



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Tuesday 15 November 2022**

**Session 6**



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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 15 November 2022*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Lucy McKee, who is a membership ambassador for Enable Scotland. Lucy's contribution has been pre-recorded.

**Lucy McKee (Enable Scotland):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, for inviting me to address the Parliament in today's time for reflection. It is a privilege to speak to you.

I am a membership ambassador for Enable Scotland, which is Scotland's largest charity for our citizens who have a learning disability. We campaign to bring real change to the lives of people with a learning disability and their families across Scotland, and our ACE—advisory committee of Enable Scotland—and ACE youth groups connect them to their wider communities, thereby supporting them to grow in confidence, rise to their ambitions, make friends, live independently and, ultimately, be leaders of their communities rather than just observers.

Enable Scotland began in 1954, when family carers in Glasgow first came together with the idea that Scotland could be a better place for people with a learning disability. We have made great progress, but we have still not come far enough. Nearly 70 years later, people with a learning disability face bullying, institutional living, lower life expectancy, more hardship and greater isolation than their fellow citizens who do not have a learning disability.

We saw that inequality throughout the pandemic, with people who have a learning disability being more likely to catch Covid, more likely to become seriously ill and more likely to die than the general population. We still see that as we emerge from the pandemic.

People with a learning disability are campaigning to uphold their human rights and to live in the home of their choice, in the community that they like, close to the people whom they love. Still, that is denied to too many people with a learning disability in our country.

Every day, children with a learning disability face going to school where they are not legally protected against restraint, and where they experience seclusion in education settings. That

damages their mental health and wellbeing for years into adulthood.

Children and adults with a learning disability in Scotland face so many injustices. I know that you will join me in supporting Enable's fight for an equal society for everyone with a learning disability in Scotland—for everyone to be included and represented.

One day—and one day soon—I hope that someone with a learning disability will be a member of this Parliament. People with a learning disability have much to give society. They can be leaders, they are role models and they have ambitions and want to be teachers, artists, journalists, actors, musicians and—yes—politicians, too. They deserve the same opportunities that are offered to everyone else.

I ask you to be as ambitious as I am in pushing for change, for opportunity, for aspiration and for hope. Ensure that no more generations of people with a learning disability will be invisible or left behind. Be bold. Be impatient. Be strong. From today, Scotland can truly start its journey to being an equal society.

Thank you.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much indeed, Lucy.

## Presiding Officer's Statement

14:05

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Before we move to the next item of business, I wish to address an issue that occurred at the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee this morning that members might be aware of, and which members have raised with me.

At that meeting, a visitor to the public gallery was asked to remove a purple, green and white scarf. Having declined to do so, the visitor was informed that she would not be able to return to the gallery. That request was made by officials in connection with the Parliament's code of conduct for visitors, which sets out that

"The display of banners, flags or political slogans, including on clothing and accessories"

is forbidden.

Let me make one thing crystal clear: suffrage colours are not, and never have been, banned at the Scottish Parliament. We actively support and promote universal suffrage in a number of ways at Holyrood, and we will continue to do so.

I advise the chamber that the action that was taken this morning was not prompted by any member of the committee. The action that was taken was an error, and I apologise for it on behalf of the Parliament. The wearing of a scarf in those colours does not, in itself, breach the code of conduct for visitors. The Parliament wishes people to engage with the democratic process, including observing elected representatives debating and making the law of the country.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Presiding Officer, thank you for making it clear that no breach of the code of conduct occurred during this morning's committee meeting. I had planned to make a point of order regarding the issue. It is important that you have confirmed that MSPs are treated in exactly the same way as members of the public, and that wearing the suffragette colours does not breach the guidelines that have been set by this Parliament. I thank you for your intervention, for sharing that with Parliament and for being clear regarding that matter.

## Point of Order

14:07

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I seek your guidance on comments that were made in the chamber by Jamie Hepburn, the Minister for Higher and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, that do not appear to bear any resemblance to accuracy.

On 27 October, Mr Hepburn said in this chamber:

"There is no freeze on apprenticeships this year. There are still many places available to be taken up in the contracts that have been awarded, and they should be fulfilled. Let us be clear: there is no freeze on apprenticeship places this year."

Training providers have been in contact with many members to make it clear that they have been told something very different by Skills Development Scotland. At the start of the financial year, training providers were told that they could utilise the process for requesting additional starts as long as they met their key performance indicators, as has been standard practice in many previous years.

However, last month, despite meeting all their key performance indicators, training providers were told that, as a result of John Swinney's announcements, Skills Development Scotland was unable to process any further requests for additional volume or value to provide modern apprenticeship qualifications. That has removed the ability of training providers to respond to the needs of our businesses and to provide opportunities for our young people.

It has always been the practice that training providers can apply for additional places halfway through the year, to allow for flexibility in the labour market. They had received assurances to the effect that that would continue. I know that Mr Hepburn has received the same correspondence that I and many other members have received from training providers. That normal practice has ended and the number of places on apprenticeship schemes is frozen, yet Mr Hepburn said that there was "no freeze on apprenticeships". There is. That feels more than a little misleading.

What options exist for members to have Mr Hepburn come to the chamber to explain what he meant by

"there is no freeze on apprenticeships this year" —[*Official Report*, 27 October 2022; c 47.] ,

when, clearly, there is a freeze on apprenticeships?

If Mr Hepburn has misled the Parliament inadvertently, he should put the record straight. What sanctions exist? If there has been a change since the minister spoke a few days ago, relatively speaking, would not it be normal practice for him to inform the Parliament?

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I thank Mr Kerr for his point of order.

It is of paramount importance that members, including ministers, give accurate information to Parliament and that they correct inadvertent errors at the earliest opportunity. If any member has a question about the factual accuracy of another member's contribution, they should raise it with that member. I am sure that all members are aware that Parliament has a corrections procedure and are aware of how that mechanism operates. I have not received a request to make a statement. If a member considers that a statement should be made, they should raise that directly with the relevant member. If a request to make a statement were to be received, I would notify the Parliamentary Bureau so that time could be scheduled and set aside for it.

My points reflect the procedures and practices that have been agreed to by Parliament but, of course, if anyone considers that those should be revised, they can raise the matter with the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. We will move on to the next item of business.

## Topical Question Time

### Offshore Wind

1. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that its claim that Scotland has 25 per cent of Europe's offshore wind potential lacks evidence and that it knew that there was no basis for it. (S6T-00960)

**The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):** The figure relating to Scotland having 25 per cent of Europe's offshore wind potential was first set out in a 2010 publication, and it is now outdated. However, that does not change the fact that Scotland already has an important offshore wind sector, and that we have huge potential to grow it and become a global leader, with over 40GW of potential offshore wind developments already in the pipeline.

**Liam Kerr:** I am afraid that the minister has completely missed the point. Everyone wants the renewables industry to succeed, but that will not be achieved by ministers putting out dodgy data. Only a couple of weeks ago, I raised a point of order, because the First Minister had misrepresented Scotland's energy consumption from renewables. Instead of doing the honourable thing and publicly admitting her mistake, she quietly amended the *Official Report*. It seems that misrepresentation and misuse of data might be endemic within the Government. Apparently, the civil service knew that the data was not true several years ago. When did ministers first become aware that they were using a figure that, to quote Scottish Government officials, had not "been properly sourced"?

**Lorna Slater:** Ministers became aware of the issue on Tuesday 8 November ahead of the publication of the report by These Islands. What does not change with regard to the statistic is the amount of renewable energy potential that Scotland has, which is still significant and will be part of Scotland's future energy provision both now and as an independent country. Over 40GW is in the pipeline already, presuming the outcome of planning decisions and routes to market being found, and that is the equivalent of producing enough electricity to power every home in Scotland for 17 years.

**Liam Kerr:** Once again, the minister has completely missed the point. The claim was that Scotland has 25 per cent of the potential, and a bogus statistic that civil servants and ministers knew was wrong has been repeated ad nauseam. Members in the chamber have heard it either in the chamber or in the course of their duties from First Minister Sturgeon, Deputy First Minister

Swinney, Minister Todd, Minister Macpherson, Minister Robison, Minister Matheson and Minister Slater.

Section 1.3.(c) of the ministerial code says:

“It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to the Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead the Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the First Minister”.

Now that I am raising the issue with the member, as the Presiding Officer has just asked us to do, what action is the minister taking to ensure that the ministerial code is always complied with?

**Lorna Slater:** At the time when they cited it, Scottish ministers understood that statistic to be accurate. Now that it has come to our attention that it is not, we are working to update the statistics on how our offshore wind potential compares with that of other countries. We will update the Parliament once that is done and, at that point, we will consider how any legacy documents might need to be updated. The key point, however, is that Scotland’s enormous potential for offshore wind has not changed. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Members!

**Lorna Slater:** In fact, we have made big progress in recent years, As I have said, 40 GW is now in the pipeline.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** We know that the claim that Scotland had 25 per cent of Europe’s offshore wind was always untrue, as is the Government’s constantly-repeated claim that nearly 100 per cent of the electricity that we consume comes from renewables.

However, I want to turn to another figure. The Scottish Government promised that, by 2020, there would be 120,000 jobs per year in renewables. Was that target reached? Is it still the target? Finally, how many supply chain jobs arising from the offshoring of ScotWind leases will be created in Scottish, not foreign-owned, businesses?

**Lorna Slater:** We are all keen to ensure that the development of the offshore wind industry benefits Scotland’s businesses and our economy. Initial supply chain commitments with regard to ScotWind indicate an average of £1.4 billion of investment in Scotland per project, which equates to £28 billion of investment across the 20 projects.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** I hope that we are all here not to play politics with the past but to propel progress in the future. To that end, I would just reflect that, when I was energy minister, one of my most frustrating experiences was finding out that it could take 12

years to get consents for an onshore wind farm that it took 12 months to construct.

I therefore suggest to the minister that the Scottish Government review the processes for obtaining permissions, licences and consents for onshore and offshore developments, subsea cables and, in particular, grid connections, with a view to simplifying, shortening and streamlining them; and that, in order to achieve success throughout these islands, the Scottish Government engage with the United Kingdom Government to identify one lead body to guide the process. I fear that, otherwise, many of the projects that we all wish to see might be thwarted and jeopardised through delay.

**The Presiding Officer:** I thank Fergus Ewing for his question, but it bears no relation to the substantive question on the paper. I therefore ask the minister not to respond.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Now that the Scottish Government has admitted to cooking the books—something that did the renewables sector no favours—does the minister believe that it is advisable for Scottish National Party MPs to double down on the statistic that it has been admitted is not true, as they did in the House of Commons earlier this afternoon? Does she not believe that that will simply spread further fake news about the state of the sector?

**Lorna Slater:** I welcome my Liberal Democrat colleague’s new-found interest in statistical rigour, which, I am sure, he will also bring to any future election materials.

I repeat that, when they cited it, Scottish ministers understood the statistic to be accurate. Now that it has come to our attention that it is not, we are working to update the statistics on how our offshore wind potential compares with that of other countries. What has changed is not that potential, but merely how we report it in comparison with that of other countries, which we will update in due course.

### **Independent Commission of Inquiry into Asylum Provision in Scotland**

**2. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to Baroness Helena Kennedy KC’s final report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry into Asylum Provision in Scotland, published on Friday, which highlights avoidable failings in the provision of care to new Scots during the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6T-00961)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I thank Baroness Kennedy and Asylum Inquiry Scotland for their work. The report is a shocking indictment of the United Kingdom’s



broken asylum system. It highlights the need for fundamental change, so that the United Kingdom upholds its responsibility to recognise and protect people who have been forced to flee persecution, and treats them with compassion, dignity and human decency at all times.

The Scottish Government will respond to the inquiry report. Moreover, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government has written to the Home Secretary seeking an urgent meeting to discuss the inquiry's findings about the asylum system.

**Maggie Chapman:** Of course, the tragic death of Badreddin Abdalla Adam and the injuries that he caused to others were preventable. He had called the Home Office and two of their contractors 72 times seeking help.

The use of institutional-style accommodation such as hotels is clearly not enabling the right support to get to people in a timely way. What more can the Scottish Government do while people are here to ensure that vulnerable adults and children, including survivors of trafficking, are not left in grossly inadequate institutional-style accommodation for indefinite periods, without the vital specialist mental health support that they need?

**Angus Robertson:** As Maggie Chapman knows, asylum is a matter reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament. The UK Home Office is responsible for the provision of asylum accommodation and support to people who are awaiting the decision on their asylum application. People seeking asylum should be accommodated within communities, with access to the support and services that they need to rebuild their lives, and the Scottish Government will continue to raise concerns and press for improvements to the UK asylum system.

**Maggie Chapman:** It is clear that, here in Scotland, we are trying to do better than appears to be the case south of the border. The hostile environment rhetoric of invasions and deportation flights to Rwanda is not replicated by our Government, but there is still more to do and there are things that we can do here.

The report of Helena Kennedy's inquiry has some clear recommendations for Scotland to act on. Will the cabinet secretary and perhaps even the First Minister agree to meet Refugees for Justice, the survivors of the Park Inn tragedy and Baroness Kennedy to discuss immediate actions and future strategies that will better secure the rights of refugees?

**Angus Robertson:** The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government met Baroness Kennedy last week and has previously met representatives of Refugees for

Justice. Furthermore, the Scottish Government and our partners at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Refugee Council are preparing to undertake an engagement to inform the refresh of our new Scots refugee integration strategy, which we intend to publish next year.

At the new Scots national conference last Friday, we asked people with lived experience and support services how we could enable people, communities and organisations to participate in engagement to shape that strategy. The new Scots refugee integration strategy will continue to set out our partnership-led approach to supporting refugees who are seeking asylum—and, indeed, supporting our communities—from day 1 of arrival.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I am the constituency MSP for Glasgow Kelvin, where the unfortunate tragedies, which the commission referred to as “avoidable”, took place, and I was able to attend the launch of the final report at the Merchants house. Will the Scottish Government join me in pursuing recommendation 6, which calls on asylum accommodation support and care providers to immediately ring fence a fund of £5 million per annum for

“asylum seeker wellbeing and mental and emotional health support”

and treatment of trauma? Does the cabinet secretary agree that there should be no profiteering from pain?

**Angus Robertson:** I commend Kaukab Stewart, the constituency member of the Scottish Parliament, for her dogged pursuit of justice on this matter.

I reiterate that the Scottish Government has still to respond to the inquiry. We will do that in good time, but I will make sure that my cabinet secretary colleague with ministerial responsibility for this area looks very closely at the points that Ms Stewart has made and that, if they are not dealt with in the response to the inquiry, she writes to the member to update her on the Scottish Government's position and the priorities that she is calling to our attention.

#### **Nursing Staff (Queen Elizabeth University Hospital)**

3. **Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that nursing staff at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital are routinely left in charge of up to 30 patients and are forced to conduct 5 am bed washes due to staff shortages. (S6T-00975)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** The Scottish Government expects health boards to ensure that at all times

there are sufficient suitably qualified staff to support the provision of high-quality care. That includes reviewing staffing levels daily, with decisions regarding real-time staffing being made throughout the day.

It is my understanding that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde does not ask nursing staff to carry out any non-essential care for patients in the night-time hours or early morning. Doing so is not its policy and that remains the case. The board supplements wards with healthcare support workers to support tasks at appropriate times as part of the wider care team.

**Paul Sweeney:** The cabinet secretary will be well aware of the wider problems that our national health service faces. Spiralling waiting times, missed targets and, indeed, impending strike action due to low pay have been routinely discussed in the chamber and are common knowledge.

Just last week, a whistleblower contacted me to express their grave concerns about the conditions that nurses and patients face at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital. They explained that nurses are

“frequently left in charge of up to 30 patients”,

and how they are forced, despite having raised concerns with management, to conduct deeply inhumane 5 am bed washes of vulnerable patients due to severe understaffing. Was the cabinet secretary aware of that prior to the press reports on Sunday? If he was, does he think that either scenario is acceptable?

**Humza Yousaf:** Of course I am aware, and the Government is aware, of the extreme pressures right across our acute sites, including the Queen Elizabeth university hospital. Having heard the allegations that have been made, we sought immediate assurance from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which, I repeat, has said that the policy remains that it does not ask nurses to carry out any non-essential care for patients—including bed washes—during the night or in the early morning. That is not the policy.

That said, if Paul Sweeney has details of those allegations, I will be happy to speak to him. Indeed, I would also be happy to speak to the whistleblower, off table, in a confidential space.

Whistleblowing is important. I have met the whistleblowing champion in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Charles Vincent, and I reiterated to him the importance that I attach to whistleblowing. If the issues in question have been raised with senior management and have not been rectified, that would concern me. However, as I said, I sought assurances from NHS Greater Glasgow

and Clyde, and it has told me that that is not routine practice.

**Paul Sweeney:** I appreciate that, prior to the press reports, the cabinet secretary might have been unaware of the practice, but I urge him to investigate the matter further, and I welcome his offer to meet me and, potentially, the whistleblower, should they be interested in having such a meeting.

Since the publication of that story in *The Sunday Times*, current and former NHS staff have contacted me to say that the practice has been going on for years and is not exclusive to the Queen Elizabeth university hospital. The reality is that

“Nurse staffing levels across Scotland’s health and social care services are dangerously low and patient care is suffering as a result.”

Those are not my words; they are the words of the director of the Royal College of Nursing in Scotland, Colin Poolman.

