg-and-spoon race, I soon lost interest in that competitive pursuit. That was compounded when, at the age of 11 and a half, a hockey stick hit my bare shin on an ice-cold day while I was playing on a brick-hard pitch. That ended my interest in sport totally. However, I danced competitively as a teenager and practised several days a week because I loved it, so I was fit, those early activities on Scotland’s streets aside. Dancing should form part of the activity that we are talking about, as opposed to “sport”, a word that is anathema to some of us.

Although I applaud the opportunity that the Commonwealth games provide to endeavour to engage with our young people, I will say what I have said before: in the previous session of Parliament, when I was convener of the Health and Sport Committee—how much I suited that

role—we found no evidence whatever that such international sporting competitions had a lasting legacy. Patricia Ferguson gave the example of tennis rackets appearing on the streets temporarily during Wimbledon. That is what we found, whether in relation to the Olympics in Australia or similar events elsewhere: any benefit was temporary. I hope that the Scottish Government will break the mould, but it will not be easy.

As members might have guessed, I am a conscript in the debate and a sceptic, which I think is a very healthy position to take. I want the Commonwealth games to cowp us out of our armchairs and sofas and to get us to do anything that exercises our limbs. As Patricia Ferguson did, I think that we should use the word “activity”, instead of just talking about sport, which will put people off.

PE teachers have an important role to play. I got off to a really bad start with mine, not surprisingly. I was asked to vault the horse, after which I propped myself up against the wooden bars. When I was challenged to vault the horse again, I said that I had already done it. “Once was enough,” I muttered under my breath. My relationship with my PE teacher went from bad to worse after that. The attitude of the gym teacher is extremely important for people such as me. I was a bit of a snob in those days. I rated academic competitiveness and achievement way above physical prowess. I was wrong to do so, but that was the attitude that I had.

Having disagreed with the SSA’s view that sport is fun, I agree with it when it says that sport—in this case, I mean “activity”—can have

“a positive impact on academic performance”.

People such as me will never play a decent game of tennis or table tennis. I was all right at skiing, but that was about the only sport that that was true of. People who are not going to be good at such things should not be put off by use of the word “sport”.

Although I am quite sceptical, I held a sport summit in my constituency—I called it that because I like alliteration—to find out how we could make our pupils more active. By engaging with Midlothian Council, Scottish Borders Council, sports co-ordinators, the police and other agencies, I found that we had to talk about healthy eating at the same time as looking to have children who were active. Adolescent girls—some of them, anyway—want to look pretty and attractive; they do not want to look sweaty on a hockey pitch. Therefore, activities such as dancing and aerobics could appeal to them. I know that it is difficult for others who are sporty to understand, but that is how many of us feel.

That is how we are looking at the issue in my area, but we are also looking to engage with local food shops, because there is no point in young people having those activities at school if they then go away and have a bag of chips on a roll.

That is my contribution, which is what happens when you are a conscript.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

That brings us to the closing speeches. I note that a couple of members who participated in the debate are missing. All members who have spoken in a debate should be present for the closing speeches. I call Tavish Scott.

16:25

Tavish Scott: Christine Grahame gave us a litany of all the sporting and gym equipment that she did not like. I would have thought that, after the vote on courts this morning, she should be more worried about the high bar—but maybe that is just me.

I confess that I sensed a slight frisson of—how can I put it delicately?—atmosphere between Jenny Marra and the minister in an intervention. I have fallen into a few political traps in my time, and I certainly sense a political trap being laid for the minister by Jenny Marra over the national performance centre for sport. If the minister's colleagues do not award the centre to Dundee, Jenny Marra will no doubt slam the Government for that; if they award it to Dundee, she will undoubtedly take the credit. That is the benefit of the great political traps of our day.

That exchange brought to mind the importance of the national performance centre for sport. I rather agreed with the minister's response to Margaret McDougall, who made the case for locating it in Largs, because it struck me that having a centre for more than just football—one that covers a range of sports—is the right approach for Scottish sport more generally. The case for that approach is well proven.

I have been to Heriot-Watt University to be talked through the bid that it has submitted. I must confess that, like Alison Johnstone, I find its bid pretty compelling, but, in fairness, I do not know in any detail the benefits of either the Dundee bid or the Stirling bid, which I am sure are equally strong. I guess that that is ultimately a decision for the Government. However, on the principle of a national performance centre and of £25 million being invested in sport for the long term, I endorse the approach that the Government is taking. As other members have said, we are a sport-mad country. When we take an international view of investment in other countries, we see that they have been down this route over many years and across many sporting disciplines. Such investment

is an important principle and a practical measure that can help considerably.

On sport more generally, I believe that the Riccarton bid would be stronger were consideration given to the stadium issue that bedevils Edinburgh to this day. Stadiums matter, but elite athletes matter more, because they inspire young people. We have heard about curling and about many different sporting figures, and it is healthy to concentrate not only on our well-known and exemplary elite athletes but on the many unsung heroes who support people at all levels.

I sneaked a look at the British Lions this morning, and it is quite nice to see a young Hawick lad called Stuart Hogg playing fantastically well—indeed, starring—at fly half. As a representative of a rugby-mad town such as Hawick, he is certainly the epitome of youth sport.

Alex Johnstone raised an important issue about participation or “activity”—a term that other members have also commented on—versus elite sport. If we are to inspire the next generation and encourage more young people to follow different sporting disciplines or to take part in a range of sports and then decide which one they want to pursue, we need a bit of both.

What really struck me about the Olympics was how much money went in from the national lottery to deliver for sporting success, and how focused that funding stream was on success, both for young athletes coming through and for more established elite athletes. There was no room for failure, and sports that did not match up to the agreed targets simply had their funding reduced. Irrespective of how that approach develops in future, Scotland faces a challenge: UK-wide lottery funding is fundamentally important to the number of young Scots who can make it.

Shona Robison: Is the member aware that one of the difficulties with the current funding arrangement through UK Sport is that although Scottish swimmers gave a strong performance in the Olympics, as we hope they will next year, that was not necessarily recognised when it came to deciding which sports were successful or otherwise at the Olympics?

