



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 24 March 2015

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 24 March 2015*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Good afternoon. The first item of business today is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader this afternoon is the Rev Joe Barnard, the minister of Kiltarlity Free Church, Inverness-shire.

**The Rev Joe Barnard (Kiltarlity Free Church, Inverness-shire):** First of all, I thank the Presiding Officer and members of Parliament for the opportunity to be here.

On Saturdays, when we are tidying up the house, my children often ask me, “When can I be done?” I used to give them a list of to-dos, but I have realised that their question is itself a problem. The problem is this: they are thinking of a family activity in selfish terms. My strategy as a parent now is to teach my kids that the important question is not “When can I be done?” but “How can I help us finish the task?” I have to admit that, thus far, I have been a total failure at this.

Jesus understood the importance of helping people ask the right questions. Like Socrates, he was a master at revealing hidden assumptions and enabling people to shift their mental categories. One of my favourite moments in the gospels is when a really intelligent man, seeking to look good in front of his peers, and reflecting upon the ancient command “Love your neighbour as yourself”, asks Jesus the question, “Who then is my neighbour?” As Jesus often does, instead of giving a direct reply, he answers with a story.

I will not repeat the story, because you know it—it is the story of the Good Samaritan. I just want to point out the mind-shifting idea hidden within a story that has become a moral cliché. A selfish assumption was lodged within the question of the young man. To ask “Who is my neighbour?” is to attempt to draw a circle around a limited set of people to reduce the sphere of my personal responsibility; if these are my neighbours, I am accountable only to them.

However, Jesus has no taste for self-interest. The explosive idea within the parable is that responsibility is not something that can be measured, quantified and validated, but something that moment by moment is either fulfilled or neglected. In other words, a neighbour—my responsibility—is never an object that is detached

from me, but a relationship of fidelity that I find myself in and which I must maintain.

Perhaps your job is not wholly dissimilar to mine. As a minister in the church, I sometimes fall into the trap of trying to appraise my work by measuring the number of people whom I have helped. This parable of Jesus is a goad to thinking differently. The true criterion of responsibility is not how much I have done, but whether I recognise the need staring into my eyes right now and whether I act on behalf of this woman, this man or this child with grace, justice, and mercy. Only then will I have fulfilled my God-given calling to be a neighbour.

## Topical Question Time

14:03

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Before we start, I indicate to members that we have time in hand this afternoon and that it is likely that we will go early to the debate after topical question time. I hope, assume and indeed expect that members will be in the chamber for the start of the debate.

### Rural Payments and Services System (Support)

**1. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the farming sector to transition to the new rural payments and services system. (S4T-00982)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead):** There can be no doubt that the new common agricultural policy is extremely complex, and we worked alongside the industry to carefully plan its implementation, which is now under way.

We have taken a number of steps to support the transition. We held more than 50 farmer meetings to explain the new policy, and they have reached 6,500 people in the past five months. Our online single application form—SAF—for delivering the new CAP was launched on time, and farmers can book customer support sessions in our 16 area offices. Some 437 farmers have done that so far. Farmers who are without good broadband at home can access our online services in an area office.

We are aware of teething issues, which there are with all new websites, that customers have experienced. We have fixed many of them and are working hard to address the remaining issues quickly. However, it is worth noting that the system has been available for 97 per cent of the time.

The online service has major benefits in helping farmers to avoid errors and penalties with its built-in checks and validation. I therefore encourage all farmers to register and use the service.

**Sarah Boyack:** I agree that the system is hugely important and I welcome the intentions behind it, but I understand that the online process has been painstakingly slow and deeply frustrating for those who have attempted to use it and that there are particular problems for farmers with dyslexia, given the complexity of the process.

On Friday, it was reported that 150 out of an expected 22,000 farmers and crofters had started the process online. The system is crucial for CAP payments, so it is fundamental that it is fixed, but it appears to be a shambles at the moment. Given the concerns that the National Farmers Union

Scotland has raised, when will the system be fixed? What would the implications be if the Scottish Government were to take up Commissioner Hogan's offer for member states to extend the SAF deadline?

**Richard Lochhead:** The online system has been open for only one week and one day. Given the complexity of the new policy, we were always aware that the first week—perhaps even the first two weeks—of the new system would throw up issues that would have to be ironed out.

The number of farmers who complete forms online is always very low in the first few weeks of the window being opened—they have until 15 May to do so. We are addressing all the issues as they arise, and it is completely unfair and unreasonable to say that the system is “a shambles”. That will simply talk us into a place that none of us wants to be in, and it will sow seeds of uncertainty across the industry. We recognise that there are issues that have to be ironed out, but I ask members to keep their comments measured. We want people to have confidence that they can apply for the vital payments under the new policy.

Unlike elsewhere on these islands, people in Scotland can apply using paper or apply online. They have that option. If people are having difficulties or challenges, they can visit their local area office and get assistance to complete a form online or a paper form. A variety of support is available across the country to help farmers and crofters to complete the forms, and I urge them to take advantage of the support that is available.

Sarah Boyack mentioned farmers who have dyslexia. I urge anyone who has such challenges to visit their area office, sit with one of the officials and get advice on how to use the online system or complete a paper copy. That assistance is available for people to use.

Finally, on extending the single application form deadline beyond 15 May for one further month, Commissioner Hogan said last week that that is an option that member states can voluntarily take up if they so wish. We are currently considering what the consequences would be of taking up that offer. We are not ruling it out, but we recognise that, if we extended the deadline for applications by one month, that would cut by one month the time that we have for inspections before we make payments. We have to discuss with stakeholders the consequences of doing that, given that farmers and crofters are saying to me that what is really important is getting the payments out as quickly as possible once the window for that opens in December.

Members should rest assured, please, that we are treating these matters very seriously.

**Sarah Boyack:** I thank the cabinet secretary for the seriousness with which he has addressed the issue that I have raised. I totally agree that we do not want to exacerbate the problem, but can he clarify when the technical problems with the online process will be fixed and people can have confidence in the system?

**Richard Lochhead:** That is a very important issue. I do not doubt for one second that it will have been extremely frustrating for people who have gone online during the few occasions when the system has been down.

The fixes have been put in place quickly, but some remain. For instance, the industry asked for a printing facility so that, once people have populated data in their forms, they can print the form out and perhaps keep a copy in paper format to refer to. I hope that we will introduce that facility, which is at the request of the industry, within a few days.

To reiterate, this is a very complex system, but we now have a functioning online system available that brings additional benefits compared with completing the form on paper. In other words, the validation process online flags up problems to the applicant immediately, which they can then fix online, unlike with the paper copies. That avoids penalties and problems further down the road. That is an important dynamic in the online system in which we have invested.

I continue to take these issues seriously, and I will ensure that any other issues that arise are fixed as quickly as possible.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I have been listening carefully to what the cabinet secretary has said. I understand his desire to keep the language measured, but we are talking about a system that an increasing number of agents—people who are well versed at filling in such forms, online and on paper—are saying is not fit for purpose.

An agent who I know well and who is used to completing such forms tells me that the SAF system crashed on him 14 times on day 3 and seven times yesterday, too. He finally completed a simple online form for a small farming business this morning. He was given an application receipt number of 53. Does that mean that, at this point in time, only 53 farming businesses have completed the process?

As has already been said, the United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has extended the deadline for submissions, but it has also issued paper forms pre-populated with information to every farmer, to ensure that European deadlines are met.

Will the Scottish Government be prepared to do the same, if necessary? If not, what is its alternative—its plan B—if it has one? If the Government does have one, which I hope it has, when is the cut-off point when that plan B will have to be put into action?

**Richard Lochhead:** We have contingency plans in Scotland. Indeed, that was referred to in the coverage of what has happened with the English system over the past few days. It was pointed out that, unlike England, Scotland has contingency plans. That of course involves paper copies of the single application form—if required—but they are already available for specific requests. If any farmer wants to use paper, they can do so at the moment. They do not have to apply online.

I do not doubt for a second the frustrations that are caused by those occasions when the system has been shut down over the first week since it was set up. Every effort is being made to fix any issues that come to our attention as quickly as possible. Many of them have been fixed already.

One agent, Ian Hope at CKD Galbraith's Perth office, said:

"I have not completed a full SAF yet but I have been filling in field data sheets and it seems to be working OK.

I would rather be working online than on paper. If we have to go back to paper, as they have in England, it will just increase the scope for errors because there would be no automatic checks."

He added:

"Now that we are online we have to keep the momentum going."

I know that there are other views from other agents. Believe you me—I have heard them, as I have had them communicated to me over the past few days. I appreciate the frustrations being experienced. I hope that, this time next week, we will be in an even better place than we are today.

On the question of those who have completed their forms, it is fair to say that 50-odd farmers have fully completed their forms. Another 500-plus farmers have partly completed their forms. Many of them want to wait until the printing facility is available before they finally submit their online application.

As I have said before, there is a slow uptake of people filling in their single application forms online in the first couple of weeks, as is the case every year. The rate then gets faster as the deadline gets closer.

We will certainly monitor the situation very closely, and we will monitor the wider issues very closely as well. We will take appropriate action as and when required.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** The cabinet secretary has referred to the various options that are available to farmers. He will be aware that, in the constituency that I represent, access to broadband is far from universal. Indeed, many farmers are based out in the smaller islands, so even accessing the area office presents a logistical challenge. I welcome any comments that the cabinet secretary has about the specific support that may be available to those farmers.

Much has been made of the information technology problems surrounding SAF. I am getting feedback from my constituents that the complexity of SAF is also a major problem. The cabinet secretary has indicated the need to get it right and to ensure that payments get out in a timely fashion. Would it not be prudent, in this first year, if we only have some 53 out of about 22,000 forms through the system already, to accept that it is pretty much inevitable that we will have to delay by a month, and to get people prepared for that sooner rather than later?

**Richard Lochhead:** As I said, this is because of the complexity of the new policy. One reason for the complexities in the IT system is that the overall policy is complex.

Every single member state has made strong representations to the new commissioner to simplify the new common agricultural policy, because all Administrations are finding it pretty challenging to implement the new policy. Notwithstanding that, we have a system up and running in Scotland, which many people are using. I am confident that more people will use it as the weeks go by.

We will give serious consideration to extending the deadline by a month. As I said, we would have to take into account other consequences if we were to do that. We are discussing those consequences with the industry and stakeholders because we do not want to be in a position in a few months' time in which we are getting complaints about the payments being delayed because we extended the deadline for the single application forms. We have to balance all the considerations, but we are giving the matter serious thought.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I declare an interest as a farmer.

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the frustration in the farming industry about the new £100 million rural payments and services computer system's apparent lack of functionality. He will also be aware of the industry concerns that farmers are required to lodge their application form before 15 May, which is less than two months away, yet 99 per cent of applicants have still to

use the new system at what is for many their most stressful time of year.

Given Commissioner Hogan's reported willingness to accept late applications, will the cabinet secretary tell Parliament if and how such delays would affect the timing of this year's payments should he need to take up the commissioner's offer to accept late applications?

**Richard Lochhead:** Although a lot of the complexity of the system has emanated from Europe, we have introduced some of our own complexity after discussions with the industry to ensure that the policy is appropriate for Scotland's diverse circumstances. Consequently, we must be careful about how we move forward and ensure that the payments are made in time if that is at all possible.

We have always said to the industry that the policy is complex and will be challenging to implement in Scotland, given some of the decisions that have been taken, and that that could have potential implications for the payments. The industry's message back was that it did not mind the payments being made a bit later if we got the right policy in place.

Our schedule is still to issue the payments on time in December. If a month's extension for submitting the claims were granted, that would clearly give us less time to carry out the inspections that must be done before the payments are made. We must balance those challenges, which we are doing. We are also discussing with the Commission whether there would be more leeway over the inspections and the penalty regime if we extended the deadline for applications by a month.

That is where the discussions are. I take seriously many of the members' concerns. I am receiving daily reports from the IT team and the wider CAP implementation team. I want to ensure that we can fix any issues that come up as quickly as possible, that we implement the new policy as smoothly as possible and that we issue the vital payments to farm businesses across Scotland as soon as possible thereafter.



## Post-study Work Visas

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-12763, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on post-study work visas.

I invite members who want to take part in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. I advise members that we have a bit of time in hand. I, and the other Presiding Officers, will allow additional time for interventions.

I call Alasdair Allan to speak to and move the motion.

14:18

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** I am delighted to open this important debate on the role that post-study work immigration routes can play for Scotland.

A post-study work visa would allow recent international graduates from Scottish institutions to stay in Scotland and contribute to our economy and society; the Scottish Government has consistently argued for the reinstatement of the post-study work route for international students. We opposed its abolition by the United Kingdom Government in 2012 and we have continued to seek opportunities to press for its reintroduction, including in our submission to the Smith commission last year. There is no doubt in my mind that a post-study work visa would be in Scotland's interests. It would be in the interests of our businesses and of our world-class further and higher education institutions, and it would be in the wider interests of the people of Scotland.

We know that a post-study work visa is what our businesses and education leaders want, because that is what they are telling us. Today's debate follows the publication at the weekend of the post-study work working group's report. The working group comprised business, student and further and higher education leaders. Those leaders came together because of a shared concern across their sectors about Scotland's ability to attract the brightest and the best international students and graduates. In its report, the group confirmed its unanimous support for the principle of a scheme to enable international students who graduate from a Scottish institution to stay and work in Scotland.

The report is important, because it clearly sets out the case for the reintroduction of a post-study work visa in Scotland not from the point of view of the Scottish Government, but from that of education and business leaders who are dealing every day with the aftermath of its abolition.

The opportunities and benefits of introducing a post-study work visa were acknowledged in the report of the Smith commission. The Scottish Government is strongly committed to responding positively to the opportunity that is presented by exploring all possible avenues for the reintroduction in Scotland of a post-study work route. I am disappointed that, as yet, the UK Government has not made any substantive progress in taking forward that recommendation, despite the continued efforts of the Scottish Government in pressing for action. While the UK Government delays on the matter, Scotland suffers.

Scotland is a highly attractive destination for international students, and it is crucial that it remains that way. Our higher education system is underpinned by world-class research, a tremendous breadth of learning, including on internationalisation, and a focus on enhancing all aspects of graduate employability. Scottish education is known across the globe for its excellence. As I never tire of pointing out, we have four institutions in the top 200 *Times Higher Education* world university rankings. The 2014 research excellence framework found that 77 per cent of research in our universities was "world-leading" or "internationally excellent"; in that respect, we were ahead of the UK average.

We know that the students who come here have very positive feelings about their experiences. The most recent student academic experience survey, which was carried out in 2014, found that of the four home nations, Scotland had the highest level of respondents—88 per cent—who declared themselves to be satisfied with the overall quality of their courses. If we add to all that Scotland's natural beauty, friendly cities, world-renowned festivals and good travel infrastructure, it is clear that this country is a wonderful place to study, work and live. It is therefore unquestionably a highly attractive destination for international students.

I am very proud that Scotland has among the highest proportions of international students in the world. In 2013-14, there were in our universities 28,610 international students, from more than 180 countries, at all levels. That represents a small increase of just 1 per cent on the total for the previous year. Behind those figures, the negative impact of the UK Government's immigration policies is being seen and felt: Scottish institutions are experiencing serious declines in the number of students from key overseas markets. Countries that have traditionally sent high numbers of students to Scotland are now looking at alternative and more welcoming—at least, at official level—destinations.

In March 2011, the UK Government announced the closure from April 2012 of the post-study work visa route. In the years since then, the number of new entrants to Scottish higher education institutions from India has decreased by 63 per cent, and the number from Nigeria has fallen by 29 per cent. Those figures demonstrate the real threat to the success of our universities that is presented by the UK Government's immigration policies, but there is another threat.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I am very grateful to the minister for taking an intervention. I agree with much of what he says, including his view that withdrawal of the post-study work visa was regrettable. He has given the figures for in-bound students from India and Pakistan—they are a matter of record—but can he confirm that, overall, the number of international students who have come to Scotland over the past three years has increased? Does he agree that there is a danger that, by talking about a reduction in the number of international students, ministers might feed the very problem that he is rightly pointing out?

**Dr Allan:** Liam McArthur will have just heard me say that I acknowledge that overall there was in 2013-14 a very small increase of about 1 per cent on the total for the previous year. I am very happy to acknowledge that increase, but the member will acknowledge that it is something of a plateau and that some of our biggest markets that have traditionally supplied us with the largest numbers of overseas students are clearly expressing concerns that are worth being mentioned in Parliament.

I mentioned that there is another threat. Although the number of international students in Scotland's higher education institutions is an issue for us and for the sector, the number who are being attracted to our key competitor countries is growing, which is worth mentioning. Between 2011-12 and 2012-13, international student numbers in three other key English-speaking university markets increased—there was modest growth of 0.4 per cent in Australia, 7 per cent growth in the United States and 11 per cent growth in Canada.