As well as acknowledging that the issue requires immediate investigation, will the cabinet secretary accept with some humility the fact that it is the decisions that his Government has taken over the past 14 years in which it has been in power that have resulted in staff being demoralised and overstretched to the point of taking industrial action, and which have left us with a system in our health service in which staffing levels are so low that staff are being forced to conduct such inhumane practices, despite the fact that it risks impeding patients’ recovery?

**Humza Yousaf:** If we look over the past 10 years, we can see that nursing and midwifery student intake numbers have increased over consecutive years. In fact, they have almost doubled over that decade.

I acknowledge that staffing—nursing staffing in particular, in the case of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde—has been a problem and continues to be an issue. That is why I was really pleased to see nearly 600 newly qualified nurses and midwives being welcomed to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and starting their jobs in the past few weeks. That has helped to reduce the vacancy level.

Under this Government, we have record levels of staffing in the NHS and, of course, we have the best paid staff anywhere in the United Kingdom. However, neither I nor anyone else in the Government is complacent about the staffing challenges that exist, which is why I will—as Mr Sweeney would expect—get back round the table with our trade unions and our staff side representatives to make sure that we do everything in our power to avoid strike action,

which I know would be catastrophic for the NHS in the course of this winter.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** Nurses are doing their best in trying to deliver care at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, but they are at breaking point. Overtime is up and the Scottish Government is responsible. The Scottish Government does not have their backs, and any semblance of trust that staff and patients had in the cabinet secretary has evaporated. Working conditions in the NHS are so bad that 70 per cent of nurses said that they felt that their most recent shift had been unsafe and that patient care had been compromised. With an NHS winter crisis fast approaching, the situation seems unlikely to improve.

What specific action will the cabinet secretary announce today? Rather than a woolly announcement, we need action that he can guarantee will improve the working conditions of nurses and thus patient safety, which was woeful before Covid, when there were a record 6,000 vacancies.

**Humza Yousaf:** I reiterate that neither I nor this Government is in any way complacent about the challenges that face our NHS staff in Scotland. Those problems are faced by health services across the United Kingdom, but it is worth noting that we have more qualified nurses and midwives per 1,000 of the population than in England. For example, we have 8.3 qualified nurses and midwives per 1,000 people in Scotland, in comparison with 6 in England. We also have higher staffing per head than other parts of the UK.

Notwithstanding that, the rate of vacancies is too high. That is why I stood in the chamber a number of weeks ago and committed additional funding to international recruitment of 750 overseas nurses, midwives and allied health professionals.

If Sandesh Gulhane had any influence whatsoever, it would be better if he demanded that his party provided the Scottish Government with additional funding, because it is due to that party's economic incompetence that my budget is now worth £650 million less.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** It is clear that, in the current climate, the NHS faces recruitment challenges across the four nations in attracting people with the right skills from outwith the UK. Does the health secretary agree that comments such as those of Mr Sweeney's UK party leader, Keir Starmer, do not reflect the welcoming nature of Scotland's NHS, and that Brexit, which Labour now clearly backs, is a further barrier to recruitment in our NHS?

**Humza Yousaf:** I do, but in fairness I do not think, knowing Paul Sweeney and Scottish Labour as I do, that those remarks from Keir Starmer reflect their position. I know from having spoken to many Scottish Labour members that they are pro-immigration, which is why I think that they would share my, and Emma Harper's, disappointment at Keir Starmer's very divisive rhetoric.

There are three elements to helping with our staffing crisis. One is increasing the pipeline of graduates; I have spoken about that already. The second is domestic recruitment. The third prong, which is really important, is overseas recruitment, and I make it clear on my behalf, and on the Scottish Government's behalf, that the contribution of every overseas worker in our NHS is greatly valued.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes topical question time.

## Gaelic and Scots

### **The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06763, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the future of Gaelic and Scots. I advise members that interpretation facilities are available. Members can listen by inserting the headphones into the socket on the right-hand side, towards the front of the console. Any member who is unable to hear the interpretation should press the audio button on the console and select channel 1 for English. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

14:32

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** It is a privilege to open a debate in the Scottish Parliament on our support for Gaelic and Scots. At the outset, I recognise that in this Parliament, there has been strong cross-party support for both languages; I am confident that we would all agree that that needs to be not just maintained, but strengthened.

As the poet Iain Crichton Smith said, in a poem that was read out at the opening of the Scottish Parliament,

“Let our three-voiced country  
Sing in a new world”.

The focus of our discussions today is support for our indigenous languages, Gaelic and Scots, and those two lines, in just a few words, express the same sentiment and share the same priorities as are behind the motion that we are debating.

The Scottish Government is proud of our record in supporting our languages, and we recognise the cultural and economic benefits that Gaelic and Scots bring to the whole of Scotland and the impact that they have internationally.

We are witnessing a growing number of young people in particular who want to embrace their languages. The Scottish Government is determined that those who wish to learn and live their lives through Gaelic and Scots are afforded the opportunity to do so. We must also give those individuals the confidence to use their language without the negativity that we sometimes witness on social media and in some sections of the press.

We came to power on a manifesto that demonstrates our commitment to our languages. However, it has been several years since the legislation supporting the languages was passed and now is the time to consider how we can further strengthen the current structures. I hope that today will be the first of many discussions that we have on the future of our languages. I want to

work with all parties in the Parliament to ensure a bright future for Gaelic and Scots.

First, I want to refer briefly to the initiatives that are in place, the progress that is being made and the consultation paper that is still open and on which we are inviting comments.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am sure that the cabinet secretary is right and that it will be a very consensual debate. I think that all the parties in the Parliament are in the same place.

However, before she progresses further in her speech, does she agree that languages in general is an area where we could do better in Scotland, by introducing languages to children at a much younger age and following that up through their scholastic years in primary and secondary school? Together, we should have the political will to improve our linguistic skills in general.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** If we can begin the interventions today by me agreeing with Stephen Kerr, I would say that we are off to a good start. *[Laughter.]*

The member is correct to point to the importance of opening up languages and language learning to all our young people. That is why the Government has the one-plus-two policy to ensure that languages are brought into our primary schools and throughout primary, so that children are opened to that progress. I would be very happy—although perhaps in another debate—to discuss that and other opportunities further.

The Scots language has played a leading role in the life of our nation, baith in oor past and in the present. If we look back, we see Scots used in public and community life, in oor literature and oor songs, and if we look at oor current cultural life, we still see Scots in use aw aroon us. Ah am gled tae sey as weel that there has been mair support fur Scots and mair resources makkit available.

The Scottish Government noo has a Scots language policy, and further support fur Scots can be fund in the Cooncil o Europe’s European charter fur regional or minority languages and in the maist hertenin information gaihert frae the Scots question in the last census.

Scots plays a muckle pairt in education, publishin and the airts and a thrang o smaw organisations wi support frae the Government are wirkin thegither tae heeze up Scots in every wey.

The Scottish Government kens weel that Scots needs mair support and we are increasin fundin fur it, and hae addit tae the nummer o Scots bodies that are wirkin tae provide a brichter future fur Scots speakers. A nummer o Scots, particularly young folk, are mair closely aligned wi the Scots

language and it is important that they hae access tae the richt materials. By braidenin access fur young folk and teachers through the wirk o Scots Hoose and Yaldi Books we are daein jist that. These ootstandin resources are helpin young folk in their attainment and educational outcomes. Ah have nae doot that we can aw agree that this is welcome.

Forby, as fur masel, this debate means an awfie lot tae me. Ah mind when Ah wis growin up in Fife bein telt no tae speak slang and tae speak properly. Ah couldnae understand how the language Ah used in the playgroun wis wrang and needit tae be changed once Ah got intae schuil. Thankfully, we have moved on frae these attitudes and ma appreciation and pride in my language has grown.

Ah noo find that Ah am able tae yaise the language o ma hame, ma bairnheid and ma community in ma duties as a cabinet secretary. Ah have seen monie others that are yaisin Scots wi new pride and confidence as weel, and that has tae be encouraged. Up tae noo, the Scots language hasnae benefited frae formal support through legislation, but wi growin support fur the language we must think about what we can dae in this regaird.

I will now turn to Gaelic, although I will not be attempting to speak Gaelic—despite my best efforts to learn some of the language since taking up this Government role. The Scottish Government is also determined to support the Gaelic language and is committed to the process of reversing how Gaelic has been viewed and treated.

We are all aware of the injustices of the past and the steps that were taken to eradicate Gaelic. Our aim is to create a secure future for Gaelic and Scots in Scotland, which will be achieved by an increase in those learning, speaking and using the language.

Important steps for Gaelic have been taken. Our support for Gaelic-medium education has created a successful minority sector in Scottish education that operates at all levels and is increasingly popular with parents. To help meet that demand, the Scottish Government has provided funding to local authorities, and continues to help widen access to Gaelic through new schools and units across Scotland.

Most recently, we announced a further round of capital for local authorities, including Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Glasgow City Council and Highland Council, to grow their Gaelic provision. In recent years, other local authorities have started their Gaelic journey by opening units to meet demand in their areas. Most recently, Renfrewshire Council opened provision in Paisley,

which has been welcomed by parents and will no doubt be a jewel in the crown of the local area when the Royal National Mòd visits in 2023.

To be clear, the Scottish Government wants to build on the ambitions of local authorities and parents, and I want to work with other local authorities to help meet their particular needs. Of course, it is important to widen access so that all those who wish to learn Gaelic have the ability and the resources to do so.

Through the faster rate of progress initiative, SpeakGaelic has been developed by MG Alba. That multiplatform learning resource helps to build on the massive interest that has been created by Duolingo, and will help learners to reach fluency. I am proud that the Scottish Government has provided on-going funding to the project, and our support for Gaelic broadcasting has transformed the broadcasting landscape in Scotland and encouraged a minority community to have a significant impact on Scottish cultural life.

We also recognise the economic and social benefits that Gaelic brings to all of Scotland. That is no more evident than in the Royal National Mòd, which was debated in the chamber only a couple of weeks ago. The annual Gaelic cultural festival is open to Gaelic and non-Gaelic speakers alike, and is worth on average around £2 million to the local area that hosts the 10-day event. Surely, we can all be proud of that.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I certainly recognise the economic benefit of Gaelic and Scots, and the Mòd is a great example of that. However, does the cabinet secretary also recognise the reliance of the Gaelic community on a functioning economy in its heartlands, and what will the Government do to deal with that issue in order to make sure that Gaelic can survive and thrive?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** That area is mentioned in the Labour amendment, which the Government is happy to support at decision time—I should say, for the avoidance of doubt, that we are also happy to support the Conservative amendment.

The important issue that Michael Marra raises is exactly why Kate Forbes set up a working group to consider the wider aspects across the Scottish Government that impact on the use of Gaelic and Gaelic communities. That working group is completing its final report, which will be published in due course, and we can look at the recommendations that come from it.

We are all aware that the traditional Gaelic-speaking areas are under pressure from many outside factors. Those communities must be given a level of support to help them thrive, which is why the Scottish Government has provided around

£500,000 over the past two years to build on the network of Gaelic development officers who work across Scotland. For the language to progress further, we need to build on the important initiatives that are in place and support the community of speakers and learners wherever they are and whoever they may be.

We now have the opportunity to reflect on how the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 have operated in practice. The Scottish Government's consultation paper covers a wide-ranging set of issues that relate to Gaelic and Scots, and includes four key commitments. They are:

"to establish a new strategic approach to GME, to explore the creation of a Gàidhealtachd, to review the structure and functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig (BnG), and to take action on the Scots language."

With the Scottish Government's commitments and the work that will follow from the consultation, there is another opportunity to build on the good progress that has been made and strengthen Gaelic and Scots in Scotland by increasing the numbers of people who use those languages. The consultation exercise and the views received will be an important element in making further progress, and, where primary legislation is needed, we plan to introduce a Scottish languages bill to Parliament. That will enable progress to be made.

In the consultation exercise, we are seeking contributions from across all relevant communities. The views that we receive will assist in shaping the Gaelic language plans and our plans for Scots and Gaelic in the future.

As I have previously mentioned, our task is to strengthen the confidence of speakers and learners, to encourage the use of those languages, and to create opportunities for their use across the public sector, the private sector and our communities. Our consultation exercise is an important step on that journey. My officials have engaged with local communities and interest groups throughout the country both virtually and in person, which is important. We have had a good response so far to the consultation, with a wide range of views, but I encourage all those with an interest to respond before the consultation closes, on 17 November.

This debate plays an important part in that consultation. As I said in my introduction, we have often had very informative and constructive debates when we have discussed Gaelic and Scots in the Parliament. I certainly hope that this debate will be another example of that and that the Government will take it exceptionally seriously as we move to analyse the consultation results and move forward with our progress for Gaelic and

Scots. I am sure that we can provide support for that across the Parliament.

I move,

That the Scottish Government recognises the value of Gaelic and Scots and welcomes efforts of public bodies, stakeholders and the communities in supporting their growth and development; welcomes the progress that has been made in recent years with support for Gaelic in community initiatives, guidance and legislation, national structures and a wide range of projects and educational resources; further welcomes Scottish Government commitments to build on this progress, including the introduction of a Scottish Languages Bill in this parliamentary session, the establishment of a new strategic approach to Gaelic Medium Education, the development of a Gàidhealtachd, and reviewing the structure and functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and calls on all MSPs to promote the Scottish Government's ongoing consultation on these commitments, to encourage people across Scotland to play their part in supporting a vibrant future for Gaelic and Scots.

14:46

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** As ever, the Scottish Conservatives welcome the opportunity to take part in a debate on Scotland's languages—on Gaelic and Scots. After all, we are Conservatives: we believe in conserving things, particularly our heritage. On a personal level, as someone who strongly supports the need to protect, preserve and promote all Scotland's languages, I take a keen interest in the issue, especially when it comes to Gaelic.

I thank the cabinet secretary for the consensual approach that is being taken today. She was right to acknowledge the cross-party support. We will support the Government's motion and Labour's amendment.

In order for all of Scotland's minority languages to survive and grow, the Parliament must continue to be united in its endeavour to deliver on the promises that we make. That is especially true in the case of Gaelic, which faces many existential threats that I will return to later. That will form the predominant part of my speech.

The Scots language is crucially important, too. It is not in the same perilous position that Gaelic is in, given its many variations, as spoken by more than 1.5 million people across Scotland, but we must not rest on our laurels there either. We have to ensure that the proposed Scottish languages bill addresses the threats to Gaelic and that we learn from past mistakes so that Scots, too, remains prevalent.

Scots is, of course, made up of various regional languages, including Border Scots and Doric, to name but two. I cannot help but mention my former colleague Peter Chapman, who was a champion of Doric in the chamber. Those languages have evolved over time. In many cases,

people merge Scots with Gaelic. Creative Scotland has supported various bodies, including the Scots Language Centre and other cultural organisations that rightly promote Scots as part of their work, and it has supported the Dictionaries of the Scots Language.

I turn to Gaelic. It is right to begin by acknowledging the many good things that are happening, especially in the media and the arts—notably the on-going success of Fèisean nan Gàidheal and the work of MG Alba, which has already been mentioned. It is also particularly positive that Gaelic has been gaining an ever-higher status in the academic community in recent years, with the University of the Highlands and Islands playing a leading role. Researchers are active on campus and in many Gaelic-speaking communities. We even see technology playing a part. The Gaelic algorithmic research group at the University of Edinburgh has been developing an automatic speech recognition system for Gaelic that can automatically transcribe Gaelic speech into writing. That is particularly helpful for Gaelic speakers who struggle with dyslexia, for instance.

I should also mention the 1.4 million people who subscribe to learn Gaelic on the Duolingo app. Around 80 per cent of them are based in Scotland.

Those are all good news stories to celebrate.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Donald Cameron mentioned Duolingo. There isnae a Duolingo fur Scots. Would he encourage a Duolingo being created to help folk speak Scots better?

**Donald Cameron:** I would absolutely support that. I regret that my technical ability for such an endeavour is fairly limited, but I accept what Emma Harper said.

Those are all good news stories to celebrate, but I feel that, although we come to the chamber to debate Gaelic again and again, very little changes. We have had many debates in which lots of warm words have—rightly—been spoken, but precious little action has happened. There should be no doubt that Gaelic is in crisis and that we are running out of time. It will die out if we do not do more.

Back in 2018, UHI published its long-awaited report “The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community”. Its findings were sobering and included the finding that the social use and transmission of Gaelic was at the point of collapse in the language’s traditional heartlands. According to the researchers, only 11,000 habitual speakers of Gaelic were left.

Even more worrying was the finding that there is

“general indifference among the young regarding the place of Gaelic in their lives”.

In his introduction to “An Tuil”—the magisterial collection of Gaelic poetry—the editor, Ronald Black, noted the Gaelic revival in the final quarter of the previous century, but he said:

“that revival took place in education, the mass media, and various forms of prose—not in its use as a community language, and not in poetry.”

“An Tuil” was published in 1999, which is the same year as the Scottish Parliament was reconvened. I have no doubt that hopes were high that, under devolution, a revival would gather pace. The fatal flaw was that the revival was not taking place in the Gàidhealtachd and was not sufficiently rooted among young people. The challenge remains and, if anything, it is more daunting than it was two decades ago.