Tavish Scott: I hope that the minister is not running down what team GB achieved. Nationalist members can shake their heads if they want, but given that the minister has raised the issue, I note that Sir Chris Hoy and other great Scottish Olympians have made the point that they got where they were and achieved so much for Scotland and for team GB because of the funding that came into their sports. Chris Hoy has said that he would not have achieved all that he achieved if he had not trained in Manchester regularly. I hope

that those who want to separate us from all that do not dismiss that argument lightly. *[Interruption.]*

It is a serious point. If members talk to anyone who is seriously involved in athletics, they will find that they think that it is a serious point, too. I hear that SNP members on my left dismissing it, but members need to talk to those who are involved in athletics to understand the point.

Patricia Ferguson: Does the member agree that it is significant that a number of the gold medals that were won by Scottish athletes were won as part of a team GB team in a particular sporting event or category? *[Interruption.]*

Tavish Scott: It is disappointing to hear SNP members criticising that point. Katherine Grainger would not have won her gold if she had not been competing with another athlete from another part of the UK. That is statement of fact. She has said it, so let us recognise that.

On young sportspeople and school pupils who have to travel from the far-flung parts of Scotland, I heard a member say that she was concerned about being 40 minutes from Glasgow. Well, that is pretty close from my perspective. The other side of the coin for people from Shetland and Orkney is that the Scottish Government has just cut the funding that was available for group discounts on ferry vessels, which are how we get to Aberdeen and then into sports on the mainland. It is all very well talking up all the other funds but the Government is cutting a really important fund that helps swimmers, fencers, football teams and schools to take part in sport across Scotland. That is profoundly wrong. I hope that when the Cabinet visits Lerwick in July, it will change that policy for a rather better one.

Richard Lyle made a fair point about volunteering. To me, the many mums and dads who spend so much time driving their children, encouraging and cajoling them and dealing with the tantrums when an event, a game or a match is lost are the essence of sport and why so many of us are delighted to be part of it.

16:33

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): This has been an interesting, informative, and, on the whole, consensual debate. Many members have cited local examples of the importance of sport for our country as a whole and the need to involve people early in the many sports that are played across the land, from football to curling and from ice hockey to volleyball—and all the others. All members have stressed the importance of regular physical activity throughout life.

Alison Johnstone was right to highlight the social and psychological benefits of taking part in

sport: the learning of discipline and how to get on with team mates, and the mental relaxation that comes with physical activity. I applaud her ambition to take part in the athletic events that Bob Doris mentioned. I am just sorry that my colleague, Liz Smith, cannot be here today to talk about her cricketing prowess and the regular coaching work that she still does with young people to encourage and train them in her sport.

I am not sure what active sport my colleague Alex Johnstone does these days but he was a bit of a legend in Aberdeenshire rugby circles in his youth, when he was tall and had a very slender physique.

Shona Robison: Oh dear.

Nanette Milne: I told him that I was going to say that.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of attending the installation of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Rothesay as chancellor of the University of Aberdeen. During the ceremony, six honorary degrees were awarded, one of which was an honorary doctorate for the great cycling athlete, Neil Fachie.

Members may be aware that Neil, a science graduate of the University of Aberdeen, came to prominence at the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing, when he competed in athletics before turning to cycling. Neil has the congenital eye condition retinitis pigmentosa, but despite that disability he has gone from strength to strength, his success culminating in the four gold medals that he won for Britain, breaking two world records and becoming the first Scot in the Paralympics GB team to win a gold medal at London 2012. Since then, he has become a regular ambassador for sport in schools across the country and is a proud representative of Aberdeen, Scotland and the UK. As others have said, when we discuss sport, we must not confine the discussion only to the able-bodied or ignore the influence that role models such as Neil Fachie can have on young people. Like Patricia Ferguson, I hope that sports for people with disabilities will feature in the forthcoming youth sport strategy.

Like all of us in the chamber, I watched with great enthusiasm last year's Olympics and Paralympics and was overwhelmed by the sense of occasion and the unifying impact that it had on our nation as a whole. Similarly, I look forward to next year's Commonwealth games, and I very much support the part of the minister's motion that backs Glasgow's bid for the youth Olympics in 2018.

As members will be aware, the Health and Sport Committee recently carried out an inquiry into support for community sport. I urge any member who has not done so already to read our

comprehensive report, which was published earlier in the year. A clear finding of the inquiry was that we require a genuine and lasting sporting legacy from the forthcoming Commonwealth games, which will be watched by an estimated worldwide audience of more than 1 billion people. Ideally, such a legacy will result in a nation whose young people are physically active and regularly participate in sport.

People of all abilities, ages and backgrounds must be encouraged to participate and volunteer in community sport, and they should begin as young as possible. Witness after witness in our inquiry stressed the importance of volunteers for every sport, referring to them again and again as the lifeblood of sporting activity without which many sports clubs would not survive. As we know, many volunteers are parents. From making the tea, washing strips after the game and raising necessary funds to coaching team members, the activities of volunteers are legion. They are essential and we need more of them, so it is vital that the Commonwealth games are not confined to two weeks of entertainment. I was encouraged when, last week, we heard from the minister some of the detail about how the Government intends to encourage more volunteers into sport beyond 2014, as it is clear that barriers to volunteering still remain.

From our inquiry, we know that many people feel that they do not have the skills or the time to become involved in sports, whereas it was suggested that others would volunteer if asked but would need to be assured that they would have an enjoyable experience. People need to be given the right training. I agree with Judy Murray's evidence about an inexperienced coach learning from an expert, which is akin to an apprentice learning from a master. I urge the minister to consider that when formulating the youth sport strategy.

As someone with a health background, I naturally hope that the most important legacy that will come from Glasgow 2014 will be the improved physical health of our people—and that must start with our young people. I fully endorse the Scottish Sports Association's vision that all children should have the right to be physically literate and that their early education should help them to become regular participants in sport and physical activity. It is of great concern that a 2012 growing up in Scotland report noted that 22 per cent of six-year-olds are classed as overweight or obese, which often leads to other problems such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis and various forms of cancer. We need to get young people moving, and participation needs to continue throughout life right into extreme old age.

In his amendment, my colleague Alex Johnstone rightly expressed his concern, which many of us in the chamber share, that despite the pledge made more than five years ago, the Government has yet to deliver access for schoolchildren to two hours of quality PE each week.