What do those trends mean? I strongly believe that the crucial difference between Scotland and our competitors is the ability to set out an immigration policy that supports and enhances the higher education sector and the wider economy. We need to be able to compete on an equal footing with those countries and to do that we need to have a post-study work offer to match.

In January this year, Alastair Sim, who is the director of Universities Scotland, spoke on behalf of the sector. He said:

"Scottish universities need action from government to improve its post-study work offer. We are losing out in key markets as our competitors take steps to attract more international talent."

Businesses share his concern that without a post-study work route we are missing an opportunity to grow Scotland's economy. In an open letter to the Smith commission last November, nine of Scotland's key education, business and employer organisations voiced support for partial devolution of immigration powers to Scotland, specifically to enable the introduction of post-study work entitlement.

Commenting at the time, Ross Martin of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry said:

"Greater powers to attract and retain high-talent from other countries would make a big difference to the key economic tests for Scotland—developing a more highly skilled and productive workforce, creating more innovative businesses, and improving our global skills and connections to grow our exports. Major Scottish industries would soon benefit from this talent, the Scottish economy and society have distinct long-term needs and there is broad civic support for this move, and that is why we are jointly asking the Smith Commission to transfer these powers and enhance Scotland's ability to prosper."

This Government shares those views. I am certain that the UK Government's immigration policies are damaging to the university sector, to Scotland and to our international reputation.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Dr Allan:** I must make some progress.

Scotland benefits immeasurably from the social, cultural and intellectual impact of the more than 28,000 international students who study in our 19 higher education institutions.

**Liam McArthur:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Dr Allan:** In the interests of fairness, I had better go for the member who asked first.

**Mary Scanlon:** I merely remind the minister—as Mike Russell used constantly to remind the rest of us—that higher education is also taught in further education. Although the number of international students in further education here dropped by 23 per cent between 2010 and 2014, the number of European Union and other European students fell by 80 per cent in the same period. So, given that we have the common travel area, why have we lost 80 per cent of EU students, compared with the 23 per cent for international students?

**The Presiding Officer:** Minister—you will be rewarded at the end for the time that you have spent on interventions.

**Dr Allan:** I will be rewarded sevenfold, I am sure.

It is fair to say that some of the language that has been used by the UK Government around people of many different nationalities, including—it must be said—people from Europe, has hardly been conducive to their feeling that they will have an entirely warm reception here. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** Order, please.

**Dr Allan:** Universities Scotland's September 2013 report "Richer for it: The positive social, cultural and educational impact international students have on Scotland" identified a number of key qualitative benefits of internationalisation in higher education, which include enrichment of the learning experience, development of an international outlook among home students and graduates, positive impacts in the wider community, and the creation of a network of alumni around the world who can act as informal ambassadors for Scotland.

Our concern is that the current Westminster approach to immigration is working against our demographic and economic need for migrants in Scotland. The Westminster approach to immigration is driven, I am afraid, by a desire to reduce net migration to the UK regardless of who the migrants are and the contribution that they make. The Westminster approach is driven by, and focused on, the needs and context of the south-east of England. It makes virtually no allowance for the value of migration to the whole of the UK, to Scotland, or to the social, cultural, economic and intellectual contribution that migrants are making to our communities every day.

The beauty of the post-study work visa is that it does not just help us to retain world-class talent to fill vacancies. We know that the prospect of a post-study work visa attracts international students to our education institutions in the first place. Scotland was the trailblazer in the UK when it introduced the fresh talent visa to encourage young, talented and hard-working international students to stay here; John Swinney and the SNP gave that initiative an unreserved welcome when it was announced in February 2004.

Scotland's success became a model for the rest of the UK, which went on to introduce the post-study work visa, which it was subsequently abolished by the current UK Government due, I am afraid, to its obsession with reducing any kind of migration. It is a nonsense to drive away from Scotland well-qualified and motivated young people when they are exactly the kind of people whom we need to stay and contribute to our great

nation. The answer is simple: we need to bring back the post-study work visa in Scotland.

I conclude by highlighting the damage that abolition of the post-study work visa has done to Scotland and our future. Scotland welcomes the contribution that new Scots can make to our economy and society; Scotland is open for academic and research business and we have the ability to provide a home for talented individuals who wish to build their lives and careers here. The first step in that is to attract the brightest and the best from around the world to our colleges and universities, and the post-study work visa will help us to do just that.

On this subject, the Scottish Government is just not on the same page as the UK Government. We deplore irresponsible negative rhetoric on immigration; the Scottish Government supports a managed migration system that meets our needs. That controlled immigration system for Scotland includes the reintroduction of a post-study work visa, as demanded by our education and business leaders.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the Post Study Work Working Group's report; agrees with business and education leaders who demand the return of the post-study work visa to Scotland; recognises the contribution that international graduates make to the economy and society; highlights that Scotland's education institutions provide a first-class experience for talented students from around the world; embraces a culturally diverse student and teaching body that enriches Scotland's intellectual, social and cultural life; calls on the UK Government to engage constructively on the Smith Commission finding that it should work with the Scottish Government to explore schemes to allow international graduates to remain in Scotland and contribute to economic activity, and calls for an immigration system for Scotland that meets its needs.

14:32

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I am pleased to open the debate for Scottish Labour. I am sure that we will find much agreement across the chamber.

I welcome the report that was published at the weekend and I thank all those who took part in the research for and production of it. The analysis and the argument are well made, and the debate gives us an opportunity to endorse the report.

Scotland is a small place. I worked in and around the Parliament in the early days of devolution, and I remember the launch of the fresh talent initiative by Jack McConnell as First Minister. It was an early example of the Parliament taking a different decision within a devolved settlement. It took negotiation with the UK Government to agree the policy, but a strong case was made and accepted. It was a Scottish solution to a Scottish problem. It provided flexibility for

immigration policy within a cohesive UK policy that retained the integrity of a UK system.

Since the Parliament's creation, Scotland has faced—and it continues to face—challenges with an ageing population, skills shortages and maintaining public services, alongside a desire to articulate who we are, what kind of country we want to be and what we value. The fresh talent scheme was introduced to respond to such questions. If bright, educated and ambitious people come to our country to study and take advantage of our excellent education institutions and to contribute to our economy and our society, can we not have a system that gains some further benefit from the situation?

The flexible, attractive and workable fresh talent scheme was a new approach, and it was adopted throughout the UK until it was revoked in 2012. There appear to have been two reasons for that. First, that was part of the approach to dealing with bogus colleges. A number of bogus colleges were bringing into the country people who had no intention of studying for a degree or a qualification, although none of those colleges was identified in Scotland. Bogus colleges are unacceptable and exploitative, and it is right that action is taken to deal with them, but that action must be proportionate. Making it less attractive for people to study here is not the correct response.

Secondly, the scheme was revoked as a consequence of targets to reduce immigration. The removal of post-study work visas was a simple way of contributing to meeting the targets, but the decision ignores the benefits of immigration to our economy and society.

The impact of the decision is clearly laid out in the post-study work working group report, which has been published in the past few days. Since the removal of the visas, we have seen at best stagnant international student numbers and, when the figures are examined more closely—as the minister highlighted—we see a disproportionate reduction in students from Nigeria and India. An impact is also starting to be experienced in numbers from China, which is a target growth area for many of our universities. Those countries are all growth areas for international students. Our competitor countries—America, Canada and Australia—are all seeing increases in numbers, and all those countries offer attractive post-study work options.

It is not only Scotland that is falling behind. Earlier this year, the UK all-party parliamentary group on migration published the report of its inquiry into post-study work opportunities in the UK, which identified the same recruitment problems at UK institutions. The group highlighted that small businesses are particularly affected under the current system, as they find it more

difficult to get a sponsor licence and to pay the Home Office's entrant's salary. It also found that the majority of sponsor licences are in south-east England, with other regions—along with Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales—being badly affected by the lack of uptake from small and medium-sized enterprises.

The group found that, even by its own measure, the UK Government had overstretched its policy. As part of a target to reduce immigration, the UK Government's estimate that its policy would reduce the number of those securing visas by 49 per cent significantly underestimated the policy's impact. The real reduction is closer to 88 per cent. That is why our amendment calls for the immediate removal of international students from net migration targets. It is a flawed policy that is counterproductive.

Voices across the UK are questioning the sense of this restrictive and damaging policy. By holding the debate today and—through the Scottish Government, with the Parliament's support—arguing the case with current UK ministers, Scotland can lead on the agenda again.

We all know that international students make a considerable contribution to our economy not only through the fees that they bring into our universities but through their substantial off-campus expenditure, which significantly benefits the Scottish economy. We should give them the opportunity to become more involved in our economy, to grow it and to contribute through taxation.

I was struck by the numbers of students, as outlined in the all-party group's report, who want to set up their own businesses and be enterprising and entrepreneurial. However, we know that the contribution that international students make cannot be measured only in pounds and pence. They contribute to a rich, diverse and multicultural educational sector and country, and we benefit from their choice to come to Scotland. International students contribute to our economy and our society, and those who wish to stay and work, contributing positively to our economy once they have gained their qualifications, should be afforded the opportunity to do so.

There is a lot of self-interest in that for Scotland. We have significant demographic challenges, such as an ageing population and a birth rate that does not keep pace. As the working group's report says,

"Scotland's proportion of the population of working age is also untypically low and is forecast to fall by 4% during the period 2012 and 2037 whilst the number of people aged over 65 years is projected to rise by 59%."

We are facing the sharpest demographic challenge of anywhere in the UK, and if we are to

prosper as a country, we need healthy population growth.

We are also facing acute skills shortages at graduate level in key sectors. Scotland has a higher level of skills shortages than the rest of the UK, and in 2013, 25 per cent of all vacancies in Scotland were due to such shortages. The report highlights that employers identified a wide range of job areas as requiring skilled graduates, including science, oil and gas, research and engineering, as well as business, media and public sector professional roles.

If Scotland is to be a modern, growing and competitive country, we must address the crisis caused by skills shortages. The key to doing that is to skill and invest in the young people who come through our school system and to have a programme of lifelong learning opportunities, but the answer also lies partly in retaining the talent of international students so that they can contribute.

The report contains an interesting discussion about the value of students and graduates having a good experience in Scotland, which they take home with them. That creates a strong network of alumni around the world who retain connections with Scotland, which is good for our society and our economy.

The minister might wish to comment in closing on a remark in Colleges Scotland's briefing that echoes Mary Scanlon's comments on EU students. It says:

"Traditionally, Scotland's colleges have been able to recruit internationally. However, priorities have changed with the move to reform and regionalisation, and colleges have had to consider carefully what international activity ... is part of their delivery plan."

Colleges are delivering some of the key courses that address our skills shortages. Perhaps the minister can comment on the role that the Scottish Government sees for colleges in international recruitment and how they can be supported.

How do we move on from today? The report raises debates about sponsorship, eligible qualifications and length of stay, but those are all technicalities. There is strong support for the principle. I imagine that we will agree at decision time that reintroducing a post-study work visa is the right thing to do.

The Smith commission considered the policy and, as it was previously successfully introduced in Scotland, saw no barrier that could not be overcome within the current constitutional settlement to delivering it. The commission recommended flexibility and co-operation between the UK and Scottish Governments. In the chamber last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Angela Constance, said that meetings were on-going. The debate and the

publication of the report can strengthen the Scottish Government's position.

One stumbling block is continuing to count international students in the net migration target. I hope that others will support the calls in our amendment for that to be resolved. That would make for easier negotiations.

In 2005, fresh talent was new and innovative and helped to promote Scotland as an educational and entrepreneurial powerhouse throughout the world. Since then, other countries have upped their offer and, because of the current UK Government's decision to end post-study work visas, we again face the challenges that we faced 10 years ago.

The post-study visa regime in the UK is cumbersome and restrictive, particularly in comparison with nations that we consider to be our competitors in education. While they are taking advantage of some of the best and brightest minds that the world has to offer, we face a competitive disadvantage. In a speech last week, Jack McConnell highlighted that our visa system is damaging our relations around the world and, in terms of this debate, is damaging the impression of the country in the eyes of young people around the world. The language that is used about immigration is making us look insular and negative.

Today's debate gives us the opportunity to talk about the benefits of immigration—and yes, to recognise that we need a fair and clear system of controlled immigration. Immigration brings advantages to our economy, our universities, our colleges and our communities. The benefits that international students bring to Scotland are clear. I hope that the consensus today about post-study work visas can stretch to consensus on the benefits that international students bring and the need for us to have in place an immigration strategy that is beneficial to the country as a whole and its constituent parts.

I move amendment S4M-12763.1, to insert at end:

"; recognises the success of Fresh Talent, launched by the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, in bringing considerable benefits to Scotland's economy by encouraging international students to work, study and stay in Scotland, and calls on the UK Government to immediately remove university students from net migration targets to ensure that Scotland's universities can continue to compete in a growing global market".

14:43

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I say at the outset that the Scottish Conservatives will support the Government's motion.

I do not think that anybody in the chamber could fail to be aware of the invaluable social, economic and cultural contribution that international students and staff make to UK universities and colleges. Like others, we believe that it is very important to celebrate the fact that the UK remains the most popular study destination for foreign students after the United States.

Scottish universities are quite simply second to none when it comes to their international reputation. That has been proven over many years, given their consistently high rankings in a wide variety of league tables. That success is precious and it means that we should be very concerned when we hear a chorus of calls for change to the post-study work visa situation because, notwithstanding the past and current ability of the sector to attract international students and staff in what is becoming a fiercely competitive global market, something is wrong—quite far wrong—when Universities Scotland, Universities UK, as well as the National Union of Students and the wider business committee, are all expressing deep-seated concerns about some aspects of Westminster immigration policy, which they argue, quite rightly in my opinion, are overly restrictive and are threatening to diminish the good work of those institutions.

I hope that members know that the Scottish Conservatives made plain our support for many of those concerns to Theresa May and David Willetts on separate occasions in 2012. Those concerns were laid bare in the recent all-party parliamentary group on migration support, which concluded that the UK is at risk of undermining its foothold in the international student market. We need to be concerned about that.

For example, the 1.1 per cent increase in international student enrolments in 2013-14 followed a 0.7 per cent decline in 2012-13, which was the first annual decline since records began. Furthermore, in every year since 2010-11, Scotland has experienced sharp double-figure declines in the enrolment of students from key overseas markets such as India, Pakistan and, as the minister mentioned, Nigeria.

Liam McArthur's point is valid. We have to keep the overall perspective, but that does not mean that we should not drill down into the concerns about some of the details.

When compared against figures from our key competitors, such as the United States and Canada, the severity of the current patterns emerges. There is a real concern, which we take very seriously. The evidence is particularly troubling. Our Westminster colleague Richard Bacon MP found common cause with many when he said that the coalition Government's current stance is

"jeopardising Britain's position in the global race for talent".

Nobody could argue that that is not detrimental.

I have no doubt that our universities are right to be concerned about the current situation. Particular concerns about the lack of flexibility in the timescale for the award of visas and the lack of transparency when it comes to visa refusals, particularly for PhD research staff contracts that run beyond 18 months, are perfectly justified. I heard those concerns articulated forcefully a couple of years ago at the University of Aberdeen medical school, and they have been raised twice at meetings of the Parliament's cross-party group on colleges and universities.

My concerns do not end there because the debate is also about respect for our tertiary education sector. It would be unacceptable if restrictions rendered our educational establishments less able to compete internationally.

On the issue of international change, just three weeks ago the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service made a change so that our students will be allowed to apply for EU universities as well as British ones. That shows the changes that are beginning to be made on the international stage.

Nothing is a greater credit to the Scottish universities sector than the way in which it has developed knowledge exchange, thanks to the underpinning of the research that the minister talked about. Knowledge exchange is so international these days that anything that we do to undermine it is obviously a concern. It is right for Universities Scotland, the all-party parliamentary group on migration and the NUS to make a very strong case for extending the length of time that international graduates will be here for high-skilled work.

There is cross-party agreement across the chamber, so why are we here in the first place? The reason is partly the context of this debate. The coalition Government had to take some action in the first instance because the number of bogus students who were abusing further and higher education was at an unacceptable level. That was true in Scotland in small measure, but it was specifically true south of the border. Given the statistics on bogus places that we had at the time, there was understandable concern that, if it went unchecked, too many of our institutions would fall foul of good practice when pursuing academic excellence, and too high a proportion of international graduates would move into low-skilled work when the demand was—and remains—for high-skilled graduates. Previous Government policy was not working so it was right to put in place some reforms to make things

better. The debate is not about whether those reforms were necessary—I believe that they were—it is more about their nature.