Many members across the chamber feel a strong sense of duty to ensure the survival and growth of Gaelic, but it is one thing to will on the language and quite another to have pragmatic solutions to achieve that. First and foremost, we require a more subtle approach than simply investing money in the hope that a mere injection of funds alone will solve the problem. Preserving a language and, by extension, a culture does not work in that way.

In part, that is also the danger of passing more legislation. We will engage with the Government to ensure that the proposed bill has the best chance of delivering real and lasting change but, on its own, the bill will not save the language—that must come through community engagement in the wider Gàidhealtachd.

It is right to depoliticise the debate around Gaelic and Scots and challenge those who try to politicise it. In 2018, I wrote that debates about Gaelic, especially online, too often descend into proxy battles over completely unrelated issues. The constitution is a particular culprit, especially on social media. I said that Gaelic is frequently appropriated as a quasi-nationalist cause on the one hand or attacked by unionist ultras on the other. I said that we all needed to tone down the rhetoric, and that remains my view. Gaelic is a language and not a political football.

Like Scots, Gaelic is one of our national languages. Gaelic is quintessentially part of our country. The words of the Highland Land League and the *West Highland Free Press* are “An tìr, an cànan sna daoine”—the land, the language, the people. All are intertwined. Just as everyone in Scotland can lay claim to Scottish nationhood and just as everyone in Scotland can lay claim to our national heritage, so can everyone in Scotland lay claim to Gaelic and Scots—they have iconic status as national languages and they belong to us all.

The celebration of both languages provides clues to Scottish identity and the vast concurrence

of distinct national and regional identities in Scotland and the United Kingdom. Let us not reduce this important debate to one about whether there should be bilingual road signs or Gaelic words on police cars—that is a diversion from the debate’s urgency.

It is a good thing that public sector organisations across Scotland have Gaelic language policies embedded in their structures and their output, but we must also recognise that a top-down approach will not necessarily work. Ultimately, it will be communities that determine whether Gaelic remains a living and dynamic language, which means engaging younger generations as well as investing in campaigns that are aimed at reviving Gaelic at its grass roots and among the people who are speaking or learning it.

With that in mind, I agree with the Government’s motion that there should be a review of the structure and functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig

The Conservatives have a very positive relationship with the Bòrd and its leadership, and I support its work to promote Gaelic. However, that view is not universally shared by the constituents whom I have met in recent years. An on-going review not only to maintain the positive work that the Bòrd does, but to identify areas of improvement is right and proper.

There is also an urgent need to improve access to Gaelic in our schools, and that is the subject of our amendment. Members might be aware of a report that was recently presented to the Scottish Government by Dr Michael Foxley and Professor Bruce Robertson, both of whom are prominent and respected individuals in the Highland firmament. The report focused on the pressing need to address the shortage of Gaelic-medium education teachers to meet the increasing demand across Scotland.

It goes without saying that GME has been a success story—the report acknowledges that and notes its particular success in early years and primary education. In addition, it highlights the stark challenges that exist for GME at present and in the future: the on-going unfilled teacher vacancies; the lack of cover for absent teachers, with no GME supply teacher availability; and the inability of local authorities to provide a meaningful GME curriculum in secondary schools.

The report states that new problems that might arise could include, as a result of the new national contract, a reduction to 21 hours a week of class contact. However, even providing that would require an increase of at least 7 per cent in GME teacher numbers.

The most striking aspect of the report is that it estimates that a minimum of 420 primary teachers and 228 secondary teachers will be needed

nationally over the next five years to meet GME demand. That is a significant challenge, but we must achieve it if we are to grow the number of Gaelic speakers.

The report concludes with eight recommendations. I hope that the Scottish Government adopts all the recommendations, but I actively encourage it to adopt one in particular: the recommendation to set up a task force to oversee a GME workforce planning project that would report in the next six months. I urge—I plead with—the cabinet secretary to set that up, and to take cognisance of the report’s other recommendations.

I have spoken at length about the challenges that Gaelic is facing. That is in large part because it continues to face uncertainty, especially in the region that I represent. It is the language of my forefathers, and one about which I feel passionate. It is crucial that we do everything that we can to support Gaelic and Scots. We need to identify and remedy the challenges that Gaelic is facing.

We can do so much, but there is only so much that Government can do, and we must recognise that communities are key to the future of Gaelic and Scots. That means ensuring that our schools can meet increasing demand; protecting cultural investment; supporting the fantastic organisations, such as an Comunn na Gàidhlig, as well as the Fèis movement and the Mòd; and ensuring that Government and its agencies proactively engage with the community. I firmly believe that we can do all that and more to secure a future for all Scotland’s languages.

I move amendment S6M-06763.1, to insert at end:

“; acknowledges that challenges exist in the promotion of Gaelic, in particular, the difficulties facing local authorities in filling Gaelic Medium Education teacher vacancies at primary and secondary level, with a consequential impact on subject choice in schools, and urges MSPs to unite collectively to address these issues so that all of Scotland’s languages can flourish.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Thank you, Mr Cameron. I call Michael Marra to speak to and move amendment S6M-06763.2. You have around nine minutes, Mr Marra

14:57

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Scottish Labour supports all Scotland’s languages. I, too, will add a personal note. Scots has played a significant part in my upbringing and the culture of my family, so I felt quite well qualified to translate the cabinet secretary’s speech for my Geordie Labour brethren, sitting to my right.

I also associate the concern of Scottish Labour with Stephen Kerr’s point about the drop in



modern language teaching in our schools. A huge drop in German, French and Spanish has been reported this year, with an 18 per cent drop in modern language teachers. When we reflect on the broad applicability and use of languages, and the skills that come from learning languages, we should consider the matter in the round.

My speech today will focus mainly on Gaelic, given the urgency of the issues that surround it. We must recognise that, over the past 40 years, Gaelic has had the support of all political parties; it is very important that the situation stays that way.

The biggest channel of growth for Gaelic-medium education used to be through the former regional councils, such as Strathclyde and Lothian, in the 1980s and the 1990s. Labour initiated the process that led to BBC Alba, and signed up to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and the responsibilities that that brought with it. Of course, the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 went through Holyrood under a Labour-led Administration.

Beyond the communities that speak the language daily, the importance of Gaelic to our Scottish culture is immeasurable, whether in music, literature or the arts more broadly. Writers such as Iain Crichton Smith and Sorley MacLean are staples in the canon of Scottish literature. The Royal National Mòd and Celtic Connections highlight to us non-Gaels the power of music that comes from Gaelic communities. It is central to what our country was and vital to what we still are, but it is at great risk when we consider what we might become.

The urgent concern, now, is that much of the impetus that we have seen in the past to support the language has been lost. In a recent paper, Malcolm Maclean, who is a former director of the national Gaelic arts agency, asked:

“How did we get here? How has the success of Gaelic development strategy in the 1990s in terms of education, the media, the arts and the economy become a 21st century crisis in Gaelic’s Hebridean heartlands? Have the government agencies responsible for Gaelic culture been oblivious to the deteriorating situation on the islands or have they known but opted for a state of denial?”

Those are the questions that the debate must address, rather than retreating into smug self-congratulation.

Anybody who denies that the language is at a critical point even in the places that are regarded as heartlands is deluding themselves. Do not take my word for it. The major piece of research entitled “The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community”, which was published last year, spelled out the unavoidable evidence that

“the Gaelic speaking community is no longer sustainable under current circumstances and policy provision”.

It is really that report that we should be debating today, rather than a self-congratulatory and largely delusional motion—although we will vote for it.

Every minority language needs a home, but the real danger is that, within a couple of decades, there will be no community left in which Gaelic is the language of the majority, or of even a substantial minority of the population. That need not be the outcome, but if it is to be avoided there must be far greater focus on the Gaelic-speaking areas—focus that goes beyond the classroom by supporting use of Gaelic in the community and in as many contexts as possible. That is where the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig needs to be concentrated with great urgency and prioritisation of resources.

The consultation paper talks about defining Gàidhealtachd areas in order to give them support. However, the last thing that Gaelic needs is a long drawn-out bureaucratic exercise around definitions. It is not difficult to identify the areas in which there is still a significant Gaelic-speaking population. They urgently need development workers and support for local initiatives. Whether they need to be formally defined as Gàidhealtachd areas is a secondary question that should not delay action by a single day.

It is impossible to separate language decline from wider issues of depopulation and its causes. Without people, there is no language, and the fact that the population continues to decline in Gaelic communities without any effective interventions from the Scottish Government is critical to the debate. We have to consider social infrastructure and the declining resilience of Gaelic communities that are so much more exposed to the economic incompetence of this Government than they would have been a generation ago.

Take, for example, the crisis in teaching of Gaelic in schools that is due to a shortage of new teachers. A recent report suggests that, over the next five years, a minimum of 225 teachers will be needed to meet demand, but—alarmingly—only 25 qualified in the whole of this year. The scale of the crisis cannot be overstated.

It is not only education that needs to be tackled; the wider economic issues that Gaelic-speaking communities face need to be tackled, too. In the words of the Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar,

“The success of the economy of the Western Isles is dependent on a modern, efficient air and sea transport network”,

which we discuss regularly in the chamber. The council made those remarks in the context of two new ferries being delayed by nearly five years and the older vessels in the CalMac Ferries fleet frequently breaking down. The Harris transport forum has warned the Government that, across

the Western Isles, businesses are at the “point of extinction.” That represents a grotesque failure that lies only at the Government’s door. The fractures in the network of sea transport to the islands are leaving food shelves bare and people unable to reach the islands.

Fifteen years ago, island life and economies were less reliant on those connections. There have been local ideas to address the issue, including the Outer Hebrides food growing strategy, which is the kind of project that needs support from ministers.

The list of failures in policy for Gaelic-speaking communities goes on: a breakdown ofcrofting regulation, delays in extending reliable broadband provision, and housing policies—or the lack of them—that push families out of the villages. Those are all contributors to the decline of communities in which Gaelic is still strongest.

The language does not exist in isolation. Just today, the director of the University of the Highlands and Islands language sciences institute has warned us all that

“Gaelic language promotion in Scotland has been overly concerned with issues of the symbolic status of the language to the detriment of protecting existing communities of speakers, particularly in island communities.”

We need to hear from the cabinet secretary for education what actions are being taken to address the shortfall in Gaelic-medium teachers. We also need to know why there is no job-dispersal strategy to bring well-paid public sector jobs that involve use of Gaelic into communities where the language is spoken. Those are not issues that need to wait for legislation, but practical action needs to be taken now. In just a few years’ time, it will be too late.

Labour has nothing but good will towards the Scots languages that are spoken in varying forms around the country, and we will look closely at whatever proposals the Government makes. However, the needs of those languages are different from the needs of Gaelic, and we should not fall into the trap of contrived equivalence. Both languages should be respected on their own merits.

I want to end my contribution with a reflection from one of the Gaelic language’s most notable writers and poets. Iain Crichton Smith, the great Lewis poet, wrote in Gaelic—which, like the cabinet secretary, I will not dishonour—

“this is my true language, the one that suits this land, the one that makes local conversation.”

Smith’s words tell us that the Gaelic language is Gaelic life—not a symbol to be promoted, but a culture to be saved. The reality now is that more and more people can either no longer afford that

life or find that an island life that works for them has been stolen. With only self-congratulation, in total opposition to what is actually happening in homes and communities, we stand precariously at the beginning of the end of something very precious.

I move amendment S6M-06763.2, to insert at end:

“; highlights the importance of protecting Gaelic and halting its decline in its heartlands in recent decades, by ensuring the increase of Gaelic speakers and protecting current Gaelic speaking communities by providing good quality jobs and housing to arrest depopulation in these areas, and by addressing current issues around regional economic inequality, connectivity and transport infrastructure as a matter of urgency; recognises the diversity of learners and speakers of Gaelic and Scots, and believes that more must be done to bring the promotion of these languages closer to communities across Scotland, and understands that cultural and social infrastructure across the country plays a key role in promoting local histories and languages that must be protected and enhanced.”

15:06

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Although I do not speak Gaelic, I value the language and what it brings to our character, culture, heritage and economy, and that is why I speak in support of it today. The language has been under pressure over centuries on legal, social, educational and economic fronts. On the legal front, often, the Government of the day sought to quell the language as a means of controlling the population. On the economic front, people needed to speak English in order to get a job, especially if they moved. On the education front, it was expected that people would speak English, not Gaelic, in school. On the social front, as people became more mobile, English became the dominant language in social circles.

Therefore, the language was almost underground, because it was considered inferior by the Government and by society. Thank goodness that that has changed, not just for the Gaels but for Scotland as a whole. It is no longer suppressed by the state; it is officially recognised and supported. There is an economic value in the language because people need it for jobs, and it attracts tourism through music and culture. We see that with the Royal National Mòd and with MG Alba, which generates gross value added of £17.2 million. The Glasgow Gaelic economy is apparently worth £21 million and 700 jobs.

Between 2018 and 2021, there was a 72 per cent increase in the number of VisitScotland users visiting Gaelic-related content. Gaelic-medium schools are spreading across the country, and they are so valued by parents, guardians and pupils alike that there is high demand for them. Governments and political parties of all colours are

fully in support, as we have heard today. However, there is still a crisis—a massive crisis—and it is in social circles that the language suffers. The number of people who speak Gaelic at home, in the shop or in the pub is not high and is declining. Whether that is about confidence or habit, its use is not an everyday occurrence. Michael Marra was absolutely bang on when he spoke about the economic and housing issues that are directly related to the wellbeing of the language.

What do we do? I accept Donald Cameron's point that there must be grass-roots growth rather than a top-down instruction to people to speak the language. However, the Government must take action—it must take a lead and a role—in order to encourage community action and growth. That is why I support some of the proposals in the consultation document with regard to the Gàidhealtachd—a designated area where there is a higher proportion of Gaelic speakers. That cannot just be a bureaucratic process, but I am afraid that the discussion in the consultation document is, so far, just that. Firm but sensitive action is needed, and I would target the area for now. I know that there is a discussion about having the whole of Scotland as a Gàidhealtachd, but we need to focus on the areas where Gaelic will be more naturally spoken in the home. That is where I would focus, to make sure that we target our efforts and that those efforts are not spread too thinly.

There may also be different solutions for different parts of the country. Let us start with the strongest area and build from there. Through local planning and decision making in the Highlands and Islands, we could implement policies such as whether all schools should provide Gaelic-medium education and whether the public sector organisations should be bilingual. It is quite a shift, but with care and good planning it could be the shift that we need to ensure that community use of Gaelic is embedded in daily life.

I support the further advancement of Gaelic-medium education, but, as opportunities in the central belt and other parts of Scotland increase for Gaelic-medium teachers, we need to make sure that schools, especially in the islands, are able to attract those teachers, too. It would be tragic if the very areas that have kept the language alive through the dark decades lost out because it is now flourishing everywhere else. I would want to explore extending the rights of parents to request early years and secondary Gaelic-medium education provision. I support the review of the functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and a greater and sharper focus on plans, including education authority workforce plans, targets, functions and measuring progress.

I support the enhancement of Scots. It is an important part of our culture and certainly my heritage, too. I was reading the *Official Report* of the passing of the 2005 act and was struck by the powerful contribution from a Conservative, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. He was explaining the role of his ancestor, Selkirk of Red River, who chartered ships following Culloden to transfer 1,000 struggling Gaelic-speaking Highlanders from Skye and Raasay to Prince Edward Island in Canada. He concluded:

“We have no power to amend the wrongdoings of bygone centuries that led to emigration. We do not need to dwell ‘On the Other Side of Sorrow’ but we can at the very least give strong support and encouragement to those who speak our country’s largest indigenous language after English.”—[*Official Report*, 21 April 2005; c 16345.]

Much progress has been made. There has been an improvement in policy over the 17 years following the 2005 act, but we should acknowledge that we should never settle and that there is a crisis, which is why we need a Scottish languages bill, combined with renewed support and encouragement, which should be a priority for this Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate, with speeches of around six minutes. I would advise that, at the present time, there is some time in hand, should members wish to take and/or receive interventions.

15:13

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** As the co-convenor o the Scots leid cross-pairty group wi ma colleague Jackie Dunbar MSP, I am awfie chuffed tae speik and I will focus my contribution on Scots.

I want tae see legislation endorsin the Scots leid and I threap that we need an act fur the Scots leid.

The Scots leid is a michtie important pairt o Scotland’s cultural heirship, kythin in sang, poems and leeterature, and in ilkaday yaise in wir communities forby.

The 2011 census comprehendit a question anent the Scots leid fur the first time. Yin and a hauf million folk reportit that they could speik Scots and 1.9 million cumulatively reportit that they could speik, read, scribe or unnerstaun Scots. I look forrit tae the results o the maist recent census—I jalouse that these nummers will be mair—fur tae see aw the nummers o oor folk wha speik, read, scribe and unnerstaun Scots. Scots isnae jist a collection o regional dialects. There is a muckle history o this now evolvin leid.

Here is a wee quote fae Scots scriever, television presenter and broadcaister, Alistair Heather:

“The Scots have kent that they’ve had their ain leid fur the last six hunner year. It’s only in the last 40 that they’ve forgotten it.”

The activists fur Scots will mak siccar that wir wirts will be shared in aa ways—as I said, through sangs, poems and essays, on telly, radio and social media, and across the internet in monie forms.