Patricia Ferguson's amendment recognises the need for quality sporting facilities so that people are encouraged into sport and their interest is maintained. That was brought home to me when the Health and Sport Committee visited the splendid sports village in Aberdeen, which is very well used by those who access it. It was pointed out to us that there are several communities in the city who cannot access it for various reasons and that those communities also need good sporting facilities if they are to be encouraged to take up sports. I am therefore very supportive of the community sports hubs concept, which can make education facilities available to local people outwith school hours. It is encouraging that the school estate across Scotland is gradually opening up for community use, although there is still a way to go.

The Conservatives welcome the Government's commitment to publishing a youth sport strategy if that goes some way towards addressing the concerns that have been raised in the chamber. The strategy ought to set out where we progress from here, and I look forward to seeing the meat on the bones when it comes out in September. I have no doubt that this is an important area to which we will return in due course.

We will support Shona Robison's motion and all three amendments.

16:40

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): As a number of members have said, Scotland is often tagged as the sick man of Europe. We have among the worst levels of obesity in the developed world, and an increase in physical activity is key to improving the health of the people of our nation and providing our young people with a better chance of a healthier life.

Figures suggest that just under 2,500 people in Scotland die prematurely every year as a consequence of physical inactivity. Levels of heart disease, stroke, colon cancer and non-insulin dependent diabetes could be significantly reduced if activity was increased. The chief medical officer Harry Burns confirmed that when he said:

"improving physical activity even by a small proportion will reduce levels of heart attack and stroke."

Over the past few years, Scotland has hosted and participated in some once-in-a-lifetime sporting events. North Lanarkshire Council and

South Lanarkshire Council hosted the 45th international children's games in 2011, in which 13,000 competitors and coaches, representing 77 cities in 33 countries worldwide, made their way through the central belt.

The world's eyes were fixed on London last year, as Scottish athletes, as part of team GB, achieved mighty feats in the Olympic and Paralympic games. We look forward to Glasgow hosting the Commonwealth games in 2014, which will bring athletes from across the globe to Scotland. I am sure that we all hope that Glasgow is also successful in its bid for the 2018 youth Olympics. We send the bid our full support from the chamber this afternoon.

Those events capture the heart of the nation. Figures show that thousands of Scots—young and old—increased their levels of activity post Olympics, whether that was swimming, cycling or simply going to the gym. Our challenge is to make sure that that increased activity is maintained beyond the honeymoon period after the games.

One of the best ways to drive up levels of physical activity is through a culture of regular exercise and participation in sport, and our schools play a key part in that regard. If we get our young people interested in a variety of sports from an early age and sustain their interest, we can fight the significant challenges that we face. As a councillor in North Lanarkshire, I saw at first hand the council's excellent work in trying to involve as many young people as possible in a wide variety of sports through its active schools network. Crucially, the 23 active schools co-ordinators work closely with schools to improve the physical activity of all children and young people.

There are hard-to-reach groups across Scotland, as Patricia Ferguson and Nanette Milne said, and I am pleased that councils such as North Lanarkshire are taking a targeted approach to attracting into sports more girls and young women, young people with disabilities and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and getting them to increase their participation.

It has been my privilege to go back to my old school, St Maurice's in Cumbernauld, which is a sports comprehensive that encompasses the motto of "raising achievement for all". The school recognises—as many members have done—that education is not just about academic success and uses sport to build self-confidence, improve attendance levels and increase attainment.

I have been able to go back every year when the school hosts an annual sport awards ceremony. St Maurice's blazes a trail. The talents of young people from across the school are celebrated in every area—from football to badminton, from volleyball to netball, from rugby to

basketball, and from gymnastics, table tennis, swimming and dance to dodgeball.

The school also encourages young people to participate in the community sport leader award programme. A number of senior school pupils, staff, former pupils and club and community coaches are involved in high-quality sport in the school. A key element of the programme is that students achieve their qualifications by delivering sports coaching to pupils in primary schools, and that then feeds into secondary schools. That takes sports coaching down to the earliest possible level.

Important as schools are in developing our young people and getting them interested in sport, a lot of work is done by volunteers in clubs throughout the country. There are 150,000 adults who regularly volunteer in sport. They coach young people, help them to hone their skills and generate that passion for sport that Alison Johnstone mentioned. Volunteers play an essential role in developing Scotland's future sportsmen and sportswomen and in improving the health of the nation. It is therefore important that the Scottish Government and sportscotland do all that they can to break down some of the barriers that volunteers face.

The Scottish Sports Association's manifesto for sport in Scotland highlights volunteers' many difficulties with disclosure checks. Through the cross-party group on sport, many organisations and individuals have highlighted the time that it takes for disclosure applications to be approved and for certificates to arrive. That can often result in volunteers having to wait for considerable periods before they can commence their work, and it creates the very real possibility that many volunteers will be put off. No one disagrees that disclosure checks are essential for people who work with vulnerable groups, but the length of time that Disclosure Scotland takes to approve volunteers could reduce the number of available volunteers and so hamper the opportunities for young people to get interested in the wide range of sports that is essential.

I agree with Joan McAlpine that a wide range of sports is needed, although I contest the idea that the south-west of Scotland may be the birthplace of curling. Kilsyth certainly stakes a claim to be the birthplace of curling. We have our curling pond and we have even named a pub the Kilsyth Curling Stone after our fine curling traditions. Perhaps I will go back to the historians in Kilsyth and ask them to check their sources.

The need to support volunteers by speeding up the disclosure process relates to the point that was raised about support for volunteers to apply for grants. The clubs across the country that receive investment often have people with skills in

completing grant application forms. It would be beneficial if volunteers were offered training in that area to ensure that grant support is spread as widely as possible.

I agree with my colleague Patricia Ferguson on the points that have been raised about the cashback for communities initiative, which I think sometimes spreads the cash uniformly across Scotland rather than targeting areas where the crime that most affects the community comes from. The cash would have a double impact if it were invested in the areas where crimes originate, with diversionary measures to ensure that the cycle does not continue with youngsters.

I welcome the Government's plans to produce a youth sport strategy. I am sure that the minister will agree that the strategy must recognise the challenges that we face, which members have highlighted, and reflect the tremendous opportunity that we have in Scotland with the many sporting events that are coming up.