I understand where Labour is coming from in asking the UK Government to immediately remove all students from the net migration totals, but there are some technical issues to be resolved before we seek to change that. The Scottish Conservatives would prefer to see how the post-Smith deliberations pan out before we make a whole-hearted commitment to a significant change to immigration data. I understand Labour's point, but we have to go about it carefully.

Just last Thursday, we had a measured and thoughtful debate in the chamber, sponsored by Jean Urquhart, which touched on immigration policy and—much more important—how we handle that debate. The same sensitivity needs to apply to this debate. We must deploy our rhetoric with extreme care, making it abundantly clear that we whole-heartedly welcome international students who intend to share their skills and talents and welcome them because they bring such significant economic, social and cultural benefits to the country.

For me, immigration policy and the wider issues around it need to be balanced. The policy needs to be wholly welcoming to international students but it should also be punitive towards those who merely wish to take advantage of it for their own ends—and there are a few students who are in that position.

The question is how we address the strong, persuasive and well-articulated concerns of bodies such as Universities Scotland but, at the same time, prevent any future abuse of the situation, which has clearly caused issues in the past. It will be to Scotland's detriment if we cannot sort out the issue; the Smith commission provides us with the opportunity to do so.

14:51

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):**

I welcome Liz Smith's speech. It is very important to demonstrate this afternoon that the Parliament is united in saying that what the Westminster Government did in 2012 was wrong, because there is no hiding the fact that, once again, Westminster's immigration policies are not working for Scotland. The abolition of the post-study work visa in 2012 is further proof of that.

Last week, I participated in two chamber debates relating to Westminster's attitude to young people who want to live and work here in Scotland. We debated Scotland's place in Europe on Tuesday and we celebrated Scotland's diverse communities on Wednesday. What this Parliament does, and does well, is to set the tone on

immigration, and it is a tone that our Scottish media are adopting when talking about the subject.

A couple of years ago, the *Sunday Herald* was eager to celebrate the fact that a French-born MSP had taken his oath in French. So eager was Robbie Dinwoodie to tell the good news that he told his readers a fib: he told them that I was educated at Dijon's university. Let us clear up any misunderstanding—I was not. The only time that I went to the university in Dijon was when I went out with a student from Sweden.

On reflection, I might never have attended a lecture at any university, but overseas students were very much part of my youth. I also shared a flat with an American student from Chicago. I remember Amy-Jo Tobin quite well. She told me never to use the F-word. I wonder whether Amy-Jo ever set foot in Glasgow.

What I am getting at is that inviting foreign students to study here not only helps them to understand our world; more importantly, inviting overseas students to live here helps us to understand the world we live in. Just like pollinating insects, foreign students are the bees, playing a critical role in helping culture to flourish and our businesses to grow. Scottish students studying abroad have the same cross-pollinating effect, spreading Scottish seeds across the world.

In 2013-14, more than 48,000 students from outside the UK were studying in Scotland. That represents more than 21 per cent of the student body and brings people from approximately 185 countries to live and study in Scotland. That is why the UK Government immigration policies are wrong for Scotland.

The policies are also damaging our economy. Business leaders in Scotland have said so. In the post-study work working group report, 85 per cent of businesses said that they were in favour of bringing back the post-study work visa for international students—what are we waiting for?

In the same report, 100 per cent of education providers in Scotland were in favour of bringing back the post-study work visa. Let us bring it back. In the report,

"70% of respondents noted that when the post study work visa came to an end, individuals should have the ability to move into a longer term visa."

What is not to like?

The tone adopted by political parties at Westminster is beyond belief. They tell us that migrants are draining our education system. Overseas students are paying to study here; they are net contributors to our universities and colleges. They could be our future teachers and professors if we allowed them to stay here.

Westminster tells us that overseas students are draining our national health service, but they are the future nurses, surgeons, consultants and general practitioners that we are desperately looking for. It is a no-brainer. The question should not be whether we should make it easier for overseas students who live here to continue to live and work here; it should be, how best can we encourage overseas students to come and study in Scotland? The answer is clear: when they are considering Scotland as a place to study, tell them that they will be encouraged to stay and live here.

The Smith commission report contained additional issues for consideration, one of which was the recommendation that the parties should

“explore the possibility of introducing formal schemes to allow international higher education students graduating from Scottish further and higher education institutions to remain in Scotland and contribute to economic activity for a defined period of time.”

What are we waiting for? That is my question. Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce's document, “Strong and sustainable—2015 General Election: A plan for the North-east” is a manifesto that calls for exactly that.

It is easy for me to claim that the best of a generation are likely to want to travel the world and are the most likely to set up home and live abroad. I am one of those migrants. Of course, it is for other members, not for me, to say whether I am making a positive contribution to Scotland's economy and society. Some members did not have or did not take an opportunity to study abroad; others might have done so but decided to come back to Scotland. I make the point again that cross-pollination with the rest of the world is important. We must keep those vibrant connections.

Data that was published recently by Scotland's chief statistician shows that we migrants are typically younger than the Scottish population as a whole; that we are just as likely to be economically active as other people in Scotland; and that half of us aged 16 and above are qualified to at least degree level. I am not one of those in the latter category; I am in the other half. However, I would like very much to support the Government motion to reintroduce the post-study work visa. Again, I celebrate the fact that all of us in the Parliament are in sync on the issue.

14:57

**Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to speak in today's debate and to support my colleague Claire Baker's amendment.

The higher education institutions in Scotland are something on which we should all quite rightly

pride ourselves. Scottish Labour has a proud history in the creation of a modern, inclusive and multicultural Scotland that attracts and welcomes international students to our world-leading universities.

The fresh talent initiative was introduced in 2004 by First Minister Jack McConnell and the Scottish Labour-led Scottish Executive to encourage foreign nationals to study in Scotland. The initiative took a step forward when the UK Government laid regulations that allowed students to apply to stay and work in Scotland for two years after the end of their course without the need for a work permit. Our connection with the fresh talent initiative is a clear signal that we in the Labour Party want Scotland to grow in profile and stature.

International students already make up a large percentage of the students in Scottish higher education institutions. There are currently more than 30,000 international students from more than 150 countries in Scotland, but the truth is that the number of Scottish students in Scottish universities is declining. In the future, assuming that the trend continues, it will become necessary for higher education institutions to admit larger numbers of non-Scottish students in order to maintain their student population size. Students from EU countries have been essential to the growth of Scottish universities in years past and, as the need for international students grows, students from the EU will prove to be even more essential to universities here.

The suggestion to reintroduce the post-study work visa, which was abolished by the UK Government in 2012, has special implications for Europe, as well. The EU students who come to study—and, potentially, to work—in Scotland are massively important, with regard to the skills that they give back to Scotland after they complete their degrees. Enabling and encouraging overseas students to work in Scotland after they complete their studies fulfils the objective of supplying the confident graduates that the employers who recruit students need.

Immigration, especially of young people and students, is a good thing for Scotland; the benefits to our culture, economy, skills and productivity are vital to the country's continued growth. Too often, immigration is shown in a negative light, but it is essential that we recognise its importance.

Post-study work visas would benefit not only the education sector but the business sector. The graduates who would be able to continue to live and work in Scotland would give back to the economy and contribute invaluable skills to the workforce throughout the country.

NUS Scotland conducted a survey about reintroduction of post-study work visas, and its



findings speak for themselves: 100 per cent of education institutions were in favour of bringing them back; 85 per cent of businesses were in favour, but that number rose to 94 per cent among businesses that had hired an international graduate. Those numbers are irrefutable proof of how important international students are to Scotland.

Scotland is a great country that has loads to offer. However, we need to make studying in Scotland even more attractive than it already is. If we were to allow students who decide to graduate with a degree from a Scottish university to stay and work in Scotland, they would be much more inclined to make that commitment.

To meet the needs of our education and business sectors, it is imperative that we encourage more international students to come to Scotland. The Labour Party believes that international students have a significant contribution to make to our education system, and to our social and cultural life and economy. Therefore, university students should be removed from net migration targets immediately, as my colleague Claire Baker said.

Our universities are among the best in the world; we need to ensure that they continue to attract the brightest and best students and researchers from overseas. Therefore, we are also committed to reintroducing the fresh talent initiative in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if they wish to take interventions, I have time for that.

15:03

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** Presiding Officer,

"As I scan the policy horizon, it's hard to see a bigger risk, or a more poisonous gun pointed at our collective success."

Those are not my words, but those of Peter Downes, the Universities Scotland convener, at a Holyrood higher education conference in December 2013. It was hardly prescient that I asked a question on the subject last week. I asked it not only because of personal circumstances that were raised with me by indigenous Scots students who have developed friendships with people from abroad, but because of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee discussion of the impending shortage of locally trained and foreign software designers and engineers that threatens the premier global presence of our key video games industry. That is only one example. Therefore, I welcome the debate.

Scotland has always welcomed migrants from all over the world who have enriched our nation with their many cultures and their intellect, and have added value through learning, hard work, leadership and business and other skills.

The Westminster all-party parliamentary group on migration recently published its report on post-study work opportunities. To be frank, the report's findings were damning of the current arrangements. Labour MP Paul Blomfield, who is the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on migration and who was chair of the group's inquiry committee, said:

"The report lays bare the negative impact that closure"—  
in 2012—

"of the former post-study work visa has had on British businesses and universities."

The same applies in Scotland.

Alternative visa routes have failed to attract talent and have actually prevented skilled inbound graduates from contributing to our jobs market. I believe that there is strong cross-party agreement—not just in the Scottish Parliament—on the need to take action to restore our reputation as a destination of choice for international students from all countries.

As Liz Smith said, the Conservative MP Richard Bacon, who was a member of the APPG on migration's inquiry committee, said that although

"Higher education is one of our country's leading export success stories, increasing our soft power and helping the UK shape the world of the future",

the UK Government's

"current approach to post-study work and student migration policy is jeopardising Britain's position in the global race for talent."

That includes Scotland's position. We are already losing out to countries that have more sensible approaches, such as Australia, Canada and the United States. That short-sighted stance is damaging to the economy and to delivery of our long-term economic plan. We need to amend the policy and improve our ability to attract students from around the world.

As I said, Scotland had a worldwide reputation for providing opportunities and high-quality education to overseas students, who then went on to contribute to the wealth of Scotland. At one stage, that was estimated to be worth almost £1 billion to the Scottish economy. In 2012-13, Scotland welcomed 45,000 overseas students, who contributed £374 million to the Scottish economy through higher education institutions. That was through non-EU fees alone, which shows the growth that existed in the number of students from China and the far east.

Since the UK Government announced that the post-study work visa route was to close in 2012, the numbers of students from India, Pakistan and Nigeria have declined, as has been mentioned. In “Scotland’s Future—Your Guide to an Independent Scotland”, we set out the Scottish Government’s vision for a controlled immigration system in an independent Scotland. We of course welcome the work of the post-study work working group.

Scotland has always recognised the value of attracting overseas talent. The fresh talent initiative, which, as has been mentioned, was introduced by Jack McConnell, was an immense improvement and had an immense impact on our economy. It is vital that the UK Government be true to its word and that it introduce a visa scheme, as is recommended in the Smith commission report,

“to allow international higher education students graduating from Scottish further and higher education institutions to remain in Scotland and contribute to economic activity”.

That should be for at least two years. Scotland needs to become the destination of choice once again for overseas students. We need to have control over not just our immigration policy but the way in which students move from a tier 4 visa to a tier 2 visa, in order to gain work in Scotland.

Overseas students bring great benefits to Scotland. As has been mentioned, because of our ageing population we need to encourage migration into Scotland by skilled people from all over the world. We have always been admired for our global reach and impact over the world. The issue applies not only to Scotland, however. As I said, according to MPs in Westminster, the current system is also failing the rest of the UK badly.

Immigration policy, including on post-study work visas, should never be dictated by the outrages of a group such as the UK Independence Party. Therefore, the post-study work working group is important. Scotland needs powers over post-study work visas as soon as possible to ensure that we attract the most talented students to our shores and so that we become, once again, a growing and welcoming environment for the most talented people in the world. The message to foreign students should and must be that they can be part of a globally competitive Scotland. They should come to Scotland, because we are open for their education and their business.

15:09

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I add my welcome for the debate and confirm my whole-hearted support for the reintroduction in Scotland of the post-study work visa. As Claire Baker’s amendment makes clear, the post-study work visa

was introduced in 2005 by the Lib Dem-Labour Executive, under the fresh talent initiative, and I pay special tribute to the work of the former First Minister Jack McConnell in driving that forward and recognising the specific demographic and skills challenge that we faced—which we continue to face—here in Scotland.

The Labour amendment calls for the immediate removal of university students from the net migration targets, and I would support such a move, for the reasons cited regularly by my colleague Vince Cable. However, it is not clear whether Labour is demanding that that should take place prior to the election or whether it is a statement of intent about what will happen post-7 May. If it is the latter, that is fine; if it is the former, it smacks a little of a demand that is asking to be disappointed. However, I appreciate the spirit in which it is intended.

Humza Yousaf’s motion is generally measured—even if not all of Dr Allan’s speech was—and appears to recognise the existence and value of the robust cross-party consensus that exists on the case for reintroducing post-study work visas in Scotland. However, I am not clear what Humza Yousaf means by his call for

“an immigration system for Scotland that meets its needs.”

As I have said before, the argument for totally separate immigration systems north and south of the border is riddled with holes—consequences that Dr Allan conspicuously failed to acknowledge. If his argument is for a post-study work visa system, the removal of university students from any overall target and a discourse about immigration at a UK level that is less inflammatory, I agree absolutely. However, he should be wary of conflating overall immigration policy—and his party’s commitment to increasing Scotland’s population by 1 million, which Chic Brodie alluded to—with a more modest and targeted but nonetheless important measure such as the post-study work visa. We have our differences, many of which have been articulated, about why the case for change still needs to be made, but we risk diluting the effectiveness of that case by overplaying the politics and undermining the genuine consensus that exists here and, as members have acknowledged, among many MP colleagues.

Dr Allan downplayed the need to address abuse in relation to bogus students and institutions. However, the problem was real; ignoring it would have risked longer-term damage to our HE and FE sectors, and it could have added to tensions in wider society.

**Dr Allan:** I am happy to acknowledge the problem created by bogus colleges, as they were called. However, as other members have pointed

out, that problem was not so prevalent in Scotland. Will the member acknowledge that that problem in no way provides an obvious explanation or excuse for the UK Government's current policy on post-study work visas?

**Liam McArthur:** The problem set the context. The minister is right to reiterate what other members have acknowledged, which is that the problem was predominantly south of the border, but the risk to reputation flowed both ways. Dealing with the problem was in the interests of colleges and institutions not just south of the border but north of the border. There were problems in Glasgow, as the minister will recall.

We are right to acknowledge and highlight legitimate concerns about the on-going problems created by the current visa regime, both practically and for perception and reputation. We are right, too, to seek a workable solution sooner, rather than later. The opportunity to mould such a solution has of course been presented by the Smith commission. The basis of the solution can be found in the recommendations developed by the working group of business, education and student representatives, to which we owe a debt of gratitude. Details may need to be fine-tuned, but the group's proposals represent a reasonable aspiration and a basis for negotiation with any incoming UK Administration.

Why do post-study work visas matter? The motion puts it very well, and members have articulated to some extent the fact that Scotland can lay claim to genuinely world-class education institutions, which compete effectively on the international stage for students and staff. In turn, that virtuous circle ensures that our culturally diverse campuses enrich Scotland's intellectual, social and cultural life.

In crude financial terms, Universities Scotland estimates that international students contribute around £800 million in fees and wider expenditure in Scotland. As important as that is the cultural and social infusion to our universities, which undoubtedly broadens, deepens and enriches the learning experience for our Scotland-domiciled students, with all the benefits that that entails in the short, medium and longer terms.

As a result, the rationale behind reintroducing a post-study work visa in Scotland lies partly in enabling our universities—and, to a lesser extent, our colleges—to maximise their chances of attracting students and staff in a highly competitive international market and partly in addressing the wider needs of our economy and society by capitalising on the desire of those who have benefited from our excellent education system and who might be inclined to stay a little longer, make a further contribution and even put down roots in

due course. That, to me, seems self-evidently a good thing.

Sadly, that view is not universally held in Scotland. Social attitudes surveys and even a recent BBC Scotland poll consistently confirm that attitudes to immigration north and south of the border differ little. I know that that runs counter to the narrative that the Scottish Government is keen to adopt, often to create an impression of otherness compared with elsewhere in the UK, but the evidence for its assertions simply does not exist.