Here in Scotland, we have soonds in place names and people’s names that dinnae match the spellings: Cullean castle is spelt Culzean; Mingies is spelt Menzies; Kirkgounyon—a village near Dalbeattie—is spelt Kirkgunzeon; and Dee-el is spelt Dalziel. Those names are all currently misspelled because they contain the letter yogh, which is the 27th letter o the Scots alphabet. It has been lost; it is tint. The yogh was replaced by Z or Y in early printers. At some point in the future, we should correct that muckle mistake and bring back the letter yogh.

As we have heard, Scots is our hame language. It is one of the three languages in use in Scotland the day. Words in Scots by the likes o Robert Burns, Walter Scott and Hugh MacDiarmid are scrievit on the foonds o the walls—the foundations o this buildin. Scots words are literally haudin up oor national Parliament.

The Scots Language Centre, Hands up for Trad, the Scots language awards, Wee Windaes, Oor Vyce, Scots Hoose and ambassadors sic as Lennie Pennie, Emma Grae, Billy Kay, my pal Susi Briggs fae Galloway—she is a braw storyteller—and sic a few mair help tae widen access tae Scots. Aa these folk, and mair, are daein fantastic work and they need supportit.

In session 4 o wir Parliament, Rob Gibson MSP convened the Scots leid cross-party group, which created the statement o principles tae advance Scots. As the statement o principles says, naebodie should be penalised or pitten doon fur speikin Scots. There are 13 statements o principle in Rob’s wee red book. Some o them are bein addressed the noo, but some havenae been yet.

Nummer 5 in the statement o principles shows that the Scots leid must receive mair fundin and investment. Currently, the Scottish Government provides £480,000 in funding fur the Scots leid each year. That compares wi £29.6 million spent on Gaelic. In nae way am I sayin that Gaelic isnae important. It absolutely is. Across Scotland, we hae monie historic ties tae Gaelic, includin place names in Dumfries and Galloway, where I am fae. However, my ask of the cabinet secretary is to increase funding fur the Scots leid tae secure its future. I hope that that can be addressed in the legislation.

The consultation that has been referred tae by monie folk, including the cabinet secretary the

day—I encourage folk tae hae their say on that; ye have until midnight on 17 November—provides an exciting opportunity tae create a sustainable future fur Scots.

We aa need tae enhance the work of the Scots organisations, we need tae bolster the yaise o Scots in education and we need tae invest in Scots to mak siccar its future. Pursuin an act o the Scots leid is key tae deliverin the recognition that activists have been workin on fur monie a year. The Scots leid activists are daein a phenomenal job, and an act and funding support are crucial tae deliverin Scots education and awareness. As the auld Scots sayin goes, tak tent or it’s tint—take care or it’s lost.

I ask the cabinet secretary to comment on whether a Bòrd na Gàidhlig equivalent fur the Scots leid is needed, or can sicklike existing established bodies as the Scots Language Centre be vehicles to continue to deliver, as they are currently doing?

Again, I welcome the debate and look forrit tae ilka ither contribution.

15:19

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am very pleased to contribute to this debate on the future of Scotland’s two indigenous languages. Having grown up in the Highlands, my cultural background was always in Gaelic rather than Scots. Indeed, it was always famously said that people in Inverness spoke the finest English that could be found anywhere. That was deemed to be the case because it was originally a town of Gaelic speakers who learned pure English directly. There was no great tradition of the Scots language, as was the case in many parts of the lowlands.

My knowledge of Scots came from school and from reading the poems of Robert Burns and particularly the novels of Walter Scott, as mentioned by Emma Harper. It is, in my view, a great pity that Scott’s prose style is deemed too flowery for modern tastes, as he is the greatest Scottish author of all time. Language aside, he is a superlative storyteller and novels such as “Ivanhoe”, “Rob Roy” and “The Fair Maid of Perth” have tremendous plots and great believable characters who leap from the page and are all rooted in real history, mostly of Scotland, but of England too, in the case of “Ivanhoe”.

Although Scott’s novels are written in English, many of his characters speak Scots, including Wandering Willie in “Redgauntlet”, whose tale of Steenie Stevenson’s encounter with the devil must be the finest, and certainly the most chilling, Scottish short story ever written.

**Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Murdo Fraser:** Of course, for an encounter with the devil.

**Alasdair Allan:** If you name him, he appears.

I agree with much of what the member says. Given the importance of Walter Scott in Scottish literature, which he rightly mentions, would the member agree that it should be the right of every child who goes to school in Scotland to learn about Scottish literature and that that should not merely be left to the enthusiasm of individual teachers?

**Murdo Fraser:** Mr Allan makes a very interesting point that would probably require a longer debate. I think that we should be very careful about prescribing exactly what is taught in our classrooms and that individual headteachers should have the right to make those choices, rather than there being a set curriculum that every pupil must follow. Although I share the member's ambition for Scottish pupils to read the work of Scottish writers, I would be nervous about too much top-down prescription. Perhaps we can debate that on another occasion.

I was very pleased to lead a members' debate just three weeks ago celebrating the success of the Royal National Mòd in Perth and paying tribute to An Comunn Gàidhealach not only for organising the Mòd and making it such a success every year but for all the work that it does in promoting the Gaelic language. We should also recognise the work that Bòrd na Gàidhlig does to support the language.

It is certainly true that there is strong cross-party support for Gaelic, as we have already heard. It was back in the 1990s that the then Conservative Government provided the financial support to create the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee, which led to the launch of BBC Alba. Since then, successive Scottish Governments—the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition and then the Scottish National Party Government here—have continued with that tradition, which is very much to be welcomed. Gaelic belongs to us all.

The most recent census data that we have on Gaelic comes from 2011 and shows that, at that point, just over 87,000 people had some Gaelic language skills. We still await the results of this year's census, but I fear that the numbers will show a drop since then. The news is not all bad, with the recent Scottish social attitudes survey showing that the number of Scots who can speak some Gaelic has doubled in the past decade, but I think that Donald Cameron is correct overall when he says that Gaelic is in crisis and that we will see some very worrying statistics when the census comes out.

There has been growth in Gaelic-medium education, which is popular even with parents who have no Gaelic background themselves. That is a success story that we should celebrate, but it is not unqualified. I know of parents in different parts of Scotland who would very much welcome the opportunity of Gaelic-medium education, but find that it is not currently available. I would like the Scottish Government to do more to encourage local authorities that do not currently provide GME where there is a demand for it to ensure that it is available. I have, for example, heard from parents in Dundee that they would welcome Gaelic-medium education in that city, where there is currently no provision. That is an issue that the cabinet secretary could address in her closing remarks.

As Donald Cameron and Michael Marra highlighted, we also have serious issues with the recruitment of Gaelic-medium teachers. A study last month by Dr Michael Foxley and Professor Bruce Robertson found that we will need 225 teachers over the next five years, but that only 25 qualified this year. In their view, that is a crisis.

We need to look at how attractive teaching is as a profession and how we might attract more people with Gaelic language skills into it. Having a demand for Gaelic-medium education among parents and pupils is one thing, but it will be a tragedy if Gaelic continues to decline because we cannot meet that demand. I seriously hope that that can be addressed.

The fact that young people are learning Gaelic and being educated through the Gaelic medium provides great hope for the future, but that will be of lasting value only if there are opportunities for them to use the language in the rest of their lives—at home, in education and in the workplace. Gaelic should not become an academic museum piece like Latin or ancient Greek. It needs to be a language that is alive and spoken daily.

People sometimes ask why we should waste money on Gaelic if it is a dying language. What is the point of putting taxpayers' money into keeping it alive? My answer is very simple. It is that Gaelic is part of the richness and diversity of our culture as a country. Although it might make life easier for some, I would not want to live in a world where we all spoke the same language, ate the same food, wore the same clothes and held the same views. What makes the world such an intriguing and interesting place is that we have such a diversity of cultures, languages and opinions.

By investing in and supporting Gaelic—and, for that matter, Scots—we can play a small part in keeping the tapestry of human life as colourful as possible instead of it simply being monochrome. I hope that that ambition unites all of us in the chamber, and on that basis I am very happy to

support the Government motion and my colleague Donald Cameron's amendment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** In calling Dr Allan, I point out that, as I understand it, he will make his contribution in Gaelic. Should members wish to avail themselves of the simultaneous translation, they should put their headphones on and turn to channel 1.

15:26

**Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Latha de na làithean seasaidh mi suas anns an t-seòmar seo agus bruidhnidh mi anns a' Ghàidhlig mu sheirbheisean slàinte, no an Ucràin.

Leis an fhìrinn innse, dh'fheuch mi a leithid a dhèanamh turas no dhà mar-thà, aig àm nan ceistean anns a' Phàrlamaid. Às dèidh làimh, bha daoine an-còmhnaidh a' faighneachd ceistean dhiom mar "Carson a bha thu a' bruidhinn anns a' Ghàidhlig? Cha robh sinn a' bruidhinn mu chuspair na Gàidhlig an-diugh."

Gu dearbh, bidh cuid a dhaoine anns na meadhanan fhathast a' faighneachd iomadach seòrsa ceist mun Ghàidhlig nach biodh iad idir a' faighneachd mun Bheurla.

Chan eil duine sam bith a' faighneachd dè chosg na seirbheisean poblach ann an Alba a th' air an toirt seachad tro mheadhann na Beurla: sgoiltean Beurla, seirbheisean slàinte anns a' Bheurla, soidhnichean-rathaid anns a' Bheurla.

Agus dìreach a dhèanamh cinnteach nach eil mì-thuigse sam bith ann, chan eil mi a' gearan gu bheil na seirbheisean sin ann, anns a' Bheurla.

Ach, agus seo am puing agam, tha na ceistean sin air an cumail gu sònraichte airson seirbheisean den t-seòrsa sin nuair a tha iad anns a' Ghàidhlig.

Ach, tha a' mhòr chuid—cho faisg air ceud sa cheud is nach eil e a' dèanamh diofar mòr statistigeach—de na seirbheisean poblach ann an Alba air an toirt seachad anns a' Bheurla. Eadhan anns na h-eileanan bidh a' mhòr-chuid de na seirbheisean seo tro mheadhann na Beurla.

Tha sinn uile an-còmhnaidh ag aontachadh air rud no dhà a tha cudromach mun Ghàidhlig—agus tha e math gu bheil sinn aonaichte, mar a bha a h-uile duine an-diugh ag ràdh. 'S e gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig prìseal, no gu bheil i na pàirt chudromach nar cultur agus ceòl agus eachdraidh.

Ach 's e rudeigin eile a th' anns a' Ghàidhlig cuideachd. 'S e cànan a th' innte.

Chan eil cànan sam bith a' fuireach ann an saoghal sàmhach teoretigeach, àitigean eile. Bidh cànan air a bhruidhinn, air a chluinntinn agus air fhacinn. Bidh daoine ga chleachdadh—eadhan nuair a bhios daoine eile ann, faisg air làimh, bho

àm gu àm, aig nach eil an cànan sin. Sin an suidheachadh àbhaisteach le iomadach cànan eile ann ann an iomadach dùthaich eile. 'S e sin, mar a chanas iad, am mainstream.

Mar sin, tha mi'n dòchas gum bi am bile seo a' dèanamh chothroman ùra gus am bi a' Ghàidhlig air a chluinntinn agus air a cleachdadh nas trice: gus am bi a' Ghàidhlig anns a' mhainstream sin.

Agus, gun rugamaid nas fhaisge air suidheachadh àbhaisteach, far am biodh barrachd anns an roinn phoblaich agus an roinn phrìobhaidich a' toirt seachad seirbheisean tro mheadhann na Gàidhlig, ann an iomadach seòrsa coimhearsneachd far a bheil iartas ann an cànan a tha mi a' bruidhinn an-dràsda a chleachdadh no ionnsachadh.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

One of these days, I will stand up in the chamber and speak in Gaelic about the health service or Ukraine. To tell the truth, I have tried to do something along those lines a couple of times in parliamentary question times, but afterwards people have immediately asked me questions like, "Why did you speak in Gaelic? We weren't speaking about the subject of Gaelic today." Indeed, some still ask various questions about Gaelic that they would never think of asking about English.

Nobody asks what the public services that are delivered through the medium of English cost in Scotland. English-medium schools have services in English, and we have English road signs. Before that point is seized on, let me say that I make no complaint about such services being provided in English. However, those questions are reserved especially for such services when they are delivered in Gaelic, even though the majority of services—as close to 100 per cent as makes no statistical difference—are delivered in English. Even in the islands, the majority of public services are delivered through English.

We all regularly agree about Gaelic, which is good. As everyone has said, Gaelic is precious and it is an important part of our culture, our music and our history. No language dwells in some silent, theoretical place somewhere else. Our language is spoken, heard and seen. People will use it even if there sometimes happen to be others nearby who may not know the language. That is a normal situation with many other languages in many other countries. It is the mainstream, as people say.

I hope that the proposed bill will create new opportunities so that Gaelic will be heard and used more frequently and will be in the mainstream, and that we might reach a more normal situation where more parts of the public and private sectors provide services in Gaelic to the many types of

community in which the demand exists to speak or to learn the language that I am speaking now.

*The member continued in Scots:*

At ae time, awbodie in this Pairliament spak Scots. Ah ken Ah aye roose some fowk whan Ah mind them at this place wisnae inventit oot o naethin at aw, twenty year syne, but Ah dinnae mean tae fash them.

O coorse, speikin Scots in here, thir days, can be an unchance business. Lookin at evidence frae the last wee whilie, Ah doot whit Ah am daein richt noo means that Ah will be trolled by aw mainner o fowk that's opeenions Ah dinnae muckle care about. At the verra least, Ah can mak ye a shortleit noo o the newspapers that will cry me ill-mainnert or donnert or waur nor thon.

There isnae time, the day, tae howk faur eneuch ben intae the national psychology tae explain aw o thon. Hooivver, jist as Ah did wi Gaelic the noo, raither nor speik about speceefic policies in the bill, Ah jalosed that maist o ma speech wid be better yaised jist ettlin at somethin else: myth-bustin.

Scots disnae really form airt nor pairt o the linguistic tradeetion o the place Ah bide noo—the Wastren Isles—but it does in the place Ah come frae: the Borders. Ah wis speikin mair or less staundard Gaelic in ma speech—like maist leids, Gaelic has sindrie spoken dialecks forby a screivit staundard; dinnae lippen on oniebody that tells ye it is jist Scots that does that—sae Ah will try tae yaise as near tae a standard Scots as exeests. Hooivver, if oo wes aw gree'd for me tae yaise Border Scots, Ah am shuir Ah cuid ableege ee. Ah wad be mair as happy tae say the nummers “ane”, “twa” and “echt” as “yin”, “twae” and “eyt”.

Twa-three meenutes isnae eneuch tae get yokit, though, tae the wark o myth-bustin aroon Scots. Ma brush aiblins seems braid eneuch tae be a besom, but lat me tak on jist the ae norie.

Tae touch on a pynt that Donald Cameron, richtly, brocht up about the media, some folk rins a Scots mile frae the Scots language, thir days, because they see it as some kin o Trojan horse—or, at the verra least, a Trojan cuddy—fur ae poleetical pynt o view. Hooivver, it isnae. Sir Walter Scott, whase name wis brocht in by the lug and the horn a wee bittie syne, wis a poleetical unionist, and John Buchan wis a Tory peer. It didnae hinner them frae scrievin in Scots—sae awbodie can keep a caum poleetical souch.

Hooivver, Ah am jist auld eneuch tae mind on seein a teacher speir a laddie at the schuil if he had duin his punishment exercise, and syne convert the sentence tae the tawse whan he got back the answer, “Aye”. Ah hope at Ah am young eneuch tae see a Scotland whaur baith Scots and

Gaelic get the places they deserve tae hae in oor schuils, oor communities and oor public life. The bill is a braw lowpin-on stane tae get us sterit doon thon road.

*The member continued in Gaelic:*

Mo bheannachd air an obair a tha an Riaghaltas a' dèanamh airson na Gàidhlig agus airson Albais anns a' bhile seo.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

I thank the Government for the work that it is doing for Gaelic and Scots in the bill. [*Applause.*]

15:32

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I am jist fair tricket tae spik in this debate e day and, like my fellow co-convener o the Scots leid cross-pairty group, Emma Harper MSP, I want tae use my time tae focus on the Doric and the Scots leid. I agree wi aathin that Emma said in her contribution.

A leid maks fowk; a common leid brings us aa thegither; a kintra's leids shape its culture. Scots, Doric and Gaelic have aa made us fa we are the day, and they hiv tae be a pairt o oor future anaa.

Like the cabinet secretary, in my education I was constantly telt tae spik e English and nae ma ain language, so I wint tae touch on attainment and education. The curriculum for excellence maks clear that e languages, dialects and literature o Scotland provide a rich resource for bairns and young fowk tae learn about Scotland's culture, identity an language. Through engaging wi a wide range o texts, they will develop an appreciation o Scotland's literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects. I wid be affa grateful if e cabinet secretary wid confirm that Doric texts will be equitable to Scots.

Thon educational principle permeates experiences and ootcomes, and it is expected that oor teachers will build upon e diversity o language represented within the communities of Scotland, valuing the languages that bairns and young fowk bring tae e skweel.

Mair than 50 per cent o fowk in Aiberdeen and the shire spik Doric or Scots, so it is important tae ensure that fowk in the region are supported tae use their ain mither tongue.