16:48

Shona Robison: I welcome the positive contributions—perhaps with one exception, which I will come back to—that have been made from around the chamber.

I should have said at the start of the debate that we accept Patricia Ferguson's amendment, which very much adds to the motion. She talked about how to harness motivation and about ensuring that we continue that through and beyond the games next year. I hope that I managed to answer in my opening remarks a little of what she asked, but it is very important that we remain focused on that.

Patricia Ferguson also raised the issue of school pupils with disabilities. We have supported Scottish Disability Sport in rolling out measures to improve delivery of sport for children with disabilities. I very much agree with members that that must be included in the youth sport strategy, so we will ensure that it is.

All that I will say in response to Alex Johnstone, apart from that he may have got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning, is that I could have understood his criticisms of our delivery on PE were it not for the fact that the Conservative UK Government dropped the target entirely in 2010. We have not done that; we have said that we will meet the target by next year. As many members have said, it is not the be-all and end-all. We agree that it is not, but it is an important part of the jigsaw; the school environment has an important role to play in ensuring that children are active every day of the week.

Tavish Scott mentioned the Public Audit Committee's consideration of the progress report

and its comments on legacy. The Commonwealth Games Federation co-ordination commission highlighted the legacy plans and described them as being world leading and as

"a blueprint for future ... Games."

We are not complacent, but I hope that the way in which legacy has been built into everything that we have done from the moment the bid was won is something that future hosts will be able to emulate.

Aileen McLeod talked about the active schools games that are going on in her area, which are a good example of an improvement in the quality of competitive school sport. We want that to feature in the youth sport strategy, because there is room there for improvement. I will also be happy to take up her invitation, diary permitting.

Margaret McDougall talked about the need for the legacy to extend beyond Glasgow. I agree with her; I want to see a legacy for the whole of Scotland. However, to imply that the west of Scotland has not received substantial investment in sports facilities might be stretching things a bit too far; I do not think that that can be said to be the case. Nevertheless, there is always more to be done, and I want to ensure that we have, in North Ayrshire and any other part of Scotland, a genuine legacy from the games.

I also agree with Margaret McDougall's point about social enterprise. There are huge opportunities for social enterprise in sport. There are some really good examples of that, although we can always do more.

Bob Doris championed the case for Glasgow hosting the world masters games in 2021, and the number of members declaring that they would take part was impressive. He also referred to the 24 projects that are being funded through the active places fund, which is a concrete example of how the legacy is being delivered to a number of communities through that community-based fund to improve community sports facilities the length and breadth of Scotland.

Jenny Marra rightly praised the efforts of Dundee City Council. I take issue with her speech only in that she implied that there has to date been little or no investment in sports facilities in Dundee, which is just not the case. I highlight the new multimillion pound Olympia leisure centre, which is about to open and has competition-quality swimming facilities; the new world-class gymnastics centre; the new hockey pitches and 3G pitches at the Dundee international sports complex; and the new outdoor velodrome in Caird park, to name but a few of the new facilities. That investment is important because, along with other cities in Scotland, Dundee is looking to host the pre-games training camps. I would not want

Dundee's portfolio of excellent facilities to be in any way undermined—it is important that it is able to promote them.

Joan McAlpine highlighted Scotland's success in curling. We must have regard to our traditional sports, and a bit of rivalry seems to be developing about which area has the strongest links to curling. Irrespective of that, I wish Eve Muirhead and the team good luck in Sochi. I also assure members that there will be opportunities to develop and support our curling tradition.

Alison Johnstone talked about the power of sport and the need to ensure that young people are involved in development of the youth sports strategy. I assure her that the young people's panel will do that—it will go out and talk to young people about what they want to see in the strategy, which is important.

Graeme Pearson talked about senior school leaders and leavers. It is important that senior pupils in schools are involved in leadership roles—it gives them fantastic skills development for the future. Of course, many of them have already been recruited into sport-coaching roles. He may be interested in the recent announcement on the expansion of modern apprenticeships in the sport and leisure sector, which creates opportunities for young school leavers who have an interest in sport.

What can I say about Christine Grahame's speech? She and I had a similar hockey experience. She mentioned that she was a dancer. We have yet to see her in action, but there is always time for that.

Christine Grahame: Any time.

Shona Robison: Christine Grahame highlighted that dance appeals to girls. It does not matter to me what the activity is, whether it is dance or hockey. I have always said that as long as it gets young people hot, sweaty and active that does it for me. [*Laughter.*] Members should wipe that thought from their minds.

Christine Grahame also mentioned the sports summit. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. The chamber is far too noisy.

Shona Robison: Information on healthy eating is important. The issue is not simply about sport; it is about everything that goes with sport, including a healthy lifestyle.

In response to Tavish Scott's closing remarks, we should remember that Scotland contributes to the Olympics funding structure and to UK Sport. As is always the case, our athletes will train wherever they need to train—they go to the best facilities all over the world—and the funding

follows the athlete. That is the case now, and I assure Tavish Scott that it will be the case after independence.

Nanette Milne mentioned passing on coaches' experience to less-experienced coaches, which is also an important point, and Mark Griffin reminded us about the international children's games and its legacy. I attended that event; it is another great example of Scotland's capacity to attract fantastic events to our country. I, too, hope that we will see that long and growing list of major sporting events that we have managed to attract to Scotland being added to, and that we have the full support of all parties in the chamber in our hope that our youth Olympic games bid has all success next month in Lausanne. I thank members for their contributions.