I accept that there is a difference in the tone of political discourse. Who knows why that is? It might simply reflect the fact that immigration policy is reserved to Westminster and therefore MSPs and Scottish ministers do not face the same unrelenting pressure from the public and particularly from the media, or it might be a question of the numbers involved. Whatever the reason, we need to continue to have the courage to conduct our debates in more benign language and to make the positive case for why encouraging more, not fewer, people from around the globe to see Scotland as somewhere that they might wish to come and not just study over the short term but live and work over the longer term is in our interests as well as theirs.

At the same time, Scottish ministers and even those in the education sector must be careful about the language that they use. In making the legitimate case for changes in UK policy over recent times, people have talked about a cap on international students or have suggested that the overall numbers coming to Scotland have reduced. Neither is true, and both points risk adding to the damaging impression that coming to Scotland or the UK is more hassle than it is worth.

**The Minister for Europe and International Development (Humza Yousaf):** I will make two points. First, I agree with the member that we should not overplay the differences in opinion that exist; I have knocked on enough doors to know that immigration is a concern on the doorstep. However, if he breaks down the figures and looks, for example, at the analysis of the University of Oxford's migration observatory, he will find that most people in Scotland believe that the number of international students should not be reduced and that there should be no unnecessary restrictions on them. I think that the same view is probably reflected in the UK. I hope that the member will consider that.

My second point is that, having recently travelled to India, I can tell the member that every single journalist, organisation and person I met asked why the UK is making it more difficult to come to work and study. Unfortunately, perception

can sometimes be the reality, and I wonder whether he will reflect on that.

**Liam McArthur:** The minister makes a fair point about the need to dig beneath the figures, but my point about the social attitudes surveys and the BBC Scotland poll is that it is wrong simply to assume that there is a more benign impression of immigration at large in Scotland than there is south of the border. That said, I suspect that when people are pressed on the issue of increasing overall student numbers they will give a very different response.

As for the impression that has been created in key markets, the minister has cited India, and I suspect that the situation in Pakistan and Nigeria is not wildly different. Those are key international markets for our universities, and the numbers that we have seen from them are a concern. That is just one of the reasons why I support a change in the tone of our language as well as a change in the position on post-study work visas.

My previous comments should not detract from the case for a change in policy, but they should act as a reminder that we all have a duty of care. Moreover, as Mary Scanlon suggested, we need to examine wider questions, such as why our colleges have seen such a fall-off in the numbers of international students. A 75 per cent drop in EU students has nothing to do with visa issues; as Colleges Scotland and Claire Baker have suggested, it points to pressures caused by mergers and hints at the effect of budget cuts. The situation is regrettable, given the financial and wider contribution that international students have made to our colleges in the past, and it requires further consideration.

I welcome the debate and reiterate the Scottish Liberal Democrats' support for the reintroduction of a post-study work visa in Scotland. It can only help to enhance and enrich our universities and colleges as well as our economy and society as a whole.

15:19

**Kenny MacAskill (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** It would be useful to make three preliminary points. First, although the consensus in the debate is in many ways heartening, I hope that I am not being too churlish when I suggest that it might indicate that what is being sought is not earth shattering; it is certainly not a distinctive immigration policy. Post-study work visas are vital, and it is therefore helpful that we have unanimity around the chamber on their benefit to Scotland. However, that unanimity perhaps indicates that taking that position is not too hard for those with a different constitutional perspective.

It is fair to say that, although the fresh talent initiative was welcomed when it came along, there is a great deal of mythology about it. There was no huge and significant change. To be fair to the previous Labour-Liberal Administration, the initiative was well packaged and well presented and it gave Scotland opportunities to sell itself but, when we drill down into what was available and what was granted, we see that not much was available that was not available elsewhere. However, a good bit of packaging and presentation went on, and the initiative should not be sniffed at. I therefore give credit to Jack McConnell and his colleagues.

**Liam McArthur:** I do not necessarily disagree with Kenny MacAskill on the mood music around the fresh talent initiative, but does he accept that it created an impetus elsewhere in the UK to follow suit so that Scottish universities would not have a competitive advantage?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The initiative helped to give Scotland a slight edge, but it did not represent the changes that were sought by the universities north and south of the border. However, I do not seek to be too churlish.

I think that Elizabeth Smith referred to the fraud and criminality that went on. The point is not that people abused the system by coming in to go to fictitious colleges. I felt a great deal of sympathy for many of the young people who came in and I had experience of them in my constituency. What was done was criminal. Young people or their families were exploited by people who established so-called colleges of education that did not provide education at all.

In Niddrie, which is one of the most deprived parts of my constituency, I met young students who were hanging around who had come over from Nepal or elsewhere and were almost the victims of criminality, given who they were—strangers in a very difficult and challenging area. They were being charged top dollar. They had come in thinking that they were going to a college that was equivalent to the University of Edinburgh or wherever else. Rather than blaming the young people, we needed to deal with the people who exploited them and made a great deal of money. Thankfully, many of those institutions were closed down, although perhaps many prosecutions should have followed.

Two important points must be made. First, post-study work visas are important to our economy and our society. Many members around the chamber—from all political parties, thankfully—have referred to that.

Secondly, it is important to point out that what has been proposed can be done; all that it requires is the will from Westminster. I very much

welcome the comments that Elizabeth Smith and the Conservative Party have made, but it is incumbent on Westminster to deliver and implement the scheme. We are not asking for an independent immigration policy; we are asking for something that is important to our society and our economy.

Universities are a vital part of Scotland's modern economy. In the city of Edinburgh, the universities combined are the second-largest employer, and I think that the position is the same in Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen and many other places. That is even before we add in the colleges. We have just to look at the number of staff who are employed by the University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh Napier University and Queen Margaret University. They all add to the economy.

As Chic Brodie, I think, and others have said, the universities bring spin-off jobs, high-net-worth individuals, professors and talent. All that creates employment. There is not simply the employment of professors or lecturers, for example; there are a lot of jobs in catering, cleaning and maintenance, many of which my constituents do.

Universities provide remunerative and reasonably well-paid jobs in the city of Edinburgh and in every other city throughout Scotland. Universities are vital to the Scottish economy, in addition to the benefits that they provide in educating our own people. They charge young people from elsewhere top dollar; those people are paying significant amounts of money. We have to recognise the importance of that to the economy.

We must also recognise the importance to our society. Reference has been made to spin-off jobs and to the high net worth and intellectual capacity that we could not acquire in any other shape or form. It is because of Scotland punching well above its weight in university education that we are able to deliver.

The proposal would help to tackle demographic problems, which Claire Baker and other members have mentioned. We are not at crisis point in Scotland, but we have to address the matter. The demographic circumstances are better now than they were when Jack McConnell instigated the scheme. We are now at 5.3 million, and we have an increasing population. We need to do an awful lot more, because of the demographics and the ageing population, but we are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

Universities are hugely beneficial for our society in that regard and in other ways, including the mixture of people and the cosmopolitan atmosphere that is created. That returns us to the thought that it can be done.

We are not asking for the earth; we are asking for something that will benefit the Scottish economy and Scottish society. Our position is distinct from the problems that are faced on immigration south of the border. We see immigration as a benefit, not as a drain, which is perhaps the perspective down in the south of England. That is why we need to have the powers.

That is part of being as close as possible to the federal society that we were promised in the referendum campaign, without giving us the powers of an independent nation and powers over immigration. Other countries take such an approach and have done so for a considerable time—I remember that I criticised the fresh talent initiative for not going far enough a decade ago.

Let us consider the federated countries that are often mentioned by those who wish to retain the union. They include Canada and Australia. South Australia has a distinct immigration policy that is different from those of New South Wales and Victoria. It had been recognised for a long time that Adelaide did not have the cachet that Sydney and Melbourne had and that, when people emigrated to Australia, they wanted to go to those two cities and not to Adelaide. On that basis, South Australia was granted the opportunity for people to migrate there at a lower points differential than was required to get into other states and certainly to go to Sydney or Melbourne. The same situation applies in Quebec and Canada.

We simply seek what is given in other jurisdictions, where the benefits are recognised for the part of the nation that is losing out in whatever shape or form. It can be done.

Such measures would be good for Scottish society. We require to compete in a globalised world. To take on board the points that Liam McArthur made, this is a matter of leadership. It can be done, if Westminster is prepared to grant it.

We should not countenance the idea that we need to beat ourselves up because there are individuals in Scotland who have wrong and false views of migration. Yes, we have individuals whose views are abhorrent, but this comes down to political leadership. If we stand up and articulate the point—as Canada and Australia do—that immigration is a good thing, a policy can be delivered, the people will follow it and they will welcome the political lead given.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have a little bit of time in hand for interventions.

15:28

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to contribute in this

afternoon's important debate on post-study work visas, a policy that was introduced by Labour and that was, to my mind, unjustifiably cut by the Conservative Government.

We have heard about the reasons for that cut and about issues such as bogus colleges. The response to remove the post-study work visa was much like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. I agree with much of what Kenny MacAskill has said: the answer to the problem of bogus colleges is to pursue the criminality and the people who have been exploiting innocent immigrants, rather than have a wholesale withdrawal of the post-study work visa policy.

There is no question but that the policy has had a positive impact, not only on those people who came to Scotland from overseas but on Scotland's economy and on our university and college sectors. The post-study work visa has enabled international graduates to seek employment without sponsorship for up to two years after the completion of their course.

It is certainly the case that, since the UK Government closed the tier 1 route in 2012, there has been a detrimental impact on colleges, universities and businesses here in Scotland and right across the UK. Official figures show that there has been a decline in first year student enrolments from China, India and Nigeria. My colleagues on the cross-party group on China tell me that the issue of the post-study work visa and the difficulties that Chinese students face is raised in every single one of its meetings. China is a key emerging market in accessing Scottish institutions.

Similarly, across the UK, in the year that the post-study work visa was repealed, the overseas student intake declined for the first time in 29 years. I remember when the previous Scottish Labour Government introduced the fresh talent initiative in 2005—mostly because I was still in university and I could see its impact in the years following. The initiative not only encouraged foreign students to come to Scotland but allowed them to give back something by working here and contributing to our economy for two years without a work permit. The UK Government adopted the initiative in 2008, which helped to increase the number of international students coming to Scotland.

Our colleges and, particularly, our universities rely on the significant financial support provided by overseas students. They contribute around £337 million a year in fees and around £450 million to the wider economy. We cannot afford to be without that investment.

In addition to the financial consequences of a fall in overseas students from key markets such as India and Pakistan, the scrapping of the post-study

work visa has had a reputational impact. The NUS has commented:

"The hoops that international students are expected to go through to get here and once they are here are unacceptable."

The minister spoke about his trip to India and the reputational risks that we face if Scotland does not look as though it is an open market for the best talent in the world to come and study, to feel welcomed and valued and to be able to contribute to our economy. Mary Senior, from University College University Scotland, has stated:

"There is a sense that the UK Government's immigration policy is very narrow and insular and not of benefit to Scotland or universities."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 25 March 2014; c 3863 and 3864.]

All the parties in this Parliament recognise the problems that have arisen as a result of the decision taken in 2012 to end the scheme. It is important that future UK Governments take the decision to reverse that regressive step. The Scottish Government is clearly willing to work with the UK Government to ensure a variation in Scotland now. That would allow us to take a different approach, so we should reintroduce the fresh talent initiative.

**Mary Scanlon:** I am listening carefully to the member. Does he agree with the Smith commission proposal to

"explore the possibility of introducing formal schemes to allow international higher education students"

to stay on in Scotland? Does he agree that the Scottish and UK Governments should work together to achieve that?

**Mark Griffin:** Yes—that is what I was saying. I agree with the Smith commission's proposals, and I will come on to talk about them. As I said, it is right that the Scottish and UK Governments work together to find a solution to ensure that an initiative like fresh talent can take place again. It happened here first, under Jack McConnell; there is no reason to prevent it from happening again.

It has been mentioned that the slowing down in the rate of growth of international students here in the UK is not happening elsewhere. Our main competitors in the English-speaking world—the United States, Canada and Australia—have continued to expand their student numbers over the past five years. The minister cited Alastair Sim, of Universities Scotland, who said:

"We are losing out in key markets as our competitors take steps to attract more international student talent."

We are missing out on that talent.

I am pleased that Scottish Labour has committed to reintroducing the fresh talent initiative. As the Smith commission highlighted, Scotland is a much more diverse, vibrant and

culturally varied nation because of immigrants. The benefit that the reintroduction of such an initiative would bring to our educational establishments, to business and to our economy as a whole is clear. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the UK and Scottish Governments work together to end the unjustifiable restrictions that are currently in place.

15:35

**Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):**

Following last May's debate in Parliament on immigration policy in relation to higher education, I am pleased that the matter of the post-study work visa is again being debated, and I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this afternoon's debate.

The debate gives us an opportunity to recognise the vital contribution that international students make to higher education, research excellence, the economy and the cultural diversity of Scotland. In December last year when the Smith commission report was published, I took the opportunity to make it clear to the Deputy First Minister in Parliament my concern about the failure to include in the heads of agreement of the Smith commission the view of the National Union of Students Scotland, Universities Scotland, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors Scotland, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, and Unison Scotland that there should be partial devolution of immigration to enable the reintroduction of the two-year post-study work visa for international students who graduate from our universities and colleges. The Deputy First Minister's response was that the Scottish Government would seek to engage constructively with the UK Government in order to make progress on reintroducing the post-study work visa to ensure that Scotland could attract and retain talented students from across the world.

As the MSP for Edinburgh Southern, I am incredibly privileged to represent not one but two of Edinburgh's world-class universities: the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh Napier University, both of which have campuses in my constituency. Together, those two universities account for a large proportion of Scotland's 50,000 international students. More than 30 per cent of Edinburgh Napier University's student population is international, and the 13,735 international students at the University of Edinburgh, who make up 40 per cent of that university's student population, represent the largest international community at any Scottish university.

The University of Edinburgh has echoed many of the findings of the post-study work working group's report. It has highlighted that universities

require greater support in recruiting and retaining the world's best academic talent, and that the removal of post-study work opportunities for international students puts Scottish universities on the back foot in competing in a highly competitive global market, as we are not able to offer students the opportunity to live and work in Scotland in the long term after graduating.

The convener of Universities Scotland, Professor Pete Downes, made that point well when he said:

"As it stands, the UK's immigration policy is anti-competitive, it is a deterrent to highly-skilled students and staff and it is hurting our universities."

Furthermore, we can all agree that international students make a significant financial contribution to Scotland's economy, as £374 million was accrued from the tuition fees of non-EU international students at Scottish higher education institutions in 2012-13, and a further £441 million was accrued through accommodation and living costs. That is a clear demonstration that international students support local businesses in the towns and cities in which they live, which, in turn, boosts Scottish jobs.

Research for Universities UK has estimated that each international student who is enrolled at a university supports 0.45 full-time equivalent jobs in the UK, and the University of Edinburgh has calculated that its global student community supports more than 6,000 jobs in the local area.

**Mary Scanlon:** Does the member agree that EU and other European students contribute enormously to Scotland's economy and culture, too? Their numbers have been reduced by 75 and 81 per cent, whereas the number of international students has been reduced by 23 per cent. Does he share my concern about EU and other European students?

**Jim Eadie:** I certainly acknowledge that all students, no matter which part of the world they come from, enrich Scotland in the way that the member indicated. However, I hope that she would acknowledge that we have a consensus through the working group that the current system is not fit for purpose.

In terms of the findings of the working group, a number of significant points need to be put on the record. One point is that, since the change to the post-study work visa in March 2011, there has been a substantial decline in enrolments of international students at our universities. We have seen that in terms of the numbers of students from India and Pakistan, and the figures on that come from the Higher Education Statistics Agency. In contrast, key competitor countries that offer more attractive post-study work opportunities have seen a rise in their numbers of international students.

For example, the United States has seen international student numbers rise by over 5 per cent on average, and the figures in Canada have risen by over 7 per cent over the past five years.

As Liz Smith said, the current system is unduly restrictive and it is, as Mark Griffin said, narrow and insular. There are two findings in the report to the Scottish ministers that underline those points. The first is about the low number of graduates across the UK who are allowed to stay in the UK under the Home Office tier 1 provisions, which relate to graduate entrepreneurs: only 1,900 graduates a year who have been awarded a degree in the UK can extend their stay under that route in order to set up a business. The second point relates to the restriction that applies to the main route for graduates to take up employment in the UK, in that employers who wish to employ a non-European Economic Area national must hold a UK Home Office sponsorship licence and must employ them on a minimum salary of £20,500 a year. In 2013, only 4,000 tier 4 students switched to tier 2 after completing their studies, which allows those studying for a PhD to spend one year in the UK on completion of their studies to undertake employment or self-employment.