Especially for our young fowk, promotin their ain language is so important in education.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** On the very important point about our young people, which has been made in a number of speeches today, would the member like to comment on the importance of modern technologies grasping

Scots and Gaelic, so that our young people see them in a format that they are perhaps better suited to using than some of us in the chamber, including myself?

**Jackie Dunbar:** I thank the member for the question and for understanding fit I am saying. I absolutely agree. Especially wi the Doric, which is a form o Scots, it is sometimes affa difficult tae write doon fit you are trying tae say. I absolutely agree with fit you are saying.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority has confirmed that the use of Scots in education tackles the attainment gap by allowing students tae spik in their own vyce. Bilingualism has monie ither educational benefits, and promoting Scots bilingualism assists in the Government's een-plus-twa language policy goal.

Fundamentally, promoting Scots and Doric in education is about building a parity o esteem o oor language so that it is thocht o in equal terms wi ither European languages. It is about showing oor bairns and young fowk that it is okay—it is aaricht tae use their ain language. It is nae slang and it is nae inferior tae English—it is a language and its use needs to be promoted and protected.

Doric has rules and it has vocabulary, and its spickers hae a certain wey o looking at the world that gings wi onie language. If you lose onie language or lose onie aspect o a language, you lose something that is unique. Many fowk associate Doric wi humour, and richtly so, as there is a great tradition o self-aware humour richt across the north-east. However, if it is only seen through that lens, the power and status o the language is soon undermined.

As my colleague Emma Harper said, Scots, like e Doric, is often seen as a non-professional language. We need tae overcome these barriers and normalise e use o Scots Doric, nae jist in humour but in everyday life—particularly in skweels because, currently, Scots Doric is often used socially but nae professionally.

For example, if you go up tae the Broch or Peterheid, you will find sparkies fae Poland and Lithuania who hiv skweel English but fa find themselves learning e Doric. In their work life, it is fit fowk spik. In plenty waalks o life, Doric is useful and used.

We need tae see mair work gan in tae embed the language intae the curriculum and intae social life, and I speir at e cabinet secretary for a commitment on that as the legislation is taken forward.

I want to reflect on a recent poem I seen on e Facebook, written by Brian Thomson, a mannie originally fae the north-east. He wrote:

“E Doric wis used by e folks at hame, it wasna used in skweel  
If you answered a teacher in Doric tongue it didna ging doon weel  
Fin ye got hame it wis Doric again, until e skweel next day  
Sittin thinkin o the wirds, ye ken ye've nae tae say  
Fin ma bairns were growin up, e Doric wis left ahin  
I didna pass on a' e wirds, it really wis a sin  
Bit noo at last I unnerstan e wirds a hiv tae save  
E Doric words are precious, didna tak em tae yer grave  
So billies start yer screivin we wint it a passed on  
It's in oor bleed, it's history, we didnae wint it gone  
An mine an tell yer loons an quines te keep e wirds alive  
We a mun dae oor verra best tae help it te survive.”

Brian is absolutely richt and fit he writes really resonates wi me. I was telt nae tae use e Doric in skweel and it does hae an impact. Young bairns headin intae skweel fur the first time aa excited and the first thing they are telt is that they are spikkin wrang. Quite frankly, that is jist cruel and we need tae stap it. We need tae embrace their Scots and let them learn the English at their ain pace.

I want the bill to genuinely be used to normalise, support and protect Scots and Doric and I look forward to being involved as the work is taken forward.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Rhoda Grant, who joins us remotely.

15:39

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Tapadh leibh, Oifigear Riaghlaidh. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I want to focus my remarks mainly on Gaelic. I start by saying that I am slightly concerned about having a language bill that tries to cover both Gaelic and Scots in one piece of legislation. While there is a huge amount to do on Gaelic, Scots lags even further behind with regard to official recognition.

I would prefer it if the Scottish Government looked to Wales and the Welsh language as a guide as to how to proceed on Gaelic, rather than measuring progress on it against the progress that has been made on Scots, which we have heard about. That is not about putting a greater value on either language; it is simply a case of recognising that they have very different needs and ways in which they will need to be protected and promoted.

I know that there will be many people who will criticise us and ask why we are speaking about languages that have fewer and fewer speakers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could you please stop for a second, Ms Grant? Emma Harper has made a request to intervene. Are you willing to take an intervention from her?



**Rhoda Grant:** Yes.

**Emma Harper:** I understand that the consultation is looking at Scots and Gaelic but that there will not necessarily be a single revising bill. We will not even measure Gaelic and Scots, because you cannae measure them at the same time. I simply want to clarify the argument that Rhoda Grant is presenting.

**Rhoda Grant:** If Emma Harper knows more than I do about how the legislative process will proceed, I am glad to have the reassurance that both languages will be looked at separately, depending on their needs.

I know that there will be many people who will criticise us and ask why we are speaking about languages. They might ask why we are doing so during a cost of living crisis and whether it would not be better to spend money elsewhere.

I want to address that head on. First, our language holds our history and culture. The rich have museums and art galleries stuffed full of their history and culture, which have been recorded at great length. The history of the common people is held in songs, poems and stories that have been handed down through the generations, which are held in the language in which they were spoken.

Gaelic was spoken throughout most of Scotland and, indeed, into England. It has died back to the west Highlands and Islands. Sadly, the history of the lowlands that was held in Gaelic has already been lost. Let us avoid that happening to the west Highlands and Islands. In those areas, and indeed other areas of Scotland, many people depend on the language for their livelihood, whether through teaching, broadcasting or promotion. Without Gaelic, there would not be a media industry in our islands. Many of our English-medium broadcasters started their careers in Gaelic broadcasting, and that goes for many of the support staff as well. Such careers would be unknown in those parts, were it not for Gaelic.

In such areas, good careers and well-paid jobs can be hard to find, so Gaelic finds itself acting as an economic bastion against depopulation of young people. Therefore, the promotion of Gaelic is part of the solution in tackling the cost of living crisis and not a choice against which it should be measured.

There are also arguments and debates around how we protect and promote Gaelic. That is healthy. We cannot leave the protection and promotion of Gaelic solely to Bòrd na Gàidhlig; everyone has a role to play. It is also right that the work of the bòrd is scrutinised. The University of the Highlands and Islands publication "The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community" caused a stir but highlighted the need to protect Gaelic-

speaking communities in order to protect the language.

An issue that is raised with me time and again is the need for jobs and homes in the Gaelic heartlands, in order to keep our young people there and to keep Gaelic-speaking communities together. Too often, our homes go to the highest bidder. Those highest bidders are often people from parts of the country and, indeed, the world who are more affluent than our local population, and who do not speak Gaelic or feel the need to learn it. That needs to change. We need to make sure that we have a local housing market that allows local people to stay. We also need to provide them with meaningful careers.

When we welcome people into our communities, we must also encourage them to learn the language and to play their part in keeping it alive. I know that many do that, and native speakers need to encourage them. It is a strange sensation to hear someone speak in Gaelic and believe that they are local, only to discover that their accent in English is very different and reveals a very different heritage.

While we protect the vernacular community and promote Gaelic speaking there, we also need to create more new Gaelic speakers. We need education, and we need to strengthen a child's right to learn Gaelic. We need to ensure that Gaelic-medium education starts at pre-school level and follows on through the whole education system.

Last week, Jim Hunter called for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to have university status in its own right. Of course, the UHI is a university, and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig forms part of it and provides Gaelic degree courses. However, I think that Jim Hunter is looking for a university that allows students to study other academic courses through the medium of Gaelic, which is necessary for students who have spent their whole lives learning through that medium.

That is not easy. We have a shortage of Gaelic teachers, and it is a struggle to provide for the teaching of Gaelic as a language in English-medium schools. We should have Gaelic as a compulsory subject for every child in Scotland if we want to keep up with Wales and its promotion of Welsh. In order to do that, we need to increase the number of Gaelic speakers, and thereby teachers. Our ambition should not be limited by the imagination of Government. If we are to protect and grow the number of Gaelic speakers, we need to take that action. It might not be universally popular, but it is about choices. We are at a crossroads, and continuing as we are will lead to the future decline of our languages. We must take positive action to promote both Gaelic and Scots if we are not to lose them altogether.

15:46

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills for lodging the motion. I recently had the great pleasure of visiting Goodlyburn primary school in my constituency, where I was able to see at first hand Gaelic-medium education at work. The headteacher, Annemarie Sands, and the early years teacher, Christina McGregor, have an enthusiasm for what they do that is utterly infectious.

I am just a wee bittie envious of the opportunity that GME has given those kids, but I am immensely proud of the fact that the Scottish Government is pursuing it, because there is a richness to both the Scots and Gaelic languages that I think we would all be the worse off for not having. For the majority of us—as has been demonstrated today—Gaelic is probably a step too far. I once tried to teach myself the language wi a wee black book of Gaelic words and phrases. It was utterly impossible, because the language is a living, breathing thing that cannot be learned by rote. I see in the Gaels that they live in the language.

The GME programme gives children and young people the chance to live in that language as it should be used, and the bilingual skill of being proficient in both Gaelic and English will be life-changing.

**Alasdair Allan:** I do not want to take issue with that, but I assure the member that it is possible to learn Gaelic by rote—I have done it.

**Jim Fairlie:** I stand corrected, and absolutely in the member's shadow.

Starting in primary 1, the GME classes follow exactly the same curriculum as for English-language education, but most lessons are taught in Gaelic. As the children learn a particular subject, be it maths or history, they are also picking up another language. From primary 3 onwards, English is introduced so that pupils are bilingual by the time that they reach primary 7.

There is a wee bit of an issue there, in that we need to consider whether primary 1 is in fact young enough to be starting with that; I know that Goodlyburn primary is trying to introduce early years education as well. It is well known that there are many developmental benefits to kids learning Gaelic, beyond learning to speak a different code. Research shows that children who understand more than one language are able to think more flexibly and creatively and tend to demonstrate more focus in multitasking—clearly something that I have not learned. Furthermore, in later life, being bilingual offers many career opportunities, and studies show that it may also keep the brain sharper for longer in later years.

It is a great policy, and I wish that it had been more readily accessible, or even that it had been available, when I was a laddie. I sincerely hope that there will be clear pathways for the children at Goodlyburn to continue their education in Gaelic into the next stage of their life, as they move on to secondary school. I hope that the Scottish Government's commitment to support and grow Gaelic education will deliver tangible results, such as wider availability of such education for more kids in the coming years. When the kids go to secondary school, there may perhaps be value in looking at the Covid solution to teaching Gaelic at Goodlyburn primary, through the use of things such as e-Sgoil or Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig. The cabinet secretary might want to address how we are going to develop Gaelic-medium education in secondary schools.

It is hugely encouraging to see youngsters with a keen interest in speaking Gaelic—a language that is thriving. The Scottish social attitudes survey revealed that the number of Scots who speak some Gaelic has doubled in the past decade, and globally, upwards of 449,000 people have used Gaelic Duolingo. Well done to Emma Harper for starting the campaign to include Scots, too.

Members will recall that real belter of a speech given by Billy Kay at time for reflection back in April 2022. He highlighted how important it is to future generations that the tongue they speak is not out of place in the Scotland where they live. The language in which we do most of our business here in the Parliament is English, which is socially, politically and economically dominant in our culture and society. However, we should never lose sight of how important the native languages here in Scotland are to our land and our people. There are 1.5 million people who speak Scots, as Billy Kay said,

*"fae Maidenkirk tae Johnny Groats and ayont".—[Official Report, 26 April 2022; c 1.]*

For those people it represents an important symbol of their identity, history and culture and oor intangible heritage.

Last month, while I was climbing Kilimanjaro, the royal national Mòd took place in Perth—Murdo Fraser talked about that earlier. I am glad to say that it was reported as being a huge success.

I am proud that our Parliament recognises that Scotland is a nation of different folk, cultures and languages. It is important that we protect and enhance the richness of our linguistic diversity. Languages such as Gaelic and Scots contribute to the ecological balance of our society in the same way that biodiversity does in nature. We must protect that diversity by supporting the Scottish Government's aim to turn up the volume for our Gaelic and Scots-speaking communities in this

chamber, where we represent the folk. However, to quote Billy Kay again:

“mair important than thon, ye wull gie a signal tae the weans in the schuil that the culture o their hame is valued by fowk electit by their mithers an faithers.”—[*Official Report*, 26 April 2022; c 2.]

That is no slang as we were aince telt, but is the language o oor ain kith and kin.

15:51

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Tapadh leat, Presiding Officer, thank you—that was in British Sign Language—shukria. I am delighted to take part in this debate given that my first language is Punjabi, I learned English, tuned into Scots, and I am fully appreciative of Gaelic.

Dating back centuries, Gaelic is one of the oldest indigenous languages in Europe. Gaelic is more than 1,000 years older than English, and is an integral part of Scotland’s make up. It has been said:

“What is true for bones is also true for human language”.

It is clear that the essential elements are just one piece of a much wider, ever-evolving picture. Gaelic is more than the words that comprise it—it is an emotional connection to Scotland’s cultural heritage. I welcome the discussion today, which will celebrate its revival, and reconsider the key to its preservation.

Although Gaelic can appear a wee bit intimidating to those who do not speak it, Scots may feel more familiar. Now also recognised as a regional language under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Scots is much closer in style to English but varies considerably, even across relatively small geographical areas.

As Jennifer Smith, professor of sociolinguistics at the University of Glasgow said,

“Lots of people say ‘Oh, I don’t speak Scots’. But just because you don’t sound like Robert Burns, doesn’t mean you’re not speaking Scots.”

Professor Smith headed the University of Glasgow’s Scots syntax atlas, which is an incredible online research tool that was launched in 2019, which maps the use of Scots across Scotland. From the “gonnae nos” in Glasgow, to the “fit likes” in the north-east, the atlas confirmed that we do not have to travel very far to appreciate the rich differences. We should be proud of our vibrant local lexicon and indigenous tongue, as well as the host of other languages found here, including my own Punjabi and Urdu. There are more than 170 languages spoken in Scotland, including Makaton, French, Cantonese, German, Bengali, Spanish—the list goes on.

Embracing the nuances of our own history and heritage allows for a deeper respect and understanding of other cultures. I have been pleased to see a resurgence elsewhere that mirrors the Gaelic renaissance, such as within the Saami communities of Europe’s far north, and through the Indigenous Languages Act in Canada.

Here in Scotland, the revival of Scots and Gaelic has been aided in recent years by a variety of wondrous efforts.

In my own constituency of Glasgow Kelvin, Partick Thistle Football Club, in collaboration with Glasgow City Council Gaelic education services and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, became the first Scottish professional football club to have bilingual English and Gaelic signage at its stadium in a bid to increase the visibility of the language, and I encourage the club to add Scots to its signage in due course.

That is just one of a number of exciting projects and activities in the pipeline that seek to encourage engagement with Gaelic-medium education schools, which brings us to another gem in my constituency: the Glasgow Gaelic school, which opened in 1999. It is one of four nurseries, three primary schools and one secondary school in the city that currently provide Gaelic-medium education.

Although teaching Gaelic was sadly never part of my repertoire, I did find that children really connected with the Scots language, but I had to emphasise that it was not slang. I remember a couple of wee laddies who struggled immensely with reading and writing. Average texts in English were of no interest to them—they liked cars. I discovered the Scots poem “The Wee Rid Motor” by Sandy Thomas Ross, which captured their imagination because the words sounded like how they talked. Their imagination was engaged, and they were able to read it out loud to an audience of parents who listened intently as they read, having not been able to read before:

“In ma wee rid motor,  
I can gang for miles,  
Up and doon the gairden,  
Through the lobby whites.  
Mony a bigger motor,  
Gangs tae toons afaur,  
Nane can gang whaur I gang  
In my wee rid caur.”

Those are blithe memories indeed, of children reading, inspired by Scots.

The Scottish Government recognises the many benefits of Gaelic and Scots in our schools, and I am pleased to see that a new national strategic approach to Gaelic-medium education is one of the areas that is currently under consultation. These languages should be normalised in our institutions and across all our communities, and

the proposed Scottish languages bill has the opportunity to contribute towards that significantly.

I echo the recommendations of Bòrd na Gàidhlig that the education strategy should include a workforce recruitment and development priority, and that any new education agencies that are created should have Gaelic education responsibilities embedded within them.

Research has demonstrated that bilingual children enjoy improved cognitive development, and the earlier that the second language is introduced, the better. In a way that most adults cannot, children absorb sounds, patterns and structures, and are unencumbered by years of lessons that drill into us a single way of communicating.

Languages equip us with so much—it is vital we protect them. Tapadh leat. Ta. Thank you—in British Sign Language. Shukria.

15:58

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I welcome the debate and the intention to draw attention to the consultation on the Scottish languages bill. It is vital that everyone in Scotland play their part. Gaelic and Scots are crucial to our culture, our society, our relationship to our environment and our future. I will, of course, play my role as MSP for the Highlands and Islands and encourage engagement, but consultations can be challenging to engage with, so I ask the cabinet secretary what support is in place to make engagement more accessible.

It is only with the persistence of many people engaging over decades, each one bringing their kindling, that we have the level of support for Gaelic that we do today, and I trust that with the upcoming bill, we will see similar support for Scots. Action is required before the flames of both languages flicker out—more so for Gaelic. The bill is our opportunity to stoke the fire and add the much-needed wood to ensure that we have great bonnie fires blazing long into the future.