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill

16:59

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-06924, in the name of Alex Neil, on the legislative consent motion on the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. I call Alex Neil to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill introduced in the House of Commons on 24 January 2013 relating to the recognition of English and Welsh same sex marriages under the law of Scotland, the dissolution by the courts in Scotland and Northern Ireland of English and Welsh same sex marriages recognised as civil partnerships in Scotland and Northern Ireland and the recognition of the ending of those relationships, provisions on transgender people who married or entered into a civil partnership in England and Wales being able to stay in the relationship and obtain a full Gender Recognition Certificate and on errors in Certificates and fraud in relation to Certificates, the repeal of the Foreign Marriage Act 1892, marriages overseas, and transitional and consequential provisions, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Alex Neil.*]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. There will be no pre-emptions in relation to any amendments.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-06921.2, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06921, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a sporting nation, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S4M-06921.3, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06921, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a sporting nation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
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)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
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)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
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)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 41, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S4M-06921.1, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06921, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a sporting nation, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S4M-06921, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a sporting nation, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the important role that sport plays in the lives of children and young people by helping to create a lifelong habit of being active; recognises the potential that youth sport can have in improving physical and mental wellbeing and establishing sporting success in Scotland; agrees that every effort should be made to harness the motivational potential of the Commonwealth Games in promoting youth sport; notes research from Join In highlighting the ongoing volunteering efforts of many Olympic Games makers; further notes the increased appetite among the public to get involved in volunteering, which, it believes, demonstrates one important way in which major sporting events can deliver a legacy benefiting grassroots sports; recognises the importance of ensuring that all new primary and secondary schools built through the Scottish Futures Trust include sports facilities that are widely and easily available to the public and recognises that access to quality sporting facilities and trained coaches help to motivate and encourage continued participation in sport; notes the Scottish Government's commitment to publish a draft youth sport strategy in September 2013, and recognises Glasgow's bid for the Youth Olympics in 2018 as evidence of the commitment to delivering a sporting legacy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S4M-06924, in the name of Alex Neil, on Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill, United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill introduced in the House of Commons on 24 January 2013 relating to the recognition of English and Welsh same sex marriages under the law of Scotland, the dissolution by the courts in Scotland and Northern Ireland of English and Welsh same sex marriages recognised as civil partnerships in Scotland and Northern Ireland and the recognition of the ending of those relationships, provisions on transgender people who married or entered into a civil partnership in England and Wales being able to stay in the relationship and obtain a full Gender Recognition Certificate and on errors in Certificates and fraud in relation to Certificates, the repeal of the Foreign Marriage Act 1892, marriages overseas, and transitional and consequential provisions, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

MND Scotland Welfare Reform Campaign

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-06308, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on MND Scotland's welfare reform campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the commitment to quality palliative care in Scotland; acknowledges MND Scotland's welfare reform campaign, which highlights that, as people with Motor Neurone Disease (MND) have an average life expectancy from diagnosis of just 14 months, welfare reform is causing undue hardship and stress as well as wasting taxpayers' money; believes that it is unreasonable for a 55-year-old man who has MND, lives in the west of Scotland and has had his home adapted for his specific needs to have to pay the so-called bedroom tax or be forced to move home, and commends MND Scotland's dedicated welfare and benefits service, which provides what it considers invaluable support to people with MND at this very difficult time.

17:03

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I take this opportunity to thank all the members who signed the motion. It is on an important topic, and I am grateful to the members across the parties who enabled the debate to happen.

I give my heartfelt thanks to MND Scotland, especially Susan Webster, Craig Stockton and Bryan Carroll, who I think are in the public gallery today. I thank them and the whole team for the advice, guidance and support that they have given not just to members of the Scottish Parliament but to the people for whom they care. I must also quickly thank Hanna McCulloch at Capability Scotland for the informative briefing that she sent members last night.

Members tend to open members' business debates by saying, "I am delighted to open this debate", but I am heart sorry to open this debate. I am heart sorry that we have to have this debate; I am heart sorry for the people who have to live with motor neurone disease; and I am heart sorry for the families who must come to terms with such a shocking diagnosis.

Members no doubt understand why I am standing here today. I was one of those family members: I had to come to terms with my dad being diagnosed with MND; I was that child who grew up with their dad progressively losing all his motor capability. My mum had three children at home and worked part-time at night so that we could look after him when we were home from school; she went out to work to make ends meet

when my dad had to give up his job. I remember both my parents facing the indignity of four bus journeys to get assessed on whether he was bad enough to get sickness allowance. That was four bus journeys for a man who could barely walk and who, by that time, had no power in his arms at all.

That was nearly 30 years ago. It is tragic that, 30 years on, people with MND and their families are facing such indignity again.

A diagnosis of motor neurone disease is a devastating blow for a family. The last thing they expect is to be put through the mill of Department for Work and Pensions welfare benefits assessments, questionnaires, appeals and the worry that they will not be able to support their families financially through a traumatic time.

Can you imagine the roller coaster of emotions that a family will go through at such a testing time? Unfortunately, as a result of insidious welfare reform, that is exactly what is happening to many people with MND and their families.

MND Scotland is campaigning to highlight the dreadful impact of current and proposed welfare reform on people with the condition. MND Scotland's energy should be spent supporting those families, but it has had no option but to join the increasingly loud calls for this horrible policy to be dropped.

MND Scotland has published a report called "Time to benefit people with MND". I emailed the link to all members yesterday and I know that MND Scotland has sent it out, too. MND Scotland wants a few things to happen that will make life easier for people with MND at a stage of their life when life cannot get any harder.

First, people with MND should be exempt from the work capability assessment and allocated to the employment and support allowance support group. The charity points out that 100 per cent of people with MND who have been supported by the team at MND Scotland are allocated to that support group. It is a waste of taxpayers' money to put those people through the highly stressful process of assessment.

Secondly, people with MND who are unable to share a bedroom because they need an array of equipment to keep them safe at night, or whose home has been significantly adapted for their needs, should never be subjected to the bedroom tax nor forced to move from that adapted home.

Thirdly, people with MND who are currently on higher rates for the mobility and care components of disability living allowance should not be forced to go through reassessment for the personal independence payment, which has only come in this week. It is medically impossible for their illness

to improve; they should not be put through those assessments.

MND Scotland has sent its report, "Time to benefit people with MND" to MPs and MSPs, including Iain Duncan Smith; Lord Freud, the Minister for Welfare Reform; the Westminster all-party parliamentary group for MND; and the Scottish Parliament's Welfare Reform Committee. I urge all of those people to take the time to read and act on the very small asks that I have just outlined and which that report details.

Let us look at some of the real people who are affected. We talk about new policies and sometimes do not realise that they affect real people. For instance, under the old system of incapacity benefit, people with MND were exempt from going through a medical assessment and were awarded the full benefit from the outset. That exemption was removed when incapacity benefit was replaced by employment and support allowance in 2008.