The point is that the system does not meet the needs of our universities, our businesses or our wider economy; nor does it allow us to address the demographic challenge and the skills shortages that Claire Baker referred to earlier. A number of members referred to the fresh talent initiative, and it is important that we acknowledge the important work that was done on that under the former First Minister, Jack McConnell.

It is clear that the reintroduction of the post-study work visa would help make Scotland's economy and society better off. Commenting on the UK's policy of curbing the entry of international students, Gordon Maloney, president of the National Union of Students Scotland, stated:

"For far too long we've allowed a negative and damaging rhetoric to take precedent when we discuss immigration, harming Scotland's reputation abroad and depriving our communities ... from the benefits we know ... international students bring."

This Parliament is united in its support for having international students, and I think that it is high time that the UK Government worked with the Scottish Government to make that principle a reality.

15:43

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to talk about post-study work visas. I have been encouraging international students to visit Scotland, and Glasgow in particular, for many years now. It was a Scottish Labour Government under Jack McConnell that first introduced post-

study work visas for students. There is now broad agreement in the Scottish Parliament and educational institutions that we should reintroduce the scheme, as we in Scotland are clearly not benefiting from the current system.

Scotland generally benefits from international students learning in Scotland, as Jim Eadie said. In 2012-13, Scottish higher education institutions received £374 million in international student fees. In addition, NUS Scotland estimates that while international students are in Scotland, they contribute to the Scottish economy, and to local economies in particular, in the amount of £441 million every year. That does not include what relatives and friends spend when they come to Scotland to visit the students while they are studying here and on subsequent visits.

Whereas the number of international students has remained reasonably steady, there has been a major fall in the number of students from previously important countries such as Nigeria, India and Pakistan, as several speakers have mentioned. Much of the fall has been compensated for by students from China, but there is a risk in being so dependent on one market. As the recent decline has shown, that could be unhelpful to industry overall, and it is perhaps a risk that we do not want to take.

Another reason that is cited for people not choosing UK higher education institutions is the much better opportunities for work experience and possible migration that are offered by countries such as Canada. The UK employer skills survey report that was published in January 2014 noted that Scotland has a higher level of skills shortages than the rest of the UK. In 2013, 25 per cent of all vacancies in Scotland were due to skills shortages. That is significantly higher than the 15 per cent that was reported in 2011 and it is also higher than the levels that were reported in 2013 for England, at 22 per cent; for Wales, at 20 per cent; and for Northern Ireland, at 18 per cent.

Having post-study work visas will encourage more international students to come to Scotland. I get that, but I do not believe that that will automatically end skills shortages. I have spoken to businesses that hired people through the fresh talent initiative for two years, and many said that staff had just got fully trained and become very productive when they had to leave.

The next difficulty is how we manage the varied immigration systems throughout the UK. An interesting example is the provincial nominee programme in Canada. It has had an increase of 11 per cent, and I will tell members why. It is because Canada has set aside resources to actively support and promote good relations between recent migrants and wider society. I have not had time to look at that particular scheme in



much detail, but I am happy to go to Canada and do some fact finding with the European and External Relations Committee if that is a challenge that I have to face.

At this point, I can pretty much recycle the speech that I gave last week on negative attitudes to immigrants. In that speech, I gave statistics to show that there is still widespread underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in education and employment, for which the Scottish Government gave me no explanation. Just because I did not get an explanation does not mean that I am going to stop mentioning it. I will keep mentioning it at every opportunity that I get, because it is an important issue for us in Scotland. We cannot keep hiding it.

There is no point in saying that we want more immigrants to come to Scotland if we are not actively combatting the racism in our society. As I said last week, despite people from minority ethnic communities forming 4 per cent of the population, only 0.8 per cent of staff in our public services are from minority ethnic communities, and the figure for modern apprenticeships is 1.1 per cent. That is unacceptable and it is not a good picture. It is nice to say that Scotland is a great and very diverse country and that people must come here but, practically, we are not delivering on the ground, and that is unhelpful.

I am not going to go away. I will keep banging the drum to let people know that this is still an issue. I made an offer in my first year in this Parliament: I am here to help and to give my support to try to deal with the issue. No one has come to my door yet, but I am still here and I am still willing to help out if anybody needs my help.

Last but not least, it is crucial that the Labour amendment is considered seriously, because it is important that we continue to encourage overseas students to come to Scotland. I have always wished that we would continue to encourage our universities and colleges and support our education system—it is crucial that we do so. It is also crucial that fresh talent with young fresh minds comes from overseas. As well as stimulating revenue in our industry, that encourages competitive thinking in Scotland and helps to build minds. It also creates unpaid ambassadors for Scotland around the world, just as we had historically. We should continue to work on that.

I believe that we should continue to demand that the Government takes our proposals seriously, because they are important both for our industry and for the wellbeing of society.

15:50

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I enjoy debates such as this, because they give us the opportunity to discuss important issues in the way that we choose here in Scotland, rather than in the partisan way in which they are discussed in other places.

The debate has raised some important issues. We now know that Christian Allard attended university, but did not study there. The rest of his story was a case of too much information, so I will move swiftly on.

We can take from today's debate the conclusion that our international students make a valuable contribution to Scotland's economy and society. I believe that as a nation we must retain international students because they contribute so much to our communities.

In Paisley, the University of the West of Scotland has been recruiting non-EU international students for some time, and those students have made such a difference to our community. The challenge for us is to ensure that they stay in the community and do not move on later.

Mark Griffin was right to bring up the issue of Chinese students. UWS has recruited a lot of Chinese students, and that is the way forward. We have seen the potential of the situation and, as my colleague Christian Allard said, what is not to like about it?

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, Scottish higher education institutions receive—as Chic Brodie mentioned—an overall income of £374 million from non-EU international students. That figure represents 12 per cent of Scottish higher education institutions' income. Meanwhile, off-campus expenditure by international students amounts to some £12.2 million. Local businesses in Paisley have benefited from that over the years, but as a town we still need to develop our approach further in that respect. We need to ensure that we, and other communities around the country, get the advantages of being a university town.

We can see why education and business leaders in Scotland have set out a clear case for the reintroduction of post-study work visas in Scotland. The Westminster Government's policy on the issue is wrong, and is limiting our universities' potential as well as the growth of our economy.

We in Scotland need to find a way to be able to retain these individuals. The Smith commission's view—that the UK and Scottish Governments should work together to explore a potential post-study work scheme in Scotland—is welcome, and we are all hopeful that the legislation can deliver;

today's debate is useful in that respect. We need to have the power to ensure that we have the opportunity to make the legislation work for our country.

The post-study work working group's report called for the reinstatement of the post-study work visa, as members have noted. It set out how the scheme would operate, and asked UK and Scottish Governments to work together. It also recognised the post-study work visa as an important lever for attracting the best international students, thereby ensuring that we manage to get everyone over to our institutions and that they see Scotland as a way forward where they can live the rest of their lives.

One of the interesting points in the report was the survey of Scottish business and education providers, which showed that 90 per cent of respondents, in addition to 100 per cent of education providers and 85 per cent of businesses, were in favour of bringing back the post-study work visa for international students. That shows us how important the issue is to all the people involved.

The minister, Humza Yousaf, has previously stated:

"Immigration policy is currently too heavily influenced by the priorities of the south east of England, based on the values of the current UK Government and driven by a desire to reduce the numbers of incoming migrants which does not recognise Scotland's needs and does not serve our economic or societal interests."

That is the whole point of this debate: we are trying to find a Scottish solution to the situation.

We have also heard from the universities themselves. Professor Pete Downes, the convener of Universities Scotland and principal of the University of Dundee, said that the case to allow international students to work in Scotland was "overwhelming". He described the UK's current immigration policy as

"anti-competitive"

and

"a deterrent to highly skilled students and staff"

that is

"hurting our universities".

At present, our universities are internationally renowned and doing very well, but we need to take those views on board.

Alastair Sim, the director of Universities Scotland, said:

"A strong presence of international students is an asset to Scotland's universities and Scotland as a whole as well as making a significant economic contribution."

Everyone agrees that we need to move the issue forward.

Claire Baker and Jim Eadie have mentioned our competitors in the international market. The United States and Canada are good examples of countries that offer post-study work visas for international students. As has been said, the number of international students in the USA has increased by 5.5 per cent and the number in Canada by 7.3 per cent. That shows that if we can have a visa, it can make a difference.

Professor Anton Muscatelli, the principal of the University of Glasgow, spoke about current UK policy, saying:

"It's a message that says, 'Don't come here, we're closed for business, closed for education.'"

He went on to say:

"It's exactly the opposite message that a number other countries are sending including the US, Canada and Australia. I don't think we should be there as a country."

Professor Muscatelli is right. We should say that, as a country, we do not want to be here. The debate demonstrates that perfectly. Our colleague Liam McArthur said some quite negative things, but that is not the reality of the situation. Scotland has always encouraged immigration. We have worked together with people from other cultures and they have made our culture so much better.

We need to have these powers and embrace them. We need to ensure that we make a difference. As my colleague Christian Allard said, if we get them, what is not to like?

15:56

**Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate on post-study work visas and, in particular, in support of Scottish Labour's amendment. Scottish Labour believes that international students make an invaluable contribution—culturally, academically and financially—to our education system and economy.

More than 30,000 international students, from more than 180 countries, are currently studying in Scotland, bringing an estimated £373.6 million in fees to Scottish universities and £32.5 million to Scotland's colleges. International students also contribute significantly to the Scottish economy by helping to support our public services and local economies. That contribution is valued at around £441 million a year.

As has been mentioned, Scottish Labour first introduced the fresh talent initiative back in 2005, which encouraged students to work, study and stay in Scotland; in 2008, Labour extended the initiative across the UK. It was aimed at ensuring

that Scotland had a constant flow of fresh talent to flourish alongside our home-grown talent. The aim was to enable us to compete and succeed in the global economy, to make Scotland better and stronger and to address head on the demographic challenges that we faced.

The decision by the coalition Government three years ago to scrap post-study work visas was damaging throughout the UK, but especially in Scotland. It was a regressive move, which not only limited opportunities for our international students but posed a real threat to our higher and further education institutions. It was a move that seemed to be motivated more than anything by politics and a desire to bring down immigration figures. It was our universities and economy, and international students, that paid the price.

While overall student recruitment is up very slightly, by 1 per cent, Scotland has seen a 2 per cent decline in enrolment from China—colleagues have commented on that—a 12 per cent drop from India and a 9 per cent drop from Nigeria. That reflects the direction of travel in UK immigration policies in recent years. In contrast, key competitors such as the US and Canada have continued to expand their international student numbers over the past five years. The numbers are up 5.5 per cent in the US and 7.3 per cent in Canada. It is time for change and this debate is welcome. I am really pleased that there is cross-party support for action.

Scotland, and indeed the rest of the UK, is a more diverse, vibrant and culturally varied place because of immigration, and we should recognise, celebrate and reward the contribution that immigrants make to our society, to our economy and to our education system. We should reject the negative and nasty rhetoric from the likes of UKIP, which seeks to blame immigrants for society's ills.

Scottish Labour wants a modern, inclusive and multicultural Scotland that attracts and welcomes international students to our universities and colleges. We therefore welcome the recommendations of the Scottish Government's post-study work working group, which calls for the reintroduction of a post-study work route for international students. That move has been backed by a broad coalition of university, college, business, trade union and student representatives, as well as by members throughout the chamber today. It recognises the specific demographic challenges that Scotland faces, which contrast with those that are faced by the rest of the UK. The reintroduction of such a post-study work route would help to tackle the skills shortages that are responsible for an estimated 25 per cent of vacancies, according to a UK employers skills survey report.

The NUS Scotland briefing for today's debate tells us that, while England's population rose by 15 per cent between 1971 and 2012, Scotland's population rose by only 1.5 per cent, which is 10 times less. The proportion of our population that is of working age is low and on the decline, while the number of people over the age of 65 is forecast to rise by 59 per cent during the next couple of decades, posing significant challenges for the future.

We need to recognise that the contribution of international students does not end when a student graduates. Scotland must be a positive and welcoming destination for international students and that offer must include the opportunity for them to stay on in Scotland and for their eligible families to be allowed to join them.

For our universities to be world leading, we need to attract students from overseas and they need to be made welcome. That does not just benefit international students; it enriches the experience of Scottish learners. As Colleges Scotland pointed out in its briefing for today's debate, it is a cultural exchange that benefits everyone. It allows students to share different perspectives, values, experiences and beliefs, and it promotes Scotland internationally.

There is clear demand for change across the rest of the UK, as Claire Baker highlighted. The recent report of the all-party parliamentary group on migration looked at the impact of ending post-study work visas and recommended reforms to allow students to remain in the UK for at least 12 months after graduating. It found that, across the UK, removal of the visa has resulted in a significantly larger decline in the number of skilled international graduates who could remain in the UK than the Government had anticipated.

Last year, the UK NUS released a report in partnership with the Entrepreneurs Network, which surveyed 1,600 graduate international students, 42 per cent of whom said that they wanted to set up a business but less than a quarter of whom wanted to start up a business in the UK because of the restrictions on visas. A staggering one third said that they would not recommend the UK as a study destination to their family and friends. This is another coalition policy that is undermining our future prosperity. It has been estimated that, across the UK, the restrictions will cost British universities £2.4 billion over the next decade.

Scottish Labour is committed to reintroducing the fresh talent initiative in Scotland. We want to ensure that the Scottish dimension is taken into account properly in developing our immigration policy. Staff, students, colleges, universities and businesses are united in their call for action. We need to reintroduce a post-study work route for international students in Scotland as quickly as

possible and I hope that we can work together to make that happen. The evidence base for such a move is crystal clear and beyond doubt.

We should be celebrating the international graduates who want to contribute to Scotland, not excluding them as a way of massaging immigration numbers or meeting targets. We need a model that meets Scotland's distinct demographic and economic needs and ensures that Scotland is an attractive place for international talent from across the world. That must include the right to work and stay here in Scotland.

I hope that we will soon see progress on this vital issue for our colleges and universities. I hope that Scotland can take action to ensure that we attract the brightest and best students and graduates, and that Scotland's door will be fully open to people from across the world.

16:03

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the debate and the publication of the post-study work working group's report.

There is broad consensus across the education and business sectors, and indeed, across large parts of the Parliament, that the current UK Government's immigration policies are wrong for Scotland and are damaging our universities and economy. During my time on the Education and Culture Committee and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee I have heard the case made time and again, by those who have first-hand experience, about the valuable contribution that international students make to our economy and society.

We know that leaders in education and industry almost universally condemn the abolition of the post-work study visa as a detrimental step. In recent years, the UK Government has systematically enacted measures to reduce immigration but we need a different approach to attract skilled individuals to study in Scotland and to encourage them to stay, to contribute to our society and to help us to meet the economic and demographic challenges of the future.

Last year, the Education and Culture Committee held an inquiry into Scotland's future. One submission from Scottish Chambers of Commerce pointed to Quebec and its distinctive immigration policy as a potential model for Scotland. Quebec has its own immigration criteria, separate from the rest of Canada, and that has benefited Montreal in particular as a magnet for talent.

Other members have addressed the educational implications of the abolition of post-study work visas, so I will speak briefly about the work that I am involved in currently as a member of the

Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. The committee is conducting an inquiry into the importance of boosting Scottish exports. As Universities Scotland recently highlighted in its submission to the inquiry, our

"higher education sector is a major exporter"

and international students contribute more than £800 million annually to that sector.

Yesterday afternoon, the EET Committee was in Aberdeen. We were hosted by the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce and we heard from the Robert Gordon University, which conducted its own small poll looking at the impact of the removal of the post-study work visa on its enrolment figures for international students. The findings were stark. The number of international students enrolled at the university declined by 9.5 per cent between September 2011—when it was announced that post-study work visas would be abolished—and September 2013.

That decline happened in spite of the fact that the number of international students being offered places over that period had increased by 6 per cent. The RGU study shows that the number of enrolled international students dipped initially when the Scottish Government's distinctive fresh talent initiative was absorbed into the Westminster-controlled post-study work visa, and declined noticeably after the March 2011 announcement that post-study work visas would be abolished.

Although our world-leading university sector will undoubtedly attract many to come to Scotland to study, many students want peace of mind that, upon finishing their studies, they will be able to stay in Scotland and apply the skills that they have learned. We must not forget that this is a hugely competitive international market.

The EET Committee adviser for our export inquiry is Jane Gotts of Glasgow Caledonian University. Yesterday, she highlighted that many Scottish companies cite a shortage of the right skills, particularly language skills and knowledge of overseas markets, as a barrier to exporting. Encouraging post-study students to stay and contribute their talents after graduation is therefore an obvious way of supporting Scottish companies that wish to boost exports, which is a key goal for the Scottish Government.