We must take leadership in order to remove the mantle of shame that has been foisted on speakers of both languages over generations. Shame creates inertia and reluctance. There should be no shame in speaking any of our languages, and there should be no inertia on the part of any organisation that is tasked with supporting their growth or development.

I am grateful to my colleagues in the chamber, including the cabinet secretary, for demonstrating leadership in speaking Gaelic and Scots not just today but at other times.

I will centre the rest of my contribution on Gaelic—but not because Scots is any less

important. I have been studying Gaelic for a while, including an cùrsa inntigridh, and I have reached a 1,000-day streak on Scottish Gaelic Duolingo, whereas I have had time to take only a much-loved three-week Scots course as part of an academic research project. Bring on that Scots language Duolingo.

We can learn from what has happened to Gaelic since the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 was passed and, in turn, ensure swifter and more robust support for Scots in the legislation.

The stark reality is that most Scottish pupils now leave school without ever having studied Gaelic. There is, quite rightly, a focus on Gaelic-medium education, or GME, but we should also make provision for Gaelic-learner education at primary and high school levels. Making that provision could spark greater interest and enthusiasm and would make it possible for pupils to access Gaelic without having to attend a fully immersive Gaelic-medium school.

I will turn to GME. The consultation includes a proposal for a new strategic approach. It is good to see that the Government recognises that there is need. Since the 2005 act, progress in GME development has been limited and slow. The number of pupils in primary GME has risen by 80 per cent, but that is only 1 per cent of the national total of primary school pupils. Improvement at secondary school level has been slower: only 0.5 per cent of the total number of secondary school pupils are in GME. The long-promised Gaelic-medium high school in Scotland's capital could go a long way towards underscoring Gaelic's importance.

I recognise the challenges for secondary school level, where there is the need for teachers who can teach a speciality subject in Gaelic. However, if we are to recruit well and for the long term, we need plans to provide support and a clear career path.

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 requires all public bodies, including local authorities, to develop Gaelic language plans. The good news is that 30 of the 32 local authorities, including Argyll and Bute Council, North Ayrshire Council, Midlothian Council, Aberdeen City Council, Inverclyde Council and Scottish Borders Council—the list goes on—have plans. However, 13 of those 30 councils make no provision for Gaelic in any of their schools. A further three now provide GME, but that came about only because of persistent campaigning by parents. Parents should not have to battle for teaching of a language that should be provided. That is why I would like to see the establishment of an enforceable parental right to Gaelic-medium pre-school and primary school education.

In areas in which Gaelic is widely spoken, Gaelic language plans must ensure that the language is taken into account in relation to provision in areas such as housing, employment and transport.

There is a proposal to review Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which is the statutory Gaelic language board. It would be good to hear from stakeholders about the board's ability to carry out its responsibilities. Does it have the right powers? Is it adequately funded? We can look to Wales, where the Welsh Government provides leadership for its ambitions by requiring local authorities to heed numerical targets and to develop Welsh education strategic plans.

Most concerning in the proposals for the bill is the Scottish Government's inclusion of the Gàidhealtachd. Stakeholders say that that seems to have come out of nowhere. Where would we draw the line? Tobar na Màthar, or Motherwell? Cill Mheàrnaig, or Kilmarnock? Dùn Èideann? There is concern that drawing boundaries would undermine and demoralise people in weaker areas who are working hard to maintain the language.

There is much more that could be said, but I will close by saying that I will play my part to encourage engagement in development of the bill and in the future of Gaelic and Scots.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** I call Emma Roddick, who has a generous six minutes.

16:00

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Tapadh leibh, Oifigeir Riaghlaidh.

I welcome the opportunity to talk about the future of Gaelic and Scots—two languages that I enjoy constantly learning about and linking to my experience of growing up in this country, which is so rich in culture. Too often, we talk about the past of those languages, and many people still think that they are in the past. There is a future for them, and I encourage as many people as possible to engage in the conversation and discuss what that future should look like.

I am worried about the policy to create a Gàidhealtachd. That is not just because, to me, it already exists—I have grown up believing that I live in it—but because I would like more detail about whether that could mean giving up on Gaelic in other places.

On Friday, Bòrd na Gàidhlig sent a helpful briefing that outlined the finding from the Scottish social attitudes survey that people who come into contact with Gaelic are more likely to hold positive views about the language. That does not surprise me. Tha beagan Gàidhlig agam, and the more I

learn, the more I realise how much of the Highland Scots that I know is influenced by Gaelic. Even a word such as “smashing”, which sounds best in Highland accents, is thought by some—controversially—to originate in the Gaelic phrase “s math sin”.

Like most people, I did not realise that I had been experiencing Gaelic, outwith watching BBC Alba coverage of Scottish women's football and Scottish championship football and quickly learning what “buidhe” and “dearg” meant. Although I play the fiddle and engaged with fèis activities when I was wee, the Gaelic side seemed somehow to be out of reach, and to be there for folk who already knew how to speak the language. I will try to speak it now, and folk may want to use their headsets.

Chan ann tric a bhios cothroman ann eòlas a chur air a' Ghàidhlig, mura h-eil do phàrantan gu sònraichte dèidheil ort a bhith ag ionnsachadh aig aois òg, gad chur ann am FMG no gad chur gu clasaichean an àite Fraingis. Dh'innis mo mhàthair dhomh Fraingis a dhèanamh anns an sgoil, seach Gàidhlig, agus tha cuimhne agam air an duilgheadas a bh' aig mo charaidean a ghabh clasaichean Gàidhlig ann a bhith a' cumail tidsear, a' cumail chlasaichean aig amannan àbhaisteach, agus gam bogadh fhèin sa chànan taobh a-muigh a' phreasa bhig anns an robh iad ag ionnsachadh. Fhad 's a b' urrainn dhomh a bhith ag òrdachadh cofaidh is lòn ann am Fraingis agus a dhol dhan Fhraing air saor-làithean, tha e tòrr nas duilghe faighinn chun chleachdadh àbhaisteach, làitheil sin sa Ghàidhlig.

*Following is the simultaneous interpretation:*

We do not often have opportunities to hear about Gaelic. When we are of the age when our parents in particular want us to learn, they may send us to GME or French classes. My mother told me to take French instead of Gaelic, and I remember the difficulties that my friends in Gaelic classes had with getting a teacher, having classes at normal times and immersing themselves in the language in the little cupboard where they were taught. I can order coffee and lunch in French when I am on holiday, but it is much more difficult to use Gaelic in that way.

*The member continued in English.*

Exposure to a language gets easier the more we put into it—for example, I now love to look out the window on train journeys and learn about the origins of Gaelic place names or to Google why Dingwall, which is Norse, is not known as Inverpeffer and does not have a Parliament in it.

I will directly address the mention of my region in the consultation. I accept that the consultation is probably not referring to it as a whole, but that is not clear. The Highlands and Islands are referred

to repeatedly as the area where Gaelic would once have been the predominant language. If we put to one side the point that some communities in the Highlands would take issue with that, the natural inclusion of Orkney and Shetland by readers is the biggest problem. In those places, not only was Gaelic never the predominant language, but it would be extremely rare for someone there to have any. The predominant language in the isles was Norn and is now a dialect of Scots and English. In recognising the cultural heritage of some areas, it is important not to forget or damage that of others.

**Alasdair Allan:** I really agree with Emma Roddick's point about the diversity of language that exists around Scotland. Might it be said that one motivation for having an official Gàidhealtachd is to ensure that we do not work on a lowest common denominator basis—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask Dr Allan to address his remarks to his microphone.

**Alasdair Allan:** I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer. Could a case be made for an official Gàidhealtachd policy that is based on ensuring that we do not have a lowest common denominator approach to language policy and that the areas with a great tradition enjoy particular support?

**Emma Roddick:** As I said, I am keen to hear more detail about what is proposed. I hope that folk in the Highlands and Islands who are thinking along the same lines as me will engage with shaping the consultation as we want it to be shaped.

I recommend to anyone who is interested in Shaetlan that they check out Shetland ForWirlds, which promotes the language and the words that are found on those islands. There are words there, such as *oxter*, that are familiar to most people who have any Scots, but there is also Shetland-specific vocabulary, much of which has Old Norse origins.

When my cousin gave my sister and me a lift recently, we enjoyed comparing the vocabularies of our Shetland and Ross-shire families. Some words that were used in tellings-off were in common, although that could be our granny's influence, whereas others were extremely specific.

I love finding out the geography of certain words and phrases. I still have not figured out where along the east coast seagulls start to be called *scorries*; I will not say in the chamber what my mam's name for them was.

Like many people, I did not know that some of the words that I heard growing up were Scots—usually *Cant*—until I came to Edinburgh and started using them. My uni pals frequently pestered me to say, “Chicken dippers”, which was

a favourite meal back then. They would often be very confused when I called my cat a *wee besom*, accused one of them of being a *clype* or called somebody *thrawn*—they were almost as confused as I was when I learned that people cannot order a red pudding supper in the capital.

I very much welcome the announcement that the Gaelic capital fund will develop school units in Tain and Skye in my region. When I went to Bridgend nursery, I remember the teachers being very strict with me on some of my words. I spent the first three years of my life in Cardross and I might have picked up some *Weegieisms* when I was wee. I am quite happy to have a Highland accent now, although my sister thinks that it is now more an Inverness accent than it is the Ross-shire accent that she has, but I think that it is a shame that many schools will still tell bairns off for speaking in their native language.

In my region, many places are still hurting from the historic oppression of Gaelic and our culture in general, which perhaps makes me a bit sensitive to those things. However, if we want both Scottish languages to survive, we cannae be teaching kids that it is bad or wrong to speak them.

16:11

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** As an Orcadian, I will not be speaking in Gaelic or Scots today, but I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on Scotland's minority languages.

Scotland has a long and diverse linguistic heritage. The Highlands and Islands region that I represent remains most obviously home to the majority of native Gaelic speakers, but northern Scotland also contains a number of different traditions, representing our long and complicated history.

Our previous language, Pictish, is still obscured in some mystery. Its relationship to other languages of these islands is hotly contested, but its legacy remains, like many of our dead languages, in names and places. Although Pictish might feel long lost, I mention it because the process of language death is perhaps not as distant as we might think. In the mid-19th century, the once flourishing Norn tongue died. A Norse language, it had endured in Orkney, Shetland and parts of the far north of the mainland for centuries, long after the islands had been traded off to the Scottish crown.

At times, Gaelic has seemed similarly at risk. However, there has always been significant work to keep it going, to preserve it as a cultural marker of my region. It is the case, though, that modern times have brought a convergence in language varieties in the UK—we speak more like each

other than ever before. Geographical differences, while distinct and sometimes pronounced, have softened, whether that is in the north of Scotland or the tip of Cornwall.

Some of the culture richness that languages preserve has undoubtedly been blunted. However, increasingly, we are finding the tools to recognise and embrace that heritage and to bring it to wider audiences.

Last year, I had the pleasure of visiting Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye, which is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands, as was mentioned earlier. Although it was founded only in the late 1970s, by the early 1980s the institution had captured the imagination of Government and cultural institutions at all levels, which supported it to become the thriving academic institution that it is today.

My attempts to learn a little Gaelic, when I first started working as a young adviser here in Parliament and took some lessons, have not endured quite so well. Beyond basic greetings, I am afraid that my abilities fall short, particularly when it comes to speaking in a debate such as this one.

On a visit to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in 2004, our new King, who was then Prince Charles, remarked:

“Scottish life is greatly enriched by the Gaelic dimension.”

In Skye, and across my region, that remains very much the case today. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine a Scotland without that dimension; it is part of our story. I have previously enjoyed visiting the Western Isles and hearing the local songs in Gaelic, preserving what is very much a living language and culture. It exists alongside English and, where the two survive strongly alongside each other, both are enriched by that co-existence.

However, it is not just Gaelic that is part of our cultural tradition in the Highlands and Islands. The various distinct and overlapping dialects and variants of Scots, for example, are also key markers of who we are in the north. My good friend and former parliamentary colleague Peter Chapman, a proud Buchan man, was a great champion of the Doric of the north-east, which is probably one of Scotland’s most distinctive language varieties.

**Emma Harper:** Jamie Halcro Johnston mentioned Peter Chapman. He wanted tae join the cross-pairty group on the Scots leid. We dinnae have any Conservatives the noo. Would the member maybe do a bit of encouraging to see whether any o his colleagues will want tae join our cross-pairty group?

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I can certainly encourage my colleagues to join. As I have said, Peter has been a great supporter and promoter of Gaelic and Scots. I have enjoyed, many times, his “Poems & Sangs in the Doric”, so I will do my best to encourage other members to get involved.

In the northern isles, which I call home, Shetlandic is increasingly being recognised for its distinctiveness as a language or dialect, retaining and keeping alive some noticeable influences from Norn. Culture will change and adjust, but keeping alive some links with the past has value in itself—not just as a curiosity but as a reflection of what built the distinctiveness of places and communities.

The Parliament has long been supportive of Scotland’s minority languages, as have local government and the UK Government, which have been key in the work to maintain them.

Other organisations have played an important role, as well. Since its outset, the national lottery has provided important funding to language and cultural projects and organisations across my region. Institutions such as Fèisean nan Gàidheal, which is based in Portree but has a Scotland-wide reach, have kept the flame of Gaelic’s cultural heritage alive and flourishing, particularly among young people. Last week, the UHI team that is running the Uist unearthed app had a display in the Parliament showing the potential of new technology to educate and inform and to bring culture from the region to new audiences around the world. As has been mentioned repeatedly, the Royal National Mòd has endured since the 19th century, interrupted only by war or, more recently, pandemic. The BBC’s role in providing Gaelic language services through radio and television is well known, and the creation of BBC Alba has brought many cultural attributes of Gaelic heritage into homes across the country and beyond.

Passion has been the motive force behind those ventures. Many people have given hours—sometimes, lifetimes—in the preservation of the cultural tradition or, rather, traditions of my region.

This goes beyond the work of the state or any strategy, but it is important that that work continues, and we welcome further proposals to bring that about and to support the institutions and grass-roots efforts that sustain languages, heritage and culture. We want a thriving linguistic culture, particularly in my region, where Gaelic is such an everyday part of life and remains a first language in many communities. The Scottish Government has indicated that it will clearly recognise that. Among that will be a greater focus on language skills in not just Gaelic but other modern languages and an emphasis on their importance in education.

There is a great deal of consensus around the chamber on the need to preserve and protect Scotland's minority languages. In that area, we have often managed to move forward in a constructive and cross-party way. More importantly, Government language policy must be based on wide consultation with speakers, communities and organisations. I hope that it is in that spirit that we will move forward with any developments in this area.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Clare Adamson, who is the final speaker in the open debate, after which we will move to closing speeches. At that point, all members who have participated in the debate will be expected to be in the chamber.

16:18

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I am a North Lanarkshire resident, and I was a councillor there from 2007 until 2011. As such, I was very familiar with the Gaelic-medium education schools in the area. The delivery model there has been so successful in nurturing Gaelic in my community, and I was glad to hear Jim Fairlie mention Gaelic-medium education in his speech. A few years ago, I was delighted to visit Islay and meet former headteacher Cathie Johnston in her community. The strength of Gaelic language there is evident in song and poetry, as well as at the supermarket, where I may have bought a little Bruichladdich.

It is a love of the songs and poems that I will focus on. I commend all my colleagues who have spoken in Gaelic, Scots and Doric. I do not have their flair or experience. I was a wee lass in Lanarkshire, and Liz Lochhead's Scots and English poem "Kidspoem/Bairnsang" speaks to my experience. She wrote:

"it wis January  
and a gey dreich day  
the first day Ah went to the school  
so my Mum happed me up in ma  
good navy-blue napp coat wi the rid tartan hood  
birtled a scarf aroon ma neck  
pu'ed oan ma pixie an' my pawkies  
it wis that bitter  
said noo ye'll no starve  
gie'd me a wee kiss and a kid-oan skelp oan the bum  
and sent me aff across the playground  
tae the place Ah'd learn to say  
it was January  
and a really dismal day  
the first day I went to school".

I listened to the comments about prescription on teaching the Scots language. Liz Lochhead is from Lanarkshire—she went to Newarthill primary in my colleague Stephanie Callaghan's constituency, and to Dalziel high school in Motherwell. It would be a real shame if the young people there were not able to enjoy her poems or indeed her

incredible translation of Euripides's "Medea", which was such a success at the Edinburgh festival this year.

My experience was the same as that of so many of us. Oor mither tongue was not correct, appropriate, valued or tolerated. I hope that we have moved on from telling weans they are wrang at every turn, especially given the wealth of literature and songs that are at their fingertips today. That mention of fingertips aptly reminds me of my own primary school rendition of "The Sair Fingir".

A few years ago, I was delighted to attend the Scots language awards and see the celebration of literature such as "Nip Nebs", which was written by Susie Briggs and illustrated by Ruthie Redden, and which tells the story of Jack Frost in Scots. There were also wonderful translations. For the doubters, I point out that "translation" means the process of expressing the sense of words or text in another language. Matthew Fitt has translated children's classics such as Roald Dahl's "The Twits", which became "The Eejits", and his works with Scots writer James Robertson have been celebrated for their depth and knowledge of Scots.

However, it was Billy Kay's book "Scots: The Mither Tongue" that was a game changer for me. It stripped away the Scottish cringe and gave me the notion that the words that resonate with me are acceptable, appropriate and evocative in a way that truly speaks to my soul, especially in poetry and songs.