Jamie is one of the case studies on the MND website. He is 40 years old, he has MND, and he lives in the north of Scotland with his wife and three-year-old daughter. Jamie was employed as a mechanical technician but had to give up work when his motor function deteriorated and his arms became very weak. That is a picture that I can see very clearly in my mind; it is what happened to my dad. Jamie was assessed for employment and support allowance but he failed the work capability assessment. He was only awarded nine points and was deemed fit to work: how outrageous. He appealed the decision but had to wait one year for his appeal to be heard and was only provided with the basic rate of benefit during that time. From their diagnosis to their untimely death, people with MND live an average of 14 months.

Jamie eventually won his appeal at tribunal and was awarded a further 22 points. However, he was put into the work-related activity group, which means that his entitlement to ESA ran out after one year. Yes, we can guess what happened: DWP backdated his money for a year and then took it off him.

I turn to the bedroom tax. As people with MND lose their ability to walk, speak, feed themselves or breathe unaided, they come to rely on a wide variety of equipment to assist them in their daily living. Much of that equipment, such as an electric wheelchair, a special medical bed, hoists, breathing equipment and speaking aids, is needed in the bedroom to help the person with MND keep safe during the night. That equipment makes it very difficult for a spouse or a partner to sleep in the same room. Often, the carer will sleep in a second bedroom and catch some much-needed sleep.

William, who has MND, and his wife Carol live in the west of Scotland and have two wheelchairs. They have been subjected to the bedroom tax. They will go on the local authority waiting list until a suitably adapted one-bedroom property is found or one is adapted for them. William and Carol should never have to go through that.

I do not even have time to go into the personal independence payment but, again, families are being forced to go through the assessment.

I could not say this any better than MND Scotland says in its report, so I will just quote it:

"We appeal to the UK Government to alleviate some of the burden for people with MND and their families. We urge them to adopt a common sense approach by acknowledging that not only are people with MND unjustly suffering through welfare reform—assessing them for welfare benefits they are clearly entitled to is a waste of taxpayers' money."

Let this Parliament—our Scottish Parliament—lend its voice to that appeal and urge the United Kingdom Government to have some compassion and think again about the real people involved.

17:11

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Christina McKelvie for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

We have heard that, every year, 130 people in Scotland are diagnosed with motor neurone disease. MND is a rapidly progressing terminal neurological disease, and people who are diagnosed with the illness usually become severely disabled. Symptoms include the loss of their ability to walk, speak, feed themselves and breathe unaided. The damage caused by MND is progressive, and people who suffer from the life-limiting disease do not experience periods of improvement. Sadly, average life expectancy following a diagnosis of MND is just 14 months.

The motion asks us to acknowledge MND Scotland's welfare reform campaign and the "Time to benefit people with MND" report. I commend MND Scotland for the work that it has done to highlight the impact that welfare reforms will have on people with MND, as well as all the work that it does to support people who suffer from the illness, particularly through advice and support services. Those services are mentioned in the motion but, unfortunately, I will not have time to come on to them in this short debate.

Most members agree on the devastating effects that some of the coalition Government's welfare reforms are having and will have on our constituents and the areas that we represent. Simplification of the benefits system through the introduction of the universal credit is an example of where the UK Government has probably got the

broad approach right. However, its approach goes awry in implementation and in the cutting of support for individuals.

The motion that Christina McKelvie has put before the Parliament highlights the bedroom tax, so I will concentrate my remarks on that measure.

We know that 79 per cent of households affected by the bedroom tax include a disabled person. Christina McKelvie is quite right to say that, for people who suffer from MND, the second bedroom is not a spare room but somewhere to keep their wheelchair, hoist, breathing equipment and speaking aids. That equipment keeps the person suffering from MND safe at night, but some of it can often be noisy, which means that their partner may need a separate room in which to sleep.

Furthermore, the houses are often specially adapted for tenants and owners with disabilities. Therefore, any move may incur more cost, as the new property would also have to be suitably adapted.

Local authorities have said that they do not have the housing stock available to meet the demands created by the bedroom tax. For that reason, as well as the injustices faced by individuals and groups of people with particular conditions, the bedroom tax is, at best, a misguided policy solution to a problem that is really about the lack of affordable and appropriate housing.

People with MND will be affected not just by the bedroom tax. The "Time to benefit people with MND" report also highlights the impacts that there will be from the changes to employment and support allowance and the introduction of personal independence payments, which are being rolled out this month.

It simply must be possible to achieve a fairer way of assessing need that recognises that people with some conditions will, unfortunately, not get better or even experience significant fluctuations in the severity of their conditions that mean that their capacity to work is likely to change drastically.

The position that sufferers of MND are in indicates that there are real problems with the system that the coalition Government is putting in place. Indeed, we should recognise that, as Christina McKelvie was right to highlight, the previous system was far from perfect for many of those people. Therefore, the situation represents an opportunity missed.

In closing, I return to the issue of the bedroom tax and I repeat something that I have said before—this Parliament as a whole, across the parties, has failed on the issue. I take the view that what Ed Miliband said last week about localising housing support decisions and coupling the issue

of support with housing supply is, overall, the correct way to go.

Notwithstanding the Scottish Government announcements today, which did not clarify any plans for a separate Scottish welfare system, I accept that those people who support independence genuinely believe that Scotland on its own could create a fairer system. The issue for me is what we do in the meantime—what we do now for people who are affected by MND. On that issue, we as a Parliament have failed to put in place either the money, policies or guidance to protect people from being unfairly penalised by the bedroom tax.

I hope that all members who take part in the debate will resolve to come together and work together to deliver real support to the real people who are suffering—not just in 2014, 2015 or 2016, but today, in 2013.

17:15

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Christina McKelvie on securing this important debate.

I recall the day, just over a decade ago, when I was told that my Aunt Eileen, my father's older sister, had motor neurone disease. Over the next 22 months prior to her death, my aunt became increasingly trapped in her own body, unable to move or speak, to her great torment. Her suffering caused great distress to the entire family, who felt helpless to assist her or to slow in any way her inexorable decline towards death.