Another benefit of that approach would be the potential network of ambassadors that would spring up across the globe. Following their return to their countries of origin, talented individuals with practical experience of working in Scotland would help to build a network that could support more Scottish businesses in their international efforts.

Ms Gotts has helpfully suggested that if post-study work visas are reintroduced, a matching service between businesses and higher or further education institutions would be welcomed by both industry and the education sector. That could be done through Scottish Enterprise or through a private sector organisation such as the SCDI or Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

Scottish networks international was a good example of such industry and education collaboration. The potential for growth in start-up businesses in Scotland should be taken into account, as not all overseas students will necessarily want to work for a company. Many overseas students are entrepreneurial, so a route to giving them the opportunity to set up their own businesses in Scotland could also be good for the economy and could be linked to existing start-up hubs such as Entrepreneurial Spark.

I mentioned earlier how competitive the quest to attract international students is, and other members have mentioned that the United States attracts many international students. I have some knowledge of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where my daughter studied. The number of start-ups in that area of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is very striking. In fact, I think that it has the highest number of start-ups anywhere in the world. That is because of the talent coming out of MIT and Harvard, much of which comes from around the world.

I hope that we will be successful in lobbying Westminster for the reintroduction of post-study work visas, particularly in light of the Smith commission's finding that Westminster should work with the Scottish Government to explore schemes to allow international graduates to remain in Scotland and contribute to our economic activity.

16:09

**Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):**

This is a hugely important topic for Scotland's universities and colleges. More than 30,000 international students from more than 150 countries study in Scotland. In total, 11 per cent of all Scotland's students come from elsewhere in the EU, and a further 10 per cent come from elsewhere in the world. That means that one in five of the students at our universities comes from outwith the United Kingdom. It is a tremendous reflection of the quality of our universities that they are able to attract such large numbers of international students, and it is a huge boon not just to our economy but to our culture.

Broadly speaking, I am, as I have said before, disappointed that only universities are generally discussed when public debate turns to

international students. Too often, people's attitude to Scotland's colleges is that they are of secondary importance to our universities. Governments in Holyrood and Westminster have made choices that have resulted in drastically fewer foreign students attending our colleges, which has a financial and structural impact on them that is much greater than that on our elite universities.

To return to the subject of this afternoon's debate, I am concerned about the impact of the current Tory-Liberal Democrat Government's immigration policy; in particular, I am worried about including students in the blanket immigration cap. That policy treats all legal immigration in the same way—as a bad thing for Britain that should be reduced. In my view, that is entirely wrong. The Labour Party across the UK strongly believes that it is deeply damaging to the UK's social fabric and economy that the number of fee-paying overseas students has fallen at a time when the international market for universities in other countries is growing. That is why university students should be removed entirely from the net migration target, which is, in any event, a policy that has failed.

We need to explore how we can encourage students to stay in Scotland once they graduate, not force them to leave. Scotland in particular faces an acute demographic challenge in the coming decades. In 2010, there were about 820 centenarians in Scotland and National Records of Scotland predicts that there will be more than 7,500 in 2035. The number of people aged over 75 is projected to increase by more than 80 per cent in that same timeframe.

Our population will age at a faster rate than that of the rest of the UK. In 2013, the Finance Committee noted that the proportion of Scotland's population that is of pensionable age is projected to increase by 2.9 percentage points between 2010 and 2035, compared with a 1.7 percentage points rise for the UK. That will be accompanied by a much smaller increase in birth rates, which means that our population will age, and accompanying that change will be myriad associated increases in spending. Immigration, particularly the immigration of high-skilled young people, is therefore an important aspect of how we will finance Scotland's public services in the future. Foreign students tend to be young and are, by definition, highly skilled.

The organisations that know most about the value of foreign students—Universities Scotland, the University and College Union Scotland, NUS Scotland, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Institute of Directors Scotland—have made clear the fact that they support the expansion of post-study work visas. For example,

the principal of the University of Dundee, Professor Pete Downes, said:

"Scotland has distinct demographic challenges that adversely affect our potential for economic growth. We face skills shortages in key sectors, as articulated by business, and our universities are forced to operate in an anti-competitive environment in attracting international talent that could be of great economic and social benefit to Scotland."

Universities in Scotland have seen a 2 per cent decline in first-year student enrolments from China, a 12 per cent decline in those from India and a nine per cent drop in those from Nigeria. Those are key countries for international student recruitment, and it is a source of major worry that there has been such a marked fall in student enrolments from those nations.

I know that a post-study work visa programme can work in Scotland, because such a system has already operated under devolution. In 2005, the Labour Party introduced the fresh talent initiative, which allowed students to stay in Scotland for two years after they had graduated. That used the sort of co-operation between the UK and Scottish Governments that is the hallmark of the best policy on this topic that we encounter. In 2008, the fresh talent scheme was judged to be such a success that it was rolled out across the entire UK. Sadly, however, it was withdrawn by the Tories and Lib Dems in 2012. That is the sort of myopic policy formation that puts the short-term political interests of the Conservative Party above the economic and social interests of the British people and economy. As the entrepreneur and inventor James Dyson said,

"It's a bit shortsighted, isn't it? A short-term vote winner that leads to long-term economic decline."

When we have Governments that are willing to engage with each other and co-operate, we can ensure a different approach, as we emphasised in our contribution to the devolution commission and as was typified by the Smith commission, whose report agrees that all parties will explore the possibility of allowing

"international higher education students graduating from Scottish education institutions to remain in Scotland."

Like much else in the report, that is sensible.

Similarly, the Labour Party's five-point approach to immigration includes a commitment to

"a smart system which distinguishes between types of immigration, so we bring benefits to our economy and tackle problems"

and

"fair rules so those who come to Britain contribute to our economy and society."

A new approach to the issue is entirely consistent with those principles.

We can see in other countries allowances being made for sub-state areas within them. For example, there are such systems in Australia and Canada. In our devolution commission report, we identified that there are some barriers to setting up such schemes, but said that we ultimately believe that reasoned and agreed variations between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom are justifiable and workable.

The fresh talent scheme has shown us that the way forward is through co-operation; that is the model that we should follow. I hope that Scotland's two Parliaments and Governments can work together to ensure that those who choose to come to Scotland to study can continue to contribute to our culture and economy once they have graduated.

16:16

**Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):**

This is a timely debate and it is heartening to hear that there is cross-party support for the reintroduction of post-study work visas.

We have heard from all members who have spoken about the contribution that overseas students make, whether cultural, social, economic and educational, but in spite of the reputation of Scottish colleges and universities, we cannot assume that they will keep coming.

Competition in the education sector is tough. Many of our colleges and universities are making greater and greater efforts to attract students from around the globe, even to the extent of changing their names. The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama is now the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. That change to the name was not made because people demanded it; it was made to attract students and so that they could better understand the college's work and its potential.

It is no matter that our universities and colleges are the best or that they are opening branches in many other countries around the globe. It might be that the growing number of such courses will produce graduates there with degrees from the University of Glasgow, the University of Edinburgh or, indeed, the University of the Highlands and Islands.

What will bring those students here? It is not enough to be the best, or to provide good student associations and a welcome. As the institutions know, they need all the support that they can get to maintain or grow the international student community. The post-study work visa is only one good reason to apply to one university over another, but it is perhaps the most important.

Some of the partner colleges in the University of the Highlands and Islands have developed the

potential for business experience to follow the course as well as being part of the course. For example, were they allowed to stay after graduation, textiles students in Shetland could access equipment—large industrial knitting machines, for example—to develop better business skills and experience whether or not there was a market for their products.

Manufacturing must be one of the most important areas for us to cover, so the opportunity of getting such experience for the period after graduation is certainly an attractive option, and Scotland has a great deal to offer in that respect.

All the papers that we have received from NUS Scotland or business organisations show cross-sector and cross-party support for the reintroduction of post-study work visas.

I am not sure about the Smith commission process. It occurs to me, particularly after listening to Lord Lang on the radio this morning, that that process might not be the quickest method by which to put in place the developments that we need. It is incumbent on all members to show that there is real urgency about the issue. The fresh talent initiative has been referred to—all credit to Jack McConnell and the Labour Party for it. It is important to acknowledge that they brought it about, but it is also important to note that if we had the powers over immigration that Scotland needs and clearly deserves, the fresh talent initiative would surely still be in place and we would not need to have this debate.

It was disingenuous of Liam McArthur to try to somehow link all the evidence from academics, businesses and agencies that support the post-study work visas with the danger that not everyone will agree. By way of evidence, he cited BBC Scotland's evidence that people in Scotland are not unlike people south of the border in their views on immigration.

**Liam McArthur:** The point that I was trying to make is that the assumption that the population in Scotland takes a radically different approach to immigration from the approach of the population south of the border is not borne out by the BBC survey or by attitude surveys over a number of years. Kenny MacAskill made a fair point about the leadership that we need to show, and it is worth acknowledging that we do not work with a more enlightened or progressive population on the whole.

**Jean Urquhart:** I thank Liam McArthur for that. In fact, I was just going to refer to Kenny MacAskill's point that it is up to us to take a lead. It ill behoves us to constantly hark back to what is in some ways a bigger issue. We had a debate on immigration last week, in which we were all very

much agreed, and those points were well made by members at the time.

Joan McAlpine talked about MIT, which is a great example of the fact that, where creativity is developed, it can flourish. Scotland needs to have control of immigration if we are to realise our full potential. We must push for the issue to be considered outwith the Smith commission process. It is a serious and important issue for Scotland and for our colleges. More than that, it is seriously important for the kind of economic development that we want. We have acknowledged that we are talking about thousands of students. Why on earth would we want that talent to be educated in Scotland and then insist that they leave? That cannot be right. I hope that we will push for the issue to be dealt with in the House of Commons and for our case to be made outwith the Smith commission process.

16:23

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):**

Throughout this debate on post-study work visas, one thing that is clear is that the Parliament has a firm belief that international students and immigration more broadly are fundamentally good for Scotland. We want—indeed, we need—international students who have studied in Scotland to stay and continue their lives here. If they are to do that, we have to make it much easier for them to apply for visas that allow them to work and contribute properly to society after they graduate, rather than continue with the current restrictive approach, in which there is a four-month time limit and restrictions thereafter on the visas that can be applied for.

We need more people to settle here post study because, as we know, Scotland has an ageing population, which requires us to grow our working-age population to support and strengthen our economy. However, more than that, it is about putting in place a system that recognises that, as well as the clear economic benefits of international students studying and staying in Scotland, there are massive social and cultural benefits.

In 2013-14, more than 48,000 students from outside the UK were studying in Scotland, which equates to 21 per cent of the student population. They came here to study from almost 200 countries. The lifeblood of universities is the free exchange between scholars and students. Everyone benefits from hearing about different experiences, exchanging ideas about how to do things and broadening minds. Those are the bedrock upon which our education system is built. To put an artificial barrier to them in the form of punitive immigration policies that are based on political rhetoric rather than any sort of need is frankly absurd.

It is absurd because it is having a knock-on effect on the numbers of international students who want to come to Scotland in the first place to study, share their experiences and exchange their ideas. Principal of the University of Glasgow Professor Anton Muscatelli said about the removal of the visas:

"It's a message that says don't come here, we're closed for business, closed for education ... it is exactly the opposite message that a number of other countries are sending, including the US, Canada and Australia. I don't think we should be there as a country."

He mentions Canada. Its Government has been focusing on offering post-study work visas, which has resulted in its number of international students increasing by 7.3 per cent. In contrast, since the closure of the post-study work visa route, there has been a significant fall in the number of students coming to Scotland from countries that traditionally sent high numbers of students, including Nigeria and India, from which the number of students has dropped by 29 per cent and 63 per cent respectively over the past three years.

The NUS conducted a survey on international students, in which 90 per cent of all respondents were in favour of bringing back visas for international students. Business support for the reintroduction of PSW visas rose to 94 per cent among those who had hired an international graduate under previous post-study work schemes. Seventy per cent of respondents said that when a PSW visa comes to an end, individuals should have the ability to move on to a longer-term visa. The majority of respondents across business and education providers believe that international students should be free to remain and work in Scotland for at least two years after graduation. NUS concluded:

"many international students feel unwelcome in the UK as a result of the UK Government's hostile and overzealous policies."

What is worse is that the UK Government removed post-study work visas because of politics rather than need. It was seen as an easy way to reduce the number of immigrants to meet an artificial, politically motivated quota that has no bearing on the realities of life across the UK. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, the removal has

"come at a high economic cost"

and, as Jayne Baxter said, it is not even working.

In Scotland, we have a different way of looking at immigration. David McCollum from the University of St Andrews said:

"The character of immigration in Scotland is distinctive in terms of both the nature of immigration flows and social attitudes to immigration ... Scotland is dependent on

migration for demographic stability and growth to a greater extent than the other constituent countries of the UK."

The UK Government's policy is coming at much too high a cost across the whole of the UK and has an even worse effect in Scotland. It was therefore good to see the Smith commission recommend that the UK Government and the Scottish Government work together to explore the potential for a post-study work visa programme in Scotland. It would have been better if the Smith commission had taken its recommendation to the next level and proposed that the powers necessary to introduce such a scheme be transferred to the Scottish Parliament, which would act in the best interests of the country by looking at the best ways to attract and retain talent here in Scotland.

That is crucial, because bringing back the post-study work visa would allow us to attract students from all international backgrounds. Like many MSPs, I have taken on student interns from around the world, who fall in love with the city, make lifelong friendships and develop a connection to the Scottish Parliament. Some, like my current intern from Ireland, get the opportunity to stay because of the EU, and we should always protect that right and recognise the contribution that such people make to our economy and the diversity and vibrancy that they bring to our nation. It cannot be right that others do not have the same opportunity.

It is easy to see why international students are turned off from dedicating their time to a place that they will have to leave when their course is over, when they could go somewhere else, be warmly welcomed, get comparable experiences and then get to settle there post-graduation if they want to. It is a dilemma faced by too many international students, to whom we should be showcasing Scotland. It is time that we had an immigration system in Scotland that met our needs, rather than the negative and harmful system that we have in place now. Bringing back post-study work visas would be a good place to start.

16:28

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

I commend all the speakers, in particular Liz Smith, who set out our stance in a very thoughtful, considered and measured way, as we have all come to expect from her.

It has been a little bit painful to have had almost three hours of consensus. Perhaps this afternoon has not been as entertaining as usual for people in the gallery, but we share the views that have been expressed and we appreciate the tenor of the debate.



As others have said, there is no doubt that international, EU and other European students all benefit Scotland. They are not just here for the money. Many have mentioned the money that they spend, which is, of course, welcome, but they also benefit Scotland in many other ways—culturally, in productivity, in skills, economically, academically and in many other ways. They are not just here to learn from us; they are here so that we can learn from them. That is an important point.

To go back to immigration, I remember that, when John Reid was Home Secretary, he described the border control agency as “not fit for purpose”. There was a recognition that bogus visas for study and bogus colleges had to be addressed. For an immigration policy to function properly, it must welcome those who are willing to contribute to society and act against those who seek to exploit the system for their own ends.

I want to mention some figures. Many people have mentioned the reduction in the number of international students from India, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. We agree that post-study work visas should be reintroduced, but I put on record that there have been increases in those from China, Nigeria, Malaysia, the United States, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada and several other countries and that the total number of higher education enrolments is up 30,000 on the 2010 figure. That is still not good enough, but the numbers have increased. As Liam McArthur said, the number of first-year enrolments from non-EU countries in Scottish universities has increased, although by only 1.5 per cent.

My main point is from the Colleges Scotland paper. It confirms that, between 2010 and 2014, the fall in EU students was 75 per cent, in other European students was 81 per cent, and in international students was 23 per cent. We do not want a fall in international, EU or other European students, so when we are looking at the post-study work visa for non-EU students, each and every one of us should also ask why there has been such a drastic cut in EU and other European students. The Colleges Scotland briefing paper states:

“Traditionally, Scotland’s colleges have been able to recruit internationally. However, priorities have changed”—

I think that Claire Baker mentioned that point—

“with the move to reform and regionalisation, and colleges have to consider carefully what international activity including recruiting overseas students is part of their delivery plan.”

Who decided the college priorities? Who agreed them? Which Government brought through regionalisation? Why are international, EU and other European students no longer a priority? Let

us have a little bit of honesty. Glasshouses and stones slightly come to mind at this point.

As far as EU students are concerned, the initiative and responsibility are totally in the Scottish Government’s control. I hope that the 75 per cent fall in EU students, not the 23 per cent fall in international students, will be addressed by the minister in his summing-up. I agree with Dr Allan that we want the brightest and the best, and I agree that the post-study work visa should be introduced, but I also agree that we should be looking at further education and at EU and other European students.