At the Commonwealth games in Glasgow, the world was enthralled by Pumeza Matshikiza's beautiful rendition of Hamish Henderson's "The Freedom Come-All-Ye". More than 1 billion people saw that performance. It is a contemporary song written in Scots that describes the wind of change blowing through Scotland and the world, sweeping away exploitation and imperialism. It extols Scottish values, but it is when you hear the Scots that I swear you feel that wind:

"Roch the wind in the clear day's dawin  
Blaws the clouds heelster-gowdie ow'r the bay,  
But there's mair nor a roch wind blawin  
Through the great glen o' the warld the day."

Scots is recognised under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. We should remember that language is a human right. It is mentioned in many of the articles on human rights, in relation to justice, education and children's rights. It is the culture that defines people. It is inherent to identity and should not be rolled out once a year for Burns night, although Burns is indisputably a phenomenon.

We have talked about the economy and tourism and how we can support our languages. "Robert Burns and the Scottish Economy" was a



groundbreaking study that was led by Murray Pittock for the University of Glasgow. I should also mention my colleague Joan McAlpine for her exemplary work in that area. An estimated 9.5 million people attend Burns suppers every year, and the report puts the overall annual value of Burns to the Scottish economy at £203 million, with a further £139 million contributed to the value of Scotland the brand. Our tourism includes new visitor facilities, Burns-related festivals and branded products. Cultural tourism in particular is highly beneficial to the economy. Robert Burns's birthplace museum in Alloway is second only to Shakespeare's birthplace in terms of visitor numbers in the United Kingdom.

A Scots language bill will underpin the language and its potential in Scotland. William McIlvanney opined that Scotland is "a mongrel nation", and our Scots language reflects that. As my colleagues have mentioned, it has influences from throughout our history, from battles, invasions and tribes to words from Latin, Danish, French and Welsh, to name but a few—they include Norse, as one colleague has mentioned. However, the language of our mongrel nation does not mean that it is "doggerel", as Burns's work was once churlishly described by Jeremy Paxman. By way of evidence, I will finish with a Burns quote on education:

"A set o' dull, conceited hashes  
Confuse their brains in college classes!  
They gang in stirks, and come out asses ...  
Gie me ae spark o' nature's fire,  
That's a' the learning I desire".

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. I notice that a couple of colleagues who participated in the debate are not in the chamber at the moment, which is very disappointing. I will expect at least some explanation for that.

I call Martin Whitfield to speak for around seven minutes.

16:25

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I will open slowly to allow those people to return to the chamber. It is not a usual tactic of mine, but I think that, if we look at the quality of the debate and the agreement that exists across the chamber about the importance of the subject matter, it is worth giving those who are slightly late the chance to come back, if only to hear good words said about them.

I start by suggesting to the Scottish Government that there is an opportunity here that does not come along very often. With the bravery to reach out, listen and discuss across the chamber, we could come to the end of the session with a superb bill that supports the importance of

language. Contributors from across the chamber have spoken not just about the purity of language, but about how that empowers the people of Scotland. In particular, many people have spoken about how it empowers our young people, so that they do not go to school and feel that the language that they speak marks them out as being different from their teachers. I must say that, as Michael Marra so helpfully pointed out, my Geordie background gives me a far greater access to Scots than perhaps I had ever believed possible, and I am really grateful for that.

Scottish Labour recognises the importance of Gaelic and Scots to our communities in Scotland and welcomes the Scottish Government's consultation on its commitments in this area. A simple statement is made, but it measures the great depth of the challenges that Scotland faces with regard to Gaelic and Scots. Language is a gateway to some of the challenges that our communities face—communities that historically were isolated because of geography, which allowed the growth of fine languages that speak volumes when used for storytelling, singing and the poetry that we have heard from across the chamber.

The strength of the community was that ability to tie their history to events—which may have been tragic or, indeed, positive—in their own language and the languages developed to allow those experiences to be passed on. Then, our communities came closer together, including now, in the modern age, through the internet. Hence my question about technology in my intervention, because we are the people who need to allow those languages to continue to develop through modern technology. The requirement of .scot with regard to email addresses has made such a difference.

There are challenges ahead with regard to technology, and we have heard about some of them.

**Emma Harper:** The member talks about technology. One of the things that is happening in Dumfries and Galloway, when they are recruiting new nurses, is that they are yaising Scots so that, when the nurses look efter patients, when somebody says that they have a sair heid, it is something that even nurses from other countries can understand. Would you welcome that?

**Martin Whitfield:** I may be challenged to keep to the relatively short time that you have granted me, Presiding Officer.

Again, what we are talking about is the importance of language in some incredibly stressful situations, where someone is speaking to you and you understand them. They are not hidden behind professional phrases or words that

are used to set one profession apart from others but speak to people so that they understand.

That is the treasure that we should foster in our young people. The way that they speak in the playground should be the way that they speak when they go in. It should be the way that they can speak to their teacher and answer challenging questions, even when those questions are in another language—a modern language from France, Germany, Spain or another country. They should be able to speak comfortably and know that they are communicating and that they can be communicated with. In that way, when they have a challenge, they can reach out in the way they feel safest to ask, “Can you help?”, and the teacher, parent, stranger, police officer, nurse, doctor—all of the ranked professionals—can stand there and say, “Yes,” giving the young people the confidence to express themselves.

I want to ask the cabinet secretary about the current situation with the Gaelic-immersion high school in Edinburgh. Parents phrased it brilliantly by saying that there is a need to create a linguistic bubble where pupils and staff speak Gaelic throughout the day. They say that that is the best way of learning a language. That is very true, so I would be most grateful if, in summing up, the cabinet secretary would give an update on the current situation relating to events in Edinburgh.

Time is slightly against me, so let me turn to some of the fine contributions that we heard. I apologise to members who spoke from the front bench, but I will skip them because there was such depth to the contributions that we heard. Their speeches can be read by others later.

Willie Rennie talked about focusing on areas where languages are naturally spoken. In the consultation, there is a tension relating to how the funds and resources will be used, and it would be interesting to hear the cabinet secretary’s views on that.

Emma Harper mentioned the myth—perhaps that is too strong a word—that Scots is just a collection of dialects. She said that it is not, and it is hugely important to understand that. She made the powerful point that Scots is in the foundations of this Parliament.

I often hear people say that Scots is not a language and that it is just a dialect. I am happy to acquiesce that Geordie is a dialect, not a language, although that will be of much concern when I next visit my birthplace. However, Scots is a language. It holds the treasured feature of being able to develop. Yes, the language is different geographically, depending on where people are, but all languages are different geographically. That is one of their strengths, and it is key to

understanding the culture that sits behind the language.

Murdo Fraser commented on the importance of storytelling in language. We know about storytelling in the past, and, in relation to storytelling in the future, we need to look to Gaelic, to Scots, to Doric and possibly to English, too.

**Clare Adamson:** I will make a peedie intervention, Presiding Officer.

I mentioned Hamish Henderson in my speech. Martin Whitfield talked about technology, so does he agree that the fact that we have archives of the spoken word and storytelling in the voices of the people is important in working towards securing the future of both languages?

**Martin Whitfield:** Clare Adamson is absolutely right. Preserving a language in the way in which it is spoken is important. That is not a particularly new thing. My father had reel-to-reel tapes of dialects and languages from across the United Kingdom, and he bored me senseless with the Northumbrian dialect, which I truly love.

It is important that it is now much easier to access such recordings than it was in the past. That is helpful for people who are inquisitive about the name of the place where they come from or about someone’s surname. It also allows young people who are just trying to find something funny to listen to recordings.

It is interesting that there are comments about the risk of humour being damaging to a language. There is the risk that it could almost be mocked—I use that word carefully—by others, but the communities that speak Gaelic, Doric and Scots and those that are closest together are sometimes the communities that share the greatest humour about their predicament, because that allows them to get over some of the challenges that people outside those communities thrust upon them.

It was interesting to hear Jackie Dunbar emphasise the importance of parity of esteem. That is really important. Many languages are spoken across Scotland, and that is much to Scotland’s credit, but there needs to be parity. Kaukab Stewart said that she is aware of 170 languages being spoken across Scotland, and each has the right to parity in relation to understanding, because that is the respect that a listener shows to someone who is speaking. It is through that respect that we should continue to build the character of Scotland.

Rhoda Grant made a powerful contribution that raised a challenging question about how the bill will address two very separate languages and the need to preserve and enrich those languages while allowing them to move forward. The answers lie in communities but may be different depending

on which community we look at. It was also a great pleasure to see an intervention being made remotely on someone speaking in the chamber and to see it being handled so well.

I am desperately conscious of the time and will not push any further, but could I tempt you a little, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer** *indicated agreement.*

**Martin Whitfield:** Excellent. I will take the opportunity to mention Alasdair Allan and others who spoke in Gaelic, Doric and Scots. The translation service worked brilliantly for once, so members will not have to pester them to find out what was said. It is a fascinating step forward that we can get to that. I echo Alasdair Allan's comments about having a chamber in which many languages can be used, backed up by paperwork and support behind the scenes. I compliment those who provided that today.

We are at a powerful moment. We can, as Partick Thistle discovered by putting up dual signage, reach out. We have an opportunity, and it would be—I must use the word—a shame if we missed our opportunity during this session of Parliament. We can make a powerful statement about the languages of Scotland, which we all agree are very important. More importantly, we can first look at how to preserve them. I think that we are getting there on that. We can empower. Our educationalists have an obligation to do that and are meeting that obligation. Most importantly, we must ask how we can allow our languages to expand so that people across Scotland understand their link with history. We were told that Gaelic is one of the oldest languages in Europe.

We are at a crossroads. It would be to our benefit to go forward together, to achieve all that we can.

I thank you for your patience, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am much obliged, Mr Whitfield. However, I am more than disappointed that one member who participated in the debate has still not returned to the chamber.

I call Stephen Kerr to speak for about eight minutes.

16:37

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** It is always a pleasure to follow Martin Whitfield, who on this occasion had me grabbing for Google to find out exactly what Partick Thistle have done. I compliment Partick Thistle on the use of dual signage, which had escaped my attention.

As Donald Cameron said, it will surprise no one in this Parliament that Scottish Conservatives are very interested in preserving, conserving and promoting Scotland's national culture, because that culture is the very definition of who we are. It creates our sense of belonging and is a very important part of what it means to be a Scot. We belong to this land and to each other. From our natural landscape in all its beauty to our magnificent shared history and cultural traditions—some of which have been referred to during the debate—and our legendary, locally produced, food and drink, Scots can take a collective pride in everything that is Scottish.

That extends to and includes our national languages and local dialects. We have had a full and wide-ranging debate. We have allocated a considerable amount of time to the subject, and rightly so. I thought that the cabinet secretary's opening speech set the tone very well. She reminded us of the economic benefits of Gaelic and encouraged those who speak Gaelic to feel free and confident to use that language without the negativity that she described. It is important that our young people are encouraged to learn and speak Gaelic.

Donald Cameron made his usual masterful speech about a subject that I know is very dear to his heart. I hope that the cabinet secretary, who will be winding up the debate, will take to heart the heartfelt plea that he made about the need for Gaelic-medium education workforce planning. He called for a task force to address the issues, which a number of other speakers also mentioned. I feel that that emotional appeal in the debate requires an answer.

Michael Marra also talked about the shortage of GME teachers, and he said that something needs to be done to address that. Willie Rennie highlighted the need for Gaelic speaking to be seen in the context of everyday use. He talked about a crisis in social circles and mentioned the underpinning importance of getting the economic infrastructure and pillars right for society in those parts of Scotland where Gaelic should be the predominant language in order to thrive and prosper.

Murdo Fraser introduced to the debate several characters from Sir Walter Scott. He was just about to describe in his usual eloquent way some passage or other about an encounter with the devil that stands out in his imagination from that epoch of Scots literature, and up shot Alasdair Allan. I do not know whether an encounter with the devil and Alasdair Allan go together, however, because the good doctor always has something very useful to say, as he did today.

**Alasdair Allan:** This is really more of an observation than a question, but in the Scots New

Testament as translated from the Greek by Lorimer, at least in the apocryphal bit at the end, the only character to speak in standard English is the devil. [*Laughter.*]

**Stephen Kerr:** Well, I cannot better that. That goes to the heart of this debate, if I may say so.

Dr Allan reminded me, as an MSP for Central Scotland—

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** Will Mr Kerr give way?

**Stephen Kerr:** I will come back to my quote in a moment. I give way to Fergus Ewing.

**Fergus Ewing:** In the spirit of continuing the worthy cause of educating Mr Kerr, may I share with him a piece of information that I gleaned one evening when reading the fascinating and excellent “Jamieson’s Dictionary of Scots”? I came across a word that I thought may be of interest to Mr Kerr: the old Scots word “bluffleheid”. [*Laughter.*] Presiding Officer, I can see that you recognise it. Members will know that “bluffleheid” means a person, usually male, with a very large head but a very small brain. I just wondered whether that is a word that Mr Kerr might want—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Ewing—

**Fergus Ewing:** —without ascribing it to any member in the chamber, because that would be unparliamentary—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Ewing, if you could resume your seat—

**Fergus Ewing:** —to add to the political lexicon.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I would remind you, Mr Ewing, of the need to retain respect while engaging in debate in the chamber.

**Stephen Kerr:** I accept the education on offer from Fergus Ewing in the spirit in which it was offered. I will definitely now add that word to my vocabulary.

I was reminded of a wonderful part of Lorimer’s superb translation of the New Testament. Those members who are familiar with it may recognise this from 1 Corinthians 13. Falkirk is very dear to my heart, as a Central Scotland MSP, and Lorimer’s translation has this:

“In my bairn days, I hed the speech o a bairn, the mind o a bairn, the thochts o a bairn, but nou I am grown manmuckle, I am throu wi aathing bairnlie”.

That is a fantastic Scots translation. I am glad that Dr Allan gave me the opportunity to introduce that into the debate.

Dr Allan also mentioned Walter Scott and John Buchan—those two great Scottish national patriots, who were also unionists.

There were many other speeches in the debate that I could mention. Time does not permit me to mention them all, but there were many references to our rich, diverse national culture, which has language at its heart. Kaukab Stewart said something that is worthy of repetition, which was about how adept young children are at picking up languages from their very earliest years of understanding. I have grandchildren who, in addition to learning English, are learning Russian, Norwegian and French. What they have the capacity to absorb is phenomenal. I speak as an awe-struck grandfather and as an awe-struck monoglot—unfortunately, English is the only language that I can honestly say I have a slight grasp of.

I thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for mentioning the good work that the national lottery has done in this field.

Having been born in Dundee and raised in Forfar, I am well aware of the diversity of language and dialects. People who grow up in a place such as Forfar are caught between Dundee and Aberdeen—between Dundonian and the Doric. There is a developing uniqueness about the language.

The idea that dialects do not exist within Scots is challengeable. For example, after my wife, who comes from Ayr, first met my father, who was born in Angus and lived there all his days, she said to me, “What was he saying?” She could not fully understand everything that he was saying. That is a part of the richness of our language culture, and a part of the heritage that we all enjoy.

By definition, dialect in language is central to the identity of the towns, villages and cities of Scotland—and, undoubtedly, is recognised with local loyalty. When we hear someone speaking in the dialect and language of our homes, we instantly feel the sense of belonging to which I referred earlier.

I welcome the new national Gaelic language plan. As has been mentioned, Gaelic is a vitally important asset for Scotland, and is representative of the richness, depth and variation that we as Scots enjoy in our cultural and social life.

Because of the way that we do things in this Parliament, I am not sure how much time I have left. Maybe it is not much. How much time do I have left?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you another minute or so.

**Stephen Kerr:** Okay. That is great. I will conclude, if I have only a minute or so—we go for two hours and 40 minutes, then we do not have any time at the end.

Children and young people in our classrooms who want to learn Gaelic should be able to do so. We should utilise the technology. That has been alluded to a number of times. Why not create more virtual learning spaces? Why not create more virtual classrooms, in which pupils can be taught Gaelic—or any other subject—via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, if there is a risk that we do not have enough of a teaching complement?

The teaching and promotion of Scotland's languages must not be limited to Gaelic. That has been mentioned on a number of occasions.

All this discussion of diversity and culture, in the context of what it means to be a Scot and to enjoy the fantastic culture that we have as a nation, is the reason why I and my fellow Scottish Conservative colleagues believe that the teaching and promotion of Scots languages should be very much part of Scotland's language plan, and that we should revel in the local diversity that has been on display today—the diversity that, brought together, creates the richness of the country that we all love.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call the cabinet secretary to respond to the debate, for around 10 minutes.

16:48

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The debate has been constructive and useful, as we continue our on-going consultation on Gaelic and Scots.

Donald Cameron began, as always, with a speech that was very informative and exceptionally useful at this stage in our journey. He spoke in particular about the use of Gaelic as a community language. It is exceptionally important for us to be cognisant of that as we move forward. He also laid the challenge that legislation on its own cannot save a language. He is absolutely correct in that it is not just for us here in the Scottish Parliament but for everyone who has an interest in languages to ensure that we can work together on that. Legislation is but one small part of that.

Mr Cameron and many others spoke about the importance of Gaelic-medium education and the Robertson and Foxley report that came out recently. There are a number of important challenges and proposals on how to take the matter forward, and we recognise, as was mentioned in the consultation, the need for a strategic view of Gaelic-medium education. That is extremely important, and the Government recognises already that part of that is about increasing the number of Gaelic teachers in the system.