Motor neurone disease occurs when specialist motor neurones in the brain and spinal cord stop working properly. Because of its poor prognosis, fewer than 400 people have the illness at any one time in Scotland. Motor neurones control important muscle activity such as gripping, walking, speaking, swallowing and breathing. As the condition progresses, people with MND find those activities increasingly difficult and eventually impossible to do.

MND is one of the rarest neurological conditions and mainly affects adults who are over 40. Most cases develop in people who are between 50 and 70 years of age. The causes are unknown, but it seems likely that genes are a factor, at least for some people with the condition. That is because 10 per cent of people who develop MND also have a close family relative with it.

Motor neurone disease is a degenerative condition that progresses rapidly and sufferers have complex needs that affect all aspects of their lives. Maintaining the ability to communicate is essential and every effort should be made to

encourage advanced care planning to ensure autonomy during the course of the disease.

MND Scotland is the only motor neurone disease charity in Scotland providing care, information and funding for research and it believes that

“the last months of a person’s life should be spent in the loving care and support of their family—not going through highly stressful Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) questionnaires, interviews and medical assessments with the constant anxiety that the family could have their benefits removed at any point.”

MND Scotland also believes that

“putting people with MND through this process is illogical and a waste of taxpayers’ money”.

Indeed, it is just plain daft.

From 1 April 2013, as we have heard, social sector households that contain working age claimants of housing benefit who are deemed to underoccupy their property have had their housing benefit reduced. MND sufferers were inexplicably included. With the forthcoming introduction of universal credit and the resulting reduction of disability premiums, people with MND could also lose up to £70 per week from their benefit entitlement.

The DWP and the UK Government have not taken cognisance of specific groups in their blunderbuss approach to welfare reform. As Christina McKelvie said—it is worth repeating—there is a need to exempt people with MND from the work capability assessment, allocate them to the employment and support allowance support group and award full benefit.

It is also sensible to exempt from the bedroom tax those who have had their homes significantly adapted to their needs and who are unable to share a bedroom due to an array of medical equipment that is necessary to keep them safe during the night; to automatically transfer, without assessment, people with MND to the enhanced rate of personal independence payments when they are receiving high rates of disability living allowance mobility and care components; and, under special rules, to extend from six to 12 months the timescale in which death from terminal illness can reasonably be expected.

Families who are dealing with a devastating terminal illness such as MND should not be forced to go through the additional stress and anxiety that are caused by the cuts to the welfare programme. The UK Government should alleviate some of the burden for people with MND and their families. We urge it to adopt a commonsense approach by acknowledging not only that people with MND are unjustly suffering from welfare reform, but that it is cruel to assess them for welfare benefits that they are clearly entitled to.

Volunteers in the Scottish Parliament are being urged to participate in a project to record their speech potentially to help to reconstruct patients’ voices that have been damaged through motor neurone disease. Along with Christina McKelvie, I urge people to volunteer to help give patients their voices back as part of the MND voice bank project. The project, which will run in the Scottish Parliament for the next two months, is organised by the Euan MacDonald centre for motor neurone disease and the University of Edinburgh’s informatics team. Many individuals with MND and other devastating conditions such as stroke, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson’s disease lose their voice, and the project aims to use recorded donor voices to reconstruct the patient’s voice, as near to the original as possible.

17:20

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Although I have no family experience of motor neurone disease, I am aware that it is an extremely debilitating disease that results in severe impairment of a person’s physical abilities and is ultimately terminal. Naturally, people with MND should, when required, have their additional needs supported through the welfare system.

I note that the UK Government is not cutting support to disabled people. The Government will continue to spend around £13 billion a year on PIP—the same as it does under the current system. The introduction of PIP will ensure that the billions that are spent give more targeted support to those who have the greatest need. As such, it is quite different from the unreformed disability living allowance.

The PIP assessment is an individual consideration of how impairments affect a person’s life. Rather than simply being based on medical conditions, it will consider the claimant’s specific circumstances and support needs. A wide range of help and support will be available for people making PIP applications. The overall process will be independently reviewed soon after it is introduced to ensure that it is working effectively.

The fact is that there will be difficulties as a result of the transition to the new benefit. Many of those have been highlighted in today’s debate. Issues concerning the underoccupancy charge should be dealt with effectively through either the list of exemptions or the discretionary housing fund. However, for those who have been recently diagnosed and for those whose condition does not deteriorate quickly, there has been some concern about the way in which that has been handled.

I commend MND Scotland for highlighting the problems that exist, and I am keen to ensure that,

wherever possible, the views that it has expressed are taken into account. I will raise the matters that have been raised by MND Scotland with representatives of the Westminster Government at the next opportunity that I have to meet them. I will ensure that, where the process that we have in place results in poor or inappropriate outcomes, that process is assessed, adapted and changed to ensure that it meets the needs of those who depend on the support that the new benefits will supply.

17:22

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I thank Christina McKelvie for bringing this debate to the chamber. I understand how difficult it can be to talk about something that is so hugely personal. Normally, when I am in this room discussing such things, I am talking about Stacey and multiple sclerosis. It is hard for us to talk about such subjects, as we are aware of everything that goes on, and we feel the pressure to deliver on behalf of the organisation that we are highlighting.

My first run-in with MND was when I was a child and my gran's sister deteriorated quite quickly. I did not understand how this woman, who used to work in the mill in Paisley, could no longer speak—how, all of a sudden, she just could not function any more.

People have always motivated me in my politics. I am aware of and understand Christina McKelvie's family involvement with MND. Working to support families in Paisley has been a major part of my life. Eileen Clark, the mother of a good friend of mine, Councillor Lorraine Cameron in Renfrewshire Council, was diagnosed with MND when I was on the council, too. I saw her change from a bright woman, who was involved in the community, to a person who was dying—it is, effectively, a death sentence.

I spoke to Lorraine Cameron today and asked whether she would mind if I spoke about her experience. She said, "No, George. I want people to know about it." I also made a joke involving the mental health problems that Lorraine had during that period, because of the strain and pressure that she was under. I said, "I'll not tell them about the time you went aff yer heid," and she said, "No, tell them. That's an important part of it. The families feel the strain. I don't know anyone in MND Renfrewshire who isn't on antidepressants—they are the family members who are dealing with the situation." Lorraine told me about the times when she would sit there at night and listen to her mother breathing in the next room. Had she stopped breathing? Was she okay? People deal with that for years, knowing what the outcome will be.