As others have said, many of the skills shortages could be addressed by positively embracing EU, other European and international students with information technology specialist, technician, engineering and other skills. That is particularly important, given that the NUS paper mentioned that Scotland has a higher level of skills shortages than other countries in the United Kingdom. I think that Claire Baker made that point, as well. In 2013, 25 per cent of all vacancies in Scotland were due to skills shortages, compared with 22 per cent in England, 20 per cent in Wales, and 18 per cent in Northern Ireland.

For all those reasons and more it is important for the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government to continue dialogue and to continue to come to agreement on further devolution. The Smith commission report cites “Additional issues for consideration”. Those include an agreement to

“explore the possibility of introducing formal schemes to allow international higher education students graduating from Scottish further and higher education institutions to remain in Scotland and contribute to economic activity for a defined period of time.”

All that needs is good will and work for it to move forward. The period could be two years, which is the time that many people have mentioned, or it could be another period, by agreement.

As Liz Smith said, the Westminster all-party parliamentary group on migration also supports much of what has been said today. Its report came out last month. The group, which consists of Labour, Conservative and other members, recommends that non-European students should

“remain in the UK for a period of at least 12 months following graduation”.

The all-party group further recommends:

“Improvements should be made to Tier 2, in order to ensure that skilled international graduates can be retained within key sectors of the UK economy.”

We support that. The report also recommends consideration of

“improving additional routes for post study work in the UK, in order to increase the access of UK employers to skilled non-EEA graduates”.

The Conservative MP Richard Bacon said:

“the government’s current approach to post-study work and student migration policy is jeopardising Britain’s position in the global race for talent.”

We are actually all on the same page here. Richard Bacon continued:

“We need to adjust our policy and improve our ability to attract students from around the world.”

The desire was expressed to restore the UK’s

“reputation as the ‘destination of choice’ for international students”.

It will be by dialogue, good will, consensus, working together, putting our students first, putting our country first and putting our economy first that we will allow international higher education students to succeed and to stay in our country. I hope that the Scottish Government will do that and will work with the UK Government, because it is to the benefit of us all.

16:37

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** The focus of today’s debate has been the post-study work working group’s report to the Scottish ministers. Many members have examined different elements of that report—different recommendations and different evidence—in significant detail.

As we draw towards the close of the debate, it is worth going back to and noting the headline recommendations in the report. The members of the working group were 100 per cent united in their support for the principle of a post-study work scheme that would enable non-European Economic Area students who complete their study at Scottish further or higher education institutions to stay and work in Scotland for a defined period of time after graduation.

The working group is diverse. Its membership spans leaders from colleges and universities, students and a variety of business interests, and they agreed the recommendations unanimously. We should note that that support was based on wider consultation, which the group carried out with people in the sectors that they represented. That consultation also yielded widespread support for the idea. In that consultation, 100 per cent of education provider respondents were in favour of the proposal, and 85 per cent of business respondents also supported post-study work visas.

Interestingly, the figure for business respondents rose from 85 to 90 per cent among those who had already hired an international graduate in the past, under previous post-study work schemes. Anne McTaggart was right to draw

attention to that finding. It shows that such schemes provide not just workers but world-class talent—not just qualified workers but workers who are confident in their contribution to the companies for which they work. No wonder it is a prospect that businesses find attractive—indeed, essential. No wonder there is global competition for that talent.

Many members have mentioned that the idea is not new. Indeed, that is a great strength of the proposal. Between 2005 and 2008, Scotland benefited from the fresh talent scheme introduced by the then First Minister, Jack McConnell. During those years, 7,620 non-EEA students benefited from visa extensions under the scheme. By definition, more than 7,500 highly skilled and qualified people have contributed to Scotland and to our economy. As some members have mentioned, the fresh talent scheme was so successful that it was rolled out across the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, that led to its abolition in 2012.

When we consider reintroducing post-study work visa opportunities, we know that they can work, because they have worked before. Many speakers have paid tribute to the fresh talent scheme. My party wanted to do that, too, so we have reflected that in our amendment to the Government motion.

An aspect of the scheme having worked previously is that it shows that such schemes can be achieved within the devolution settlement. A refreshing aspect of the debate is that it has been relatively—almost completely—free of constitutional content, and it has been about what can be achieved in the devolution settlement.

As I say, we know from our own experience that such schemes can work. Members have also given us other examples. Kenny MacAskill cited the example of Australia. He was curiously belligerent in doing so; nonetheless, he made the point that it is entirely possible for South Australia to have its own post-study work visa scheme.

Although the Smith commission had little appetite for devolving immigration policy as a whole given the Scottish electorate’s decision to remain part of the United Kingdom, the idea of a post-study work visa system was seen to be desirable by everyone around the Smith commission table.

We should not be surprised that business supports post-study work schemes. They are well aware that a number of sectors face recruitment shortages in exactly the highly skilled professions likely to benefit from international students being given the opportunity to study and then live and work in Scotland.

The post-study work working group's report contains two telling examples of exactly that. Chic Brodie mentioned software engineers and the games industry. The report tells us more broadly that, in the digital technologies industry, we will need around 10,000 additional workers a year. The industry reports that domestic supply is not enough and that, even if measures are taken to address that, they would take five to 10 years to make a difference. We are told that the skills shortages are seriously restricting growth in a core industry.

The report also talks about the oil and gas sector. The North Sea has its problems, but the oil and gas sector continues to report difficulties in recruiting highly skilled personnel, with more than 70 per cent of companies experiencing problems. Over the next five years, it is looking to recruit perhaps 12,000 new skilled recruits. That is another skills demand that could be alleviated by a new post-study work visa scheme.

A number of members have correctly drawn attention to the point made in the NUS Scotland briefing that Scotland has higher skills shortage levels than the rest of the United Kingdom. On top of that, there is a demographic challenge, with population growth projected at 9 per cent by the middle of the century, which is rather less than the 16 per cent forecast for England. That will have a particular impact on the proportion of working-age people in our population. All that clearly adds up to a specific desirability of post-study work visa system in Scotland.

It is not just our industries but our higher education institutions that compete globally. Almost 30,000 international students are studying in our universities. Although, as some members have pointed out, the figure for non-EU students has increased significantly over five years and a little over the past year, there are some worrying trends, notably the fall in the number of students from countries such as India, Nigeria and Pakistan.

In colleges, there has been a drop of around a quarter in the number of non-European students over a five-year period. Mary Scanlon made the powerful point that we must also consider what has happened to the number of EU students who study at colleges in Scotland. The fact of the matter is that it is not possible to cut the income to that sector, to reduce the number of students in it by 140,000 and to focus its responsibilities almost entirely on 16 to 19-year-olds without there being an impact. That was demonstrated in the figures that are contained in our briefings, although it is a slightly different issue.

International students still contribute tens of millions of pounds of income to colleges, hundreds of millions of pounds of income to universities and

more, of course, to the communities in which they live. They also bring a cultural diversity to our institutions, which is a key part of the educational quality that they offer.

A number of members have mentioned the importance of avoiding negative and prejudiced attitudes towards those who come from abroad to study or work in Scotland. It is worth putting on record the fact that the international students we have all spoken of in no way restrict opportunities for Scottish students in higher education, because the places in question are above and beyond the places that are funded by the Scottish Government.

**Humza Yousaf:** I think that the tenor of the debate has been extremely good. Given that a general election is coming up in six and a half weeks, is the member confident that if we end up with a Labour Government in the UK—whatever form that might take—it will reintroduce the post-study work visa here in Scotland? I know that the proposal has his support, but does he think that it will happen?

**Iain Gray:** The shadow Minister for Universities, Science and Skills, Liam Byrne, who was responsible for the introduction of the original UK-wide post-study work visa scheme, said that he wanted to see it being reintroduced in some form, although the conditions would not necessarily be the same. At the same time as he made that comment, he made it very clear that, as our amendment states, he would like students to be removed from any net migration targets—I say to Liam McArthur that we have called for that for a while. As there is only a short time for the current Government to respond to that call, I guess that it is indeed a statement of intent on what a Labour Government will do after the election.

The fact is that, if the principle of post-study work visas commands such widespread support in the education world, the business world and the political world, including this Parliament, surely the reintroduction of such visas is—to use a particularly inappropriate figure of speech—a complete and utter no-brainer, and something that we should do as quickly as we can.

16:48

**The Minister for Europe and International Development (Humza Yousaf):** It has been an excellent debate that has, largely, been as consensual and positive as last week's Green and independent group debate on the diversity of communities. We are in danger of becoming a Parliament of consensus. I can practically hear the late and great David McLetchie, who often talked about the false god of consensus, tutting down at

us, but I think that he would approve on this matter.

Before I get into the substance of my speech, I want to touch on some points that members made. I will start with comments that Mary Scanlon made about colleges; Claire Baker made similar points. Mary Scanlon is right to raise those concerns, as is Colleges Scotland. If the post-study work visa is reintroduced, I do not for one minute think that it will be a magic bullet; it will not solve all the problems. We face challenges that, as a Government, we must work closely with our colleges to address.

I know that there is no block on colleges working internationally, even after the process of reform that they have gone through. In fact, I have been out with colleges in India and China and have seen the good work that they are capable of doing. However, Mary Scanlon and Colleges Scotland were absolutely right to raise the issue of EU students, and I am sure that it is one that we will reflect on.

However, I think that the reintroduction of the post-study work visa would be a step in the right direction for colleges as well as for universities. Colleges Scotland was part of the working group, so colleges were well represented, and of course Colleges Scotland agreed with reintroduction of the post-study work visa. However, as Mary Scanlon said, that does not absolve colleges of their responsibility to do other things on the issue.

There is an interesting discussion in the post-study working group report about the level of qualification that the post-study work visa should apply to, and whether it should be at the level of the higher national certificate or the higher national diploma. The working group has made its recommendations and the Government will, of course, look at them.

**Liz Smith:** Will there also be some consideration in those discussions of flexibility in the length of time that would be allowed on a work visa? Some universities have made the very important point that when it comes to knowledge exchange and research the visa should have an extended length, but that it should not for other situations.

**Humza Yousaf:** That is a fair question. My reading of the report is that it states that the visa should be for a minimum of 12 months but does not suggest what the total length should be. However, it is eminently sensible to have flexibility and variation. There is also discussion about whether an international student's length of stay should contribute to their gaining citizenship and indefinite leave to remain. Again, I am open-minded about that discussion. I thought that Mary

Scanlon's earlier good point was well and powerfully made.

I should say that we will accept the Labour amendment, which I think is a reasonable one. I speak to Lord McConnell often on the Malawi question. I am never shy of giving credit where it is due, and I think that is right to give him and others credit for the introduction of the fresh talent initiative. However, I caveat that by saying that what the working group report talks about is not fresh talent mark 2. Fresh talent was a new scheme—we should rightly be proud of it—but like any new scheme it had teething problems and issues that needed to be fixed. It would be wrong to assume that what the working group proposes is just fresh talent mark 2, although I give due credit to the fresh talent scheme.

I agree that including student numbers in the overall immigration numbers does not make any sense and is a failed policy, because we know that immigration numbers have risen. So, that policy does not even fulfil the criteria that the coalition Government wanted it to fulfil.

Members made excellent points about the contribution of international university students. Many members reflected on their own experiences—for example, Christian Allard told us of his romance, which I am sure all of us appreciated.

International students are important for more than just their financial contribution—important though that is. Their contribution is much more holistic in terms of the cultural and university experience. Mary Scanlon was correct to say that Scots get a lot from international students who make Scotland their home. One effect of international students that was not touched on is that they raise the standards of our universities. I know that from my days at university. I also have many relatives who are doctors, dentists and pharmacists and who all say that international students drove up the standards because they worked harder than those who were born here, which meant that those who were born here had to do the same in order to compete. International students raise the attainment of everybody in their classes.

Mary Scanlon said that we are all on the same page on reintroduction of the post-study work visa; I think that she is right—hence our Government's frustration. There has been a little bit of rolling back on the issue, post the Smith commission, in discussions with officials, but I hope that that is just because a general election is coming up and ministers are perhaps hesitant to sign off on anything because their minds are distracted by other issues. I hope that that is just a temporary malaise.

The tone of the debate has been excellent. I reiterate the point, as I did with Liam McArthur, that perception is often reality. I have travelled to represent Scotland in many countries and have worked closely with UK Government ministers to promote what the UK has to offer. It is important that we make positive noises, but they can often be undermined by noises that come out of other parts of the United Kingdom. For example, India has the highest level of newspaper reading in the world and newspaper circulation there is going up rather than going down. If the perception of people there who read international news is that the UK is not open for business or for students, that will unfortunately become the reality as well.

I am sorry to disappoint Iain Gray, but we purposely did not put devolution in the substance of the motion so that we could get as much consensus as possible. It will be no surprise to members that we would like immigration policy to be devolved. We heard from Joan McAlpine, Kenny MacAskill and others that there is regional flexibility, but I think that what is proposed can be done within the parameters of Smith and the current restrictions. That we could see reintroduction of a post-study work visa that in the future could be the hostage of another UK Government that might take it away is perhaps one of the flaws of the current devolution set-up.

**Christian Allard:** What is the minister's view on the fact that the matter was right at the end of the Smith commission's recommendations. We might have hoped that it would be resolved before the election, given that we do not know what kind of Government we will have after 7 May.

**Humza Yousaf:** There is still time; there are six and a half weeks. Miracles can happen, even in Government: I have seen Governments move more quickly than that. This Parliament will send out a strong message that we are united. All the political parties will I hope be united in the call. There are six and a half weeks to go—maybe less until Parliament is dissolved. I hope that, whatever the make-up of the UK Government and the Westminster Parliament post the general election, they will move extraordinarily quickly on the issue.

There is support for the proposal across the United Kingdom. Many members mentioned and quoted the all-party parliamentary group on migration. I read its report and I thought that it was excellent. It says that the perception of the UK—if it is not the reality, which I think in some respects it is—is that students are not welcome, and that is having an effect on the Scottish and UK education sectors.

Scotland cannot wait any longer for action. Our needs are different from those of the rest of the UK, and there are different needs within Scotland; the needs of the north and the north-east of

Scotland are very different from the needs of the central belt. We hope that the change will come quickly and that we do not have to wait until the general election.

I believe that the Westminster approach is damaging Scotland. Our latest migration figures show that net migration to Scotland decreased over the past year. We cannot afford that, because of our economic and demographic challenges. That is why I stress the importance of rhetoric and tone. Members throughout the chamber made that point eloquently during the debate.

This morning, I was at an event that looked at relationships between Scotland and Pakistan, and at which there was an exhibition showing many Pakistanis who came here in the 1950s and 1960s. I recognised many of the faces, as many others in Parliament would—the Bashir Ahmads of this world were in the pictures. Scotland and the UK was a very welcoming place. It was the first destination that Pakistanis wanted to come to, because of the opportunities, but also because of the links during the empire. Now, when we go to such countries, we hear that the belief and the perception is that the UK is not welcoming.

**Joan McAlpine:** The minister will have noticed that the briefing from Universities Scotland states that in 2013-14 Pakistan dropped out of the top 10 countries from which Scotland's universities recruit. Does he agree that that is regrettable?

**Humza Yousaf:** Yes. The point has been well made by members throughout the chamber that the key emerging markets that we want Scotland to connect with include India, Pakistan, Nigeria and China, from which we are not seeing the numbers that we want coming through, which is very damaging. We have historical links with some countries, Pakistan and India being two, but Nigeria and China are emerging markets.

Few issues come to mind on which there has been such universal agreement from the business sector, including the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses and many other bodies, right the way through to the trade unions and the academic sector, including Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland, and Parliament. I hope that, in that vein and that spirit, the UK Government will listen and that, whatever the make-up of the UK Government that we get in six and a half weeks, it will act on the matter with the speed that it deserves. Our students and academic institutions certainly need that, but Scotland needs it, too. We benefit from highly skilled, highly intelligent migrants coming to this country, and that has been championed by members

I call on the UK Government to continue to work with us to begin preparations for reintroduction of

the post-study work visa in Scotland. The Smith commission left a chink of light in that regard, and we should start those preparations now, because it will be in Scotland's interests, in the business community's interests and in the academic institutions' interests. I will of course accept Labour's amendment, and I hope that Parliament will unite in sending a strong message that international students are welcome to Scotland, and always will be.

## Business Motion

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12780, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for the week.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Wednesday 25 March 2015

after

2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions Fair Work, Skills and Training Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights
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insert

<i>followed by</i>	Ministerial Statement: Scotland's Energy Future – Achieving Security of Supply and a Balanced Energy Mix
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delete

5.00 pm	Decision Time
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and insert

5.30 pm	Decision Time
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(b) Thursday 26 March 2015

after

2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
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insert

<i>followed by</i>	Ministerial Statement: The Penrose Inquiry—[Joe FitzPatrick.]
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*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-12763.1, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12763, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on post-study work visas, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)

Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

### Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 93, Against 0, Abstentions 12.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-12763, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on post-study work visas, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)

McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**Abstentions**

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 93, Against 0, Abstentions 12.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the Post Study Work Working Group's report; agrees with business and education leaders who demand the return of the post-study work visa to Scotland; recognises the contribution that international graduates make to the economy and society; highlights that Scotland's education institutions provide a first-class experience for talented students from around the world; embraces a culturally diverse student and teaching body that enriches Scotland's intellectual, social and cultural life; calls on the UK Government to engage constructively on the Smith Commission finding that it should work with the Scottish Government to explore schemes to allow international graduates to remain in Scotland and contribute to economic activity; calls for an immigration system for Scotland that meets its needs; recognises the success of Fresh Talent, launched by the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, in bringing considerable benefits to Scotland's economy by encouraging international students to work, study and stay in Scotland, and calls on the UK Government to immediately remove university students from net migration targets to ensure that Scotland's universities can continue to compete in a growing global market.



## Greenock Ocean Terminal

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

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-12250, in the name of Annabel Goldie, on Greenock ocean terminal. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that the owners of Greenock's cruise terminal have predicted that, in 2015, it will become the first port in Scotland to handle over 100,000 passengers, thus making it the busiest passenger port in the country; understands that, during the year, 56 ships, bringing a total of 108,866 passengers, are expected to call at Greenock Ocean Terminal and that this would represent seven more vessels than in 2014; believes that passenger numbers at Greenock have more than quadrupled over the last eight years; understands that it has been predicted that the Inverclyde economy will receive an £8.7 million boost from the expected record-breaking number of visitors; acknowledges that the cruise terminal, which is owned by Peel Ports, will be visited by ships such as The Royal Princess, The Regal Princess and the Queen Mary II as part of Cunard's 175th anniversary celebrations; believes that breaking the 100,000-passenger barrier is a fantastic achievement and testament to the efforts made to enhance the experience of overseas visitors arriving at Greenock; notes the terminal works in partnership with the Inverclyde Tourist Group (ITG), which provides an ambassador service for the area by greeting passengers on arrival and offering what it considers vital information; understands that the ITG comprises of people from Inverclyde who are passionate about where they stay; believes that Greenock is ideally placed for overseas visitors and people from Scotland sailing from their own local port, and wishes everybody involved with the terminal every success.

17:05

### **Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con):**

I am delighted that my motion has been selected for debate and I thank everyone who has supported it. Greenock ocean terminal, in the beautiful Clyde estuary on Scotland's west coast, offers a unique facility: a deepwater quay and modern quayside facilities. The natural deepwater port of Greenock offers a safe port for cruise ships of all sizes, and it is accessible 24/7, with no tidal or lock restrictions.

Greenock ocean terminal is a success story for Inverclyde and I am delighted to be able to debate it today. The terminal has arisen, like a phoenix, from the old Prince's pier so beloved by the former passengers of the old Clyde steamers. I am indebted to the *Greenock Telegraph* for much of the information in my speech.

Peel Ports, which owns the cruise terminal, has predicted that, in 2015, it will become the first port in Scotland to handle more than 100,000 passengers, therefore making it the biggest and busiest passenger port in Scotland. During the year, 56 ships, transporting a total of 108,866 passengers, are expected to call at Greenock

ocean terminal. That represents seven more vessels than in 2014.

The passenger numbers are interesting. They have more than quadrupled at Greenock over the past eight years. In 2007, more than 20,000 passengers passed through the terminal. Last year, the figure was in excess of 92,000. It has been predicted that the Inverclyde economy will receive an £8.7 million boost from the expected record-breaking number of tourists and visiting crew. Tourists and crew members who spend locally are a huge help to local businesses.

The terminal will be visited by state-of-the-art cruise ships the Royal Princess, the Regal Princess and the Queen Mary 2, as part of Cunard's 175th anniversary celebrations. The first direct sailing from Scotland to the Caribbean, on the Fred Olsen Cruise Lines Black Watch, will depart Greenock in November on a 32-day round trip—if I am not here, Presiding Officer, you know where to look.

Breaking the 100,000 passenger barrier is an amazing achievement. Port Glasgow, Greenock and Gourock used to be synonymous with shipping to and from all parts of the world, not to mention the flotilla of Clyde steamers that plied locally. Changing patterns of marine transportation and tourism all brought their own challenges to that great waterway. However, the ocean terminal has found a niche. Proof of the efforts that have been made to develop and enhance the experience of overseas visitors arriving at Greenock is there for all to see.

The terminal works in partnership with the Inverclyde tourist group, which provides an ambassador service for the area by greeting cruise passengers on arrival. Because the terminal is a deepwater port, cruise ships berth alongside the quay and passengers disembark through a very pleasant and welcoming terminal and are met by members of the Inverclyde tourist group.

I visited the group in 2013 and was highly impressed. The group is from the Inverclyde area and was formed in 2001 to promote Inverclyde in a friendly and informal way. It is made up of volunteers and is a non-profit-making organisation.

Inverclyde tourist group members meet and greet cruise ship passengers and provide information on places of interest to visit, where to eat and drink, transport, local shopping, internet and telephone access, clan history and tartan. It also runs local coach tours on cruise call days.

Group members are proud to show tourists around this lovely part of the west of Scotland. I congratulate them on their first-class efforts. Their hard work was recognised when Greenock ocean terminal won the accolade of best cruise port reception in the world in 2013. I am delighted that

the tourist group is there to sing the praises of Greenock and Inverclyde.

As a Bishopton resident, former Greenock academy pupil and “Waterloo Road” honorary head girl, I am very well aware of what the local area has to offer and how friendly and welcoming the local people are. On a glorious day, the views across the water from Greenock are quite simply stunning.

Inverclyde is a terrific part of Scotland, with shopping facilities, restaurants, cafes and pubs, and a variety of sporting facilities. There are excellent rail links and the area is served by the M8 motorway, which makes it easily accessible by car.

The Cruise Scotland website sums up why cruise ships are picking Scotland as a destination:

“As a cruise destination, Scotland is undoubtedly up there with the best. Breathtaking scenery, stunning cities, haunting history, UNESCO World Heritage sites, and a variety of ports large and small make Scotland the perfect cruise destination.

Scotland’s cruise ports are ideally located for inclusion in Britain and Ireland itineraries, transatlantic re-positioning, or for combining with cruises to Iceland, Faroe Islands or the Norwegian Fjords and Europe.”

The Cruise Scotland website estimates that the market was worth more than £49 million last year, when 457 vessels brought 401,325 passengers, with value and passenger numbers reaching new heights and a number of ports breaking their own records.

The debate is an important opportunity to put on record the Parliament’s recognition of the cruise industry in Scotland and the particular success that is Greenock ocean terminal. I thank everyone who has supported the motion and I look forward to members’ contributions to the debate. I congratulate all who have contributed to the success that is Greenock ocean terminal.

17:11

**Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate Annabel Goldie on securing the debate. For the first time ever, I agree 100 per cent with everything that she said.

In the past week, we have heard about the efforts that are being made to promote tourism. I remind members to recognise the importance of creating a prosperous tourism industry for all in Scotland.

Inverclyde has succeeded in growing its marine tourism sector during the past few years. This year, Inverclyde’s economy expects an £8.7 million boost to come from the record-breaking number of visitors to Greenock ocean terminal.

Inverclyde is becoming a set destination port for tourists from all over Europe and elsewhere. In 2015, for the first time ever—I cannot stress that enough—a cruise line will sail from Greenock to the Caribbean. Peel Ports, which operates the port of Greenock, expects each cruise ship visitor to contribute an average of £80 to the local economy, and let us not forget the 25,000 crew members, who will also spend money and time in Inverclyde and will contribute to the local economy.

As I was putting some words together for today, I remembered that I lodged a similar motion in 2010. At that time, almost 40 ships were to go through Greenock ocean terminal and bring 50,000 tourists to Inverclyde. Between 2010 and now, the number of people going to Greenock ocean terminal and through the Inverclyde economy has doubled.

Annabel Goldie lavished praise on the people of Greenock ocean terminal, but the contribution of the people of Inverclyde tourist group cannot be overstressed. We have to consider how much of an improvement there has been and how beneficial it will be to the Inverclyde economy.

I will lavish further praise on the Inverclyde tourist group. I have met the group on a number of occasions and spoken at a couple of its annual general meetings. I was there again just last summer. It involves a wonderful bunch of people, all of whom believe in and have a passion for the area of Inverclyde. Every single person donates their time, effort and energy for no money whatsoever. They do it because they love the area and they want Inverclyde to be promoted as widely as possible. The efforts of every single person in that group cannot be overestimated. That is a tremendous group of individuals.

It is estimated that one third of the visitors who go to Inverclyde stay in Inverclyde. The rest will perhaps travel out to Loch Lomond, Glasgow or even Edinburgh for day trips. However, one third stay in Inverclyde, and that is a huge amount of money and a huge amount of economic potential that can be generated and benefited from.

I am conscious of the time, so I will wind up, but I could probably speak about the topic all day. I congratulate Annabel Goldie again on securing the motion and I whole-heartedly agree with its sentiments.

17:15

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** I congratulate Annabel Goldie on bringing the motion to the chamber. I totally agree with its sentiments. Greenock ocean terminal has added to the economy of Inverclyde and the west of Scotland, as we have heard from the previous speakers. I am fortunate in that I have

experienced the terminal's hospitality on several occasions when I have embarked from Greenock to sail to Norway and Morocco on cruises, which was a delightful experience.

One of the highlights of leaving from Greenock ocean terminal is the fantastic send-off that we get from the pipe band and the Highland dancers—and let us not forget the huge foam figure in a Scottish outfit; I presume that there is a man inside it. He is kilted and has a beret and he attempts to dance and jig on the quayside as ships depart. That is a great experience for those of us who are fortunate enough to go on a cruise—I know that you, Presiding Officer, have been on a cruise as well. It is also fantastic for the people who are not Scottish who join the cruise—lots of people come from across the United Kingdom to join the cruises from Greenock. The experience is fantastic and I am sure that the same thing happens when people come into the terminal, which is obviously why it is so popular with visitors.

I, too, congratulate Inverclyde tourist group on the service that it provides to the cruise passengers—including me—and the thousands of visitors. As we have heard, the port reception is the best in the world.

17:17

**The Minister for Transport and Islands (Derek Mackay):** By some coincidence, my day started in Inverclyde this morning, when I visited the Ferguson yard. The work that is going on there is more good news for Inverclyde and my visit was another reminder of the spectacular scenery that the area has to offer.

I, too, congratulate Annabel Goldie on securing the debate and supporting Greenock ocean terminal. Like her, I congratulate Peel Ports on increasing the number of vessels and passengers using the port, which is predicted to be in excess of 100,000 this year.

Congratulations must also go to the Inverclyde tourist group, which, working in close partnership with the port, provides—as has been described—an excellent ambassadorial service for passengers, encouraging them to enjoy what the area has to offer. Thanks must also go to Cruise Scotland, the industry body that has played such a leading role in promoting Scotland as a destination for all the major cruise lines.

Cruising is an important sector for Scottish tourism. Although we cannot always have the weather that the Mediterranean or the Caribbean can offer, we have amazing scenery, epic history, and culture and events that continue to provide a draw.

Greenock provides the perfect location for one of Scotland's top cruise ports. At the head of the sheltered and scenic Clyde estuary, Greenock ocean terminal hosts a deepwater quay that is able not only to accommodate the growing size of cruise ships but to act as the perfect entry point to the attractions of the west of Scotland and further afield.

Indeed, thanks to an invite from the Federation of Small Businesses, my ministerial colleague, Fergus Ewing, has already had the opportunity to visit the port, last August, along with Stuart McMillan and Duncan McNeil. They met volunteers from the Inverclyde tourist group and saw first hand the impressive work that Peel Ports is doing to encourage further growth in the sector.

For example, Peel Ports works closely with the tourist group to ensure that a warm welcome always awaits every arrival. The group must be commended as a good example of local people who are passionate about their area volunteering to act as ambassadors for Inverclyde. Their enthusiasm and knowledge help to ensure that visitors get the most out of their time in the area, learning about the many places of interest nearby, and are offered free local tours. As Annabel Goldie notes, 56 vessels are due to berth at the port this year, with Greenock welcoming some of the newest and most famous vessels, such as P&O's newest liner, the Britannia, which was launched by the Queen this year and will be visiting in July as part of her maiden season. The Queen Mary 2 will be arriving on 21 May to celebrate Cunard's 175th anniversary, and Cunard continues to maintain its proud relationship with the river and its people, evoking memories of the three previous Cunard queens that were launched on the river. It is good to see that the Clyde and Greenock in particular are very much still working for Cunard.

Greenock is not only a transit port—a harbour where passengers stop off as part of their cruise—it is also an important embarkation point. This year, 18 cruises will commence and end in Greenock, servicing routes such as the Baltic and the Western Isles and—new for this year, as Stuart McMillan mentioned—offering a direct route from Greenock to the Caribbean this November. That benefits Scottish consumers who wish to go on a cruise, as it means that they do not have to take the long journey south to Southampton. It is also worth noting that it is not only passengers who benefit the local economy. As Stuart McMillan has also mentioned, 20,000 crew members contribute to the local economy, too.

Last week, Cruise Scotland attended the global industry's premier event, cruise shipping Miami. Cruise Scotland, the industry-led marketing body, used the opportunity to further promote Scotland as the ideal cruise destination, and even used a

whisky versus Tunnock's taste-off to entice delegates.

Cruise Scotland represents all the main cruise ports in Scotland, from Lerwick to Leith and Greenock to Invergordon. It continues to actively market Scotland, with forthcoming attendance at the major European cruise event in Hamburg this September, and on-going familiarisation visits for cruise line executives.

Last year—2014—was the best year for the cruise industry, and 2015 is on track to beat it. Cruise Scotland estimates that the market was worth £49 million last year, when 457 vessels brought more than 400,000 passengers to Scotland—an increase of nearly 17,000 passengers on the previous year. Although it expects that the same number of vessels will come to Scotland this year, a trend toward larger vessels—some having as many as 16 decks and taking around 4,000 passengers—should see an overall increase in the number of passengers of more than an estimated 8 per cent to more than 430,000. It is good to see that Scotland's appeal, even in the cold season, means that the cruising period has extended from March to mid-December this year.

The Scottish Government is very supportive of the industry and engages regularly with Cruise Scotland and other key stakeholders. As Stuart McMillan, the convener of the cross-party group on recreational boating and marine tourism, is already aware, the Government was able to provide support to Cruise Scotland to assist it to attend the European Commission's inaugural pan-European dialogue with cruise stakeholders in Brussels earlier this month. That helped to ensure that the Scottish cruise sector's interests were fully represented and illustrates the kind of stakeholder commitment that we have.

Scotland's national marine plan recognises that cruise tourism is one of our growing sectors and demonstrates strong potential to expand further. We have secured appropriate infrastructure, which is being made available to accommodate larger ships. The emphasis in the marine plan and the national planning framework on sharing port infrastructure that was developed for other commercial reasons—for example, renewable energy—will assist and might offer further opportunities.

VisitScotland, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are all represented on the Cruise Scotland steering group, and VisitScotland engages with local bodies that are keen to market their areas, including the Inverclyde tourist group.

In relation to Greenock, VisitScotland will next month chair a Riverside Inverclyde workshop

aimed at businesses that hope to maximise opportunities from the cruise market.

However, the Government remains concerned about the damaging effect that the uncertainty about the unconsulted-upon face-to-face passport checks that the UK Government introduced in 2012 continues to have on the cruise industry and the delay for passengers that is created. It is most unhelpful.

We continue to press the UK Home Office for a proportionate process in response to cruise industry and local authority concerns around its actions. The cruise industry view on the issue is clear: the industry needs a bankable written commitment from the UK Home Office that, for as long as it insists on stopping visiting cruise passengers and checking their passports, it will meet the costs involved.

That said, the cruise industry would prefer that the UK Home Office operated in a manner that enabled all of the UK to compete for cruise traffic on the same footing as Norway, France and other nearby countries: that is, relying on advance information from the ship and stopping only the very few who might be of interest. Such an approach would encourage further traffic at existing ports and enable smaller ports to consider entry into the expanding niche cruise market with smaller vessels but targeted destinations.

We hope that the partnership working, the assets that we have and the support that we provide will all be well received. Once again, we congratulate all those who are involved with Greenock ocean terminal on their success. Long may it continue.

*Meeting closed at 17:25.*

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