As Christina McKelvie said, according to MND Scotland, a person's life expectancy from diagnosis is about 14 months. That is 14 months for families to watch their loved one deteriorate at an alarming rate in front of them and be unable to do anything. On top of that, families have to get their loved one's housing situation sorted out and arrange any adaptations. By its very nature, the disease is difficult for local authorities and Government organisations to assess. A person can be okay at one point, then deteriorate so much that their house is adapted for them, and then it is too late.

In addition, there are the benefit reforms, which will be a dramatic change. In "Time to benefit people with MND", MND Scotland has done an excellent piece of work, in which it raises issues that we take for granted. I agree with MND Scotland when it says that

"the last months of a person's life should be spent in the loving care and support of their family".

That is how it should be. People should not be worrying about assessments and whether they can get DLA or PIP, as it is now.

Christina McKelvie could not mention PIP, so I will go on about it. From October, anyone who receives a diagnosis of MND will be assessed for PIP. Those who currently receive DLA and report a change to their illness will be reassessed. Under PIP, due to the loss of a lower rate of benefit, many people in the early stages of their illness will lose out financially. As Christina McKelvie mentioned, people will have the financial burden as well as their illness. They will feel as if they are a burden on the family. Eileen Clark felt the same way. She got to the stage at which she felt that she was holding her family back.

I stress that we are literally dealing with people's lives and with families. The last thing that people need is worry about going through assessments for various benefits. We need to show some humanity and ask the Westminster Government to think again on the issue.

17:27

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): I, too, thank Christina McKelvie for bringing the issue to the chamber. She is a great champion for those with motor neurone disease. As she has explained, it is something that she cares deeply and passionately about.

We have heard many heart-rending stories about the impact of the condition on people and their families. I thank MND Scotland for its invaluable support for people living with the illness.

Given the prognosis, we know that people with MND need immediate support and care. It is important that they get the right support at the right time from the health service and social services, and that support is all the more important as the UK Government's ill-judged cuts and changes to the welfare system take effect. I know that those reforms are causing a great deal of worry and upset for many people. One of the biggest concerns continues to be the flawed work capability assessment. The DWP has made it clear that, unless a condition is terminal under its definition—which is when a doctor says that life expectancy is six months—there is no automatic exemption from assessments, regardless of disability or health condition.

However, the DWP can decide whether to refer someone for an assessment at the start of a claim based on the evidence provided by the person making the claim and their healthcare professional. We have heard from everyone tonight about MND and life expectancy with the condition. In many cases, it is an absolute nonsense that people are sent for an assessment. I would agree with all the members who have said that—Kenneth Gibson described it as “plain daft”. Nevertheless, the DWP seems to be failing to take account of the evidence that is being provided to it. That is backed up by the many letters that we all receive on the issue.

The Scottish Government has raised concerns about the welfare reforms with UK ministers on several occasions. Recently, the Deputy First Minister wrote to Iain Duncan Smith specifically about the work capability assessment process. Despite three independent reviews, that process is still not working and yet another review—to be carried out by Dr Paul Litchfield—is under way. We have pressed the DWP to ensure that the latest review finally produces a process that is fair and equitable.

As we have heard from many members, the bedroom tax is another flawed policy that just will not work. The example included in the motion is a tragic case that demonstrates perfectly the indiscriminate effect of this shameless reform. The bedroom tax takes no account whatever of the circumstances of the individual concerned. Of those households in Scotland that are affected by the bedroom tax, 79 per cent contain an adult who has a disability that is recognised under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

During the passage of the Welfare Reform Bill, the Scottish Government made clear our objections to the reforms and asked for them to be withdrawn. We were especially mindful of the impact on disabled people, so we pressed for a specific exemption to safeguard those whose houses have been substantially adapted, often at

considerable cost to local authorities. Although the UK Government acknowledged the issue, its preferred response was to increase discretionary housing payments so that local authorities could deal with what it described as the “hard cases”. The response was specifically aimed at those who have substantially adapted housing, but it does not provide the safeguard that a statutory exemption would provide. If exemptions can be made for foster and kinship carers and for those who serve in the armed forces—and I welcome those exemptions—surely people in substantially adapted disabled houses should also be exempt.

Scotland receives 6.5 per cent of the total DHP budget. Scotland and London have the same number of claimants who are affected by bedroom tax, but for 2013-14 Scotland will receive £10 million in DHP compared with £56.6 million for London. That is not fair, especially given that the original problem existed not in Scotland but in the south-east of England and in London in particular. I have repeatedly asked, and will continue to ask, for an increase in discretionary housing payments to alleviate the impact on our most vulnerable people and those with an illness or disability. The bedroom tax simply has no place in Scotland.

I note that the expert working group on welfare has today published its report, which I am sure will be an important staging post in the debate to come. I welcome the working group's contribution and I note some of the themes emerging from its report, such as the need to treat people on benefits with respect. I echo those calls. People who are too ill to work or who are unable to obtain work should not be stigmatised. They do not choose to be in the position that they are in, so they should not be penalised for it.

At heart, the independence debate is about choices. It is about ensuring that the key decisions about what we want from our society and about Scotland's future are made by the people who live and work in Scotland. We will be able to achieve a fairer welfare system for Scotland that ensures fair and decent support for people only through independence and with full control over welfare issues. I know that this is not a political debate, but, in response to Drew Smith, I point out that all parties in Westminster are now committed to keeping the bedroom tax and to keeping the benefits system as it is. There will be no improvement there, so the only option is the one that we are putting to the people of Scotland. That option would give us control of our own welfare system and would allow us to make decisions that are right for Scotland.

We have already set out measures that the Scottish Government will take in the event of a yes vote, such as repealing the bedroom tax and separating housing benefit from universal credit.

As a Scottish Government, we have a high level of ambition for Scotland and our people, and we are determined to address the root causes of poverty and inequality by bringing about the change that our nation and communities need. People who are suffering from illnesses and long-term conditions should not need to go through the indignity that they currently go through under the present welfare system.

Meeting closed at 17:34.

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