A number of measures are already in place to try to support and increase the number of GME teachers. We keep the matter under review, with new initiatives being considered and developed. A range of options, including postgraduate, undergraduate and remote learning options and immersion routes, is in place for students and teachers to enter GME teaching, but more can be done and we know that there is a need for improvement. My officials are meeting Bruce Robertson and Michael Foxley at the start of December and we will certainly make sure that they look at all the consultation responses that we get in on the matter, to see what more can be done. As Donald Cameron and others pointed out, it is something that we must be cognisant of and we know that it is very important for us to protect and grow the Gaelic language and its use.

Michael Marra suggested that the motion was self-congratulatory, which I think was being a bit unkind—although I have to admit that I have written self-congratulatory motions for other debates that he and I have taken part in. *[Laughter.]* This motion was genuinely congratulating the work that there has been across parties over time on Gaelic and Scots. Again, I recognise that there is more to do and the consultation is a part of that.

**Michael Marra:** I appreciate the cabinet secretary's comments on that, but there is a real frustration, particularly in the Western Isles, given the current economic turmoil and the fact that we have ended up with empty shelves in the supermarkets. If people cannot live a life, how are they meant to sustain a community? That is the tension that I was hoping to illustrate and to which I ask the cabinet secretary to direct her comments.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** That is another very important point. When the member intervened on me in my introductory speech, I mentioned the working group that Kate Forbes initiated, which is looking at, for example, issues around increasing the population in communities, retention of communities, affordable housing, transport, and increasing the use of Gaelic as an economic asset in those areas. The working group is due to report this winter, and we will look at its report. Of course, we recognise the impact of policies right across Government on that important issue.

I pay tribute to the many development officers and community officers that there are across Scotland. There are about 50 posts and those officers are creating opportunities for the use of the Gaelic language, which is a very important part of our work. We recognise that there is a real need to ensure that Gaelic is being used and that its use is being encouraged, in both public services and the private sector in different parts of our communities.

Willie Rennie spoke about the need to get on with it when it comes to the creation of the Gàidhealtachd. I suggest that he listens to the debate. There were different thoughts on the issue in the debate, and we have already had differing views in the consultation. There is a genuine offer for folks to come forward with their thoughts on the creation of the Gàidhealtachd, and, if that were to happen, where it should be located. It is a very important issue for us to look at and get right.

Emma Harper spoke very eloquently in Scots, as she always does, particularly about the Scots words holding up this Parliament, which it is important that we recognise. She also mentioned a number of authors, particularly younger ones, and those in the arts who promote Scots. I am mindful of their work to promote the Scots language as we move forward.

Emma Harper also spoke about whether we needed an equivalent of Bòrd na Gàidhlig for Scots or whether the Scots Language Centre could fulfil a similar role. The consultation will genuinely look at what would be right for Scots, rather than looking at what is done for Gaelic and making a comparison. The consultation suggests building up the use of the Scots Language Centre as an option, but I am sure that it will receive a variety of views on that. I look forward to seeing what people suggest is the best way forward.

Murdo Fraser mentioned Walter Scott and talked about his knowledge of Scots coming from school. As I said in my opening speech, I did not have such a positive experience of being introduced to Scots, except on one day a year—Burns day. Thankfully, we are moving on from that, but we still need to ensure that knowledge of Scots flourishes in all parts of our schools where there is a wish for that to happen.

Given that it is Scottish book week, as well as taking up what Murdo Fraser said about the importance of Walter Scott to Scottish literature, I will mention a reasonably new book by Graeme Armstrong. “The Young Team” is written in Scots, uses Scots and is an exceptionally important and powerful illustration of how Scots can be used in a very new and comprehensive manner on a subject that is important to all of us—growing up in Scotland.

There was also a discussion about Gaelic-medium education and ensuring that that is provided where there is demand for that to happen. The consultation asks genuine questions about whether we have the balance right on Gaelic-medium education, with parents having to prove that there is a demand for it. Where should the balance between the role of parents and the role of local authorities lie in that regard? There will be a variety of views on that. In relation to how we can move forward, the very fair point was

made that we might have moved on from what was right when the previous legislation was passed, and that perhaps we should look at a different approach. I would certainly expect changes in that area. What those changes will be will very much depend on the consultation responses.

Alasdair Allan outdid us all by speaking in Gaelic and in Scots. He again stressed the importance of using Gaelic as a community language. That is exceptionally important.

In her contribution on Scots, Jackie Dunbar got to the heart of an issue that is of particular importance to me—the use of Scots in education and its ability to improve young people’s attainment. Numerous studies have shown that if we enable a young person to see the value of their own language, whether that is Doric, Scots or Gaelic, as well as gaining a better appreciation of their home language, their use of English improves, as does their confidence overall. Kaukab Stewart’s anecdote about “The Wee Rid Motor” from her time as a teacher summed that up exceptionally well.

I reassure Rhoda Grant that, when we look at the consultation, we will consider the different needs of Scots and Gaelic. They will be looked at separately. The two languages differ greatly in where they are used and in what their challenges are and, therefore, what the solutions will be. I recognise Sabhal Mòr Ostaig’s move to be recognised as a small specialist institution. I visited its campus recently and had an exceptionally enjoyable time. I know that it is continuing to work with the Scottish Funding Council on the SFC’s criteria on SSIs to see what can be done on that.

Ariane Burgess and Martin Whitfield mentioned what is happening in Edinburgh in relation to the demands for a Gaelic-medium education secondary school. I recently had a useful and constructive meeting with the parents concerned. We have worked with the City of Edinburgh Council in an effort to find a suitable site. None of the Scottish Government’s properties is of use for that. Therefore, the council needs to make early progress on the issue. I was disappointed to find out that, certainly at the time that I met those parents, the City of Edinburgh Council had not met with them since the local government elections. I have written to the council to encourage it to do so.

I have not had the time, in my closing remarks, to give due attention to a number of speakers, but I will add a bit of consensus at the end. As Martin Whitfield said, we have a real opportunity to produce an exceptionally good bill, which is important, given the impact that it could have on

Gaelic and Scots across Scotland. That is a very important aspect of my role.

I thank members for their contributions and suggestions today about how we can improve our support for Gaelic and Scots, and I look forward to continuing the debate as the Scots languages bill eventually gets to Parliament later in the current session.

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-06763.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06763, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the future of Gaelic and Scots, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-06763.2, in the name of Michael Marra, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06763, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the future of Gaelic and Scots, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-06763, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the future of Gaelic and Scots, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Scottish Government recognises the value of Gaelic and Scots and welcomes efforts of public bodies, stakeholders and the communities in supporting their growth and development; welcomes the progress that has been made in recent years with support for Gaelic in community initiatives, guidance and legislation, national structures and a wide range of projects and educational resources; further welcomes Scottish Government commitments to build on this progress, including the introduction of a Scottish Languages Bill in this parliamentary session, the establishment of a new strategic approach to Gaelic Medium Education, the development of a Gàidhealtachd, and reviewing the structure and functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig; calls on all MSPs to promote the Scottish Government's ongoing consultation on these commitments, to encourage people across Scotland to play their part in supporting a vibrant future for Gaelic and Scots; acknowledges that challenges exist in the promotion of Gaelic, in particular, the difficulties facing local authorities in filling Gaelic Medium Education teacher vacancies at primary and secondary level, with a consequential impact on subject choice in schools; urges MSPs to unite collectively to address these issues so that all of Scotland's languages can flourish; highlights the importance of protecting Gaelic and halting its decline in its heartlands in recent decades, by ensuring the increase of Gaelic speakers and protecting current Gaelic speaking communities by providing good quality jobs and housing to arrest depopulation in these areas, and by addressing current issues around regional economic inequality, connectivity and transport infrastructure as a matter of urgency; recognises the diversity of learners and speakers of Gaelic and Scots, and believes that more must be done to bring the promotion of these languages closer to communities across Scotland, and understands that cultural and social infrastructure across the country plays a key role in promoting local histories and languages that must be protected and enhanced.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## Neurological Conditions

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06230, in the name of Alexander Burnett, on improving outcomes for people with neurological conditions. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the *Together for the One in Six* report from the Neurological Alliance of Scotland; understands that the report draws its conclusions and recommendations from a survey of over 800 people living in Scotland with a neurological condition; notes that the report found there were delays in the diagnosis of and treatment for neurological conditions; considers that these findings are the result of pre-existing structural problems, exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; further considers that the Scottish Government's plan to implement the Strategic Framework for Action on Neurological Care and Support has been delayed, and is unlikely to have achieved its objectives by its end point in 2025; highlights the view that services for children and young people with neurological conditions should be included in future strategic work; understands that the report concluded that there was a lack of data around the wider prevalence of neurological conditions, and notes the view that the Scottish Government must now address this and begin work to develop a comprehensive plan that ensures Scotland, including Aberdeenshire West, has the workforce and resources to support people with neurological conditions now and deliver better outcomes for them in the future.

17:03

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** I thank members from across the Parliament for their support in lodging the motion for debate.

The motion speaks to the report, "Together for the One in Six, Findings from the My Neuro Survey in Scotland", from the Neurological Alliance of Scotland, which is an umbrella body of organisations that represent people who have neurological conditions. I thank the alliance for its hard work and am delighted that some of its members are able to join us in the gallery today.

The report presents findings from a recent patient experience survey. It is the only survey of its kind, exploring the views of people who live with a wide range of neurological conditions, and this was the first time that residents of Scotland participated.

The debate is important because there is a serious lack of funding for care and for data collection, when it comes to neurological conditions, which can be hard to diagnose and treat. A primary recommendation is to improve data collection, so that there is greater knowledge of how many people live with each condition. I



understand that the Scottish Government funded the Scottish primary care information resource—SPIRE—to collect such data, but I regret that the data's publication has already been delayed by six months. In addition, the data considers only primary care. That is limiting and will not give an accurate picture of prevalence.

The Scottish Government's "Neurological Care and Support in Scotland: A Framework for Action 2020–2025" plans to allocate £4.5 million to improving care for people with neurological conditions. One project is the epilepsy register, which has helped people to understand prevalence and improve outcomes—for example, by identifying unscheduled care and hospital admissions among people with epilepsy and targeting care at those who are at greatest risk of harm.

However, that is just the start. Such an approach needs to be implemented for all neurological conditions. Covid has undoubtedly caused major disruption, but issues with care and treatment extend beyond the pandemic.

According to the survey, 37 per cent of adults in Scotland wait more than 12 months from first symptoms to getting a diagnosis. It is disappointing that the Scottish Government's framework for action excludes children and young people. I ask the minister to include children and young people in the focus of future projects, because we know that delays for children are worse here than they are anywhere else in the United Kingdom, which is simply appalling.

As for adults, 15 per cent have not seen a specialist nurse for more than a year, and nearly half report delays to routine appointments with neurologists.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I am someone who experiences such care, and at my annual check-up I often find that the person who I see knows less about my condition than I do. It is important not just that we have routine check-ups but that there is knowledge and expertise of the particular neurological condition for which someone is seeking help and therapy.

**Alexander Burnett:** I thank the member for his intervention: I will certainly come on to the knowledge gap and hope that the minister will be able to address it, when she speaks.

I have heard from constituents such as Steve, who has sleep apnoea, peripheral neuropathy, autism and functional neurological disorder. He told me that he had to travel to Dundee to speak to neurologists and to move between private treatment and national health service treatment due to long waiting lists and lack of appropriate NHS treatment pathways. Again, that is completely unacceptable.

It is clear that the lack of specialist training and recruitment is key. For example, there are just three private consultants and five NHS consultants at Aberdeen royal infirmary, and they cover not only Grampian but Moray, Orkney and Shetland, because the Scottish Government simply has not allocated appropriate resources to cater to patients' needs.

For the record, I express my disappointment that the Scottish Government's "National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care in Scotland", which was published in March, does not mention neurology once.

There are a variety of neurological conditions, including epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, motor neurone disease, Parkinson's disease, ME and others. Such conditions are complex: they can be lifelong and progressive and, in some cases, terminal. Symptoms and progression of conditions vary.

In addition, we do not know the implications of long Covid. I understand that 1 per cent of the survey's respondents have long Covid and have experienced the same issues with their treatment and care. A child in my constituency who has long Covid is having to seek private appointments in London.

From the outset, patients should be given detailed information to help them to come to terms with their condition and to understand what the future might look like for them and how their symptoms might progress. However, 30 per cent of adults and 38 per cent of children who responded said that they left the consulting room with no information about their condition. Again, that is simply not good enough. Patients are not getting the care and support that they need, and the result is that they do not understand their condition and there is a failure to initiate treatment—with a potential quickening in the progression of their disease.

We need a neurological workforce that is fit for purpose. For example, there is no ME or chronic fatigue syndrome specialist consultant in Scotland, and there is only one specialist nurse. Therefore, care becomes the responsibility of general practitioners, who do not receive adequate training in how to diagnose and manage conditions—that is the knowledge gap to which Daniel Johnson referred.

Training for healthcare professionals is urgently needed, as are early diagnosis and proper management, to give patients the best chance of long-term improvement.

Funding undoubtedly plays a key role. The report from the British Heart Foundation, "Solving the Puzzle: Ensuring the long term stability of Scotland's medical research environment",

highlighted that the Scottish Government budget for clinical research was just £65.5 million in 2018—and if we account for inflation, the figure has fallen by more than £13 million over the past decade. That amount is much smaller than the funding in the rest of the UK, and we can see the consequences of that—for example, in Scotland, the latest figures for funding for ME is just £1 per patient per year.

To date, £2.2 million of the Scottish Government's framework for action funding has been awarded to 37 projects, but half of it remains unspent. Therefore, I ask the minister to outline in her response tonight how she will allocate the remaining budget. Will the minister also provide insight into what happens to those projects, and commit to continue funding for neurological care and research after 2025? We still do not know the exact number of people in Scotland who suffer with neurological conditions because there is no adequate data system in place. What we do know is that the lack of research into, and funding for, neurological conditions and treatment is having negative consequences on the care and support that are available to patients.

There is no short-term fix; meanwhile, population data indicate that the prevalence of people living with neurological conditions is increasing over the long term. The five aims of the framework remain as relevant now, post-pandemic, as they were in 2020. To veer off course at this stage would be a disaster and would potentially make things much worse.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Burnett. I remind all members who wish to speak in the debate to ensure that their request-to-speak buttons are pressed.

17:11

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I am pleased to be able to contribute to today's debate on improving outcomes for people with neurological conditions, and I thank Alexander Burnett for bringing it to the chamber.

The brain is a very complex organ, and neurological conditions vary enormously. Those conditions can be caused by degenerative disease, stroke, accidents, mental ill health and, in rare cases, long Covid. The "Together for the One in Six" report from the Neurological Alliance of Scotland is interesting and extremely informative, and I thank the organisation for its briefing. The alliance says that an estimated 1 million people in Scotland live with neurological conditions including cerebral palsy, stroke, dementia and epilepsy, all of which are life changing.

The report explores the experiences of people with neurological conditions in Scotland, and has

gathered data on a wide range of topics, including the impact of Covid diagnosis and treatment, experience of hospital care, support for mental wellbeing, access to social care and welfare, education and employment.

However, the report also highlights issues including lack of staff—which was referred to by Alexander Burnett—and services that are needed to fully support people with neurological conditions. Those things lead to delays in diagnosis, treatment and routine appointments, as well as to difficulties in accessing mental wellbeing support.

Of course, none of those things is good, and the Scottish Government is very aware of the importance of early diagnosis and treatment. "Neurological Care and Support in Scotland: A Framework for Action 2020–2025" was published in December 2019, with £4.5 million of funding being made available over five years to deliver its commitments. It contains five overarching aims to support improvements that span health and social care. They are to

"Ensure people ... are partners in their care and support ... Improve the provision of co-ordinated health and social care and support for people with neurological conditions ... Ensure high standards of effective, person-centred, and safe care and support ... Ensure equitable and timely access to care and support across Scotland",

and, crucially, to

"Build a sustainable neurological workforce for the future".

Nineteen projects that support people with neurological conditions are to benefit from Scottish Government backing. The five-year support action plan includes projects that harness new techniques and technology and, of course, continued research into the conditions, which is already producing encouraging results for changing how we approach care of neurological conditions. The 2022-23 award will continue to support earlier projects, and will invest in new schemes such as the Migraine Trust and Epilepsy Scotland, among others.

The neurological action plan provides a clear vision to enable people who are affected to access the care and support that they need to live well on their own terms, and to cater to their own individual needs. However, the Covid pandemic has, as it has on all areas of healthcare, had an unprecedented and massive effect on delivery of the framework. The Scottish Government is committed to implementing all or part of the framework as soon as it possibly can, and it is determined to meet its objectives by 2025. I agree with Alexander Burnett that children and young people must be a priority, so I look forward to the minister's response on that.

People must be able to access the care, support and information that they need. Information must enable them to understand their condition following diagnosis, and signpost them to relevant resources for their changing requirements.

In Scotland, we are proud that we foster a society that treats all our people with kindness, dignity, respect and compassion, and I am pleased that that is embedded in the framework.

17:15

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank my esteemed colleague Alasdair—Alasdair? I mean Alexander—Burnett for bringing the debate to the chamber and allowing us once again to shine a light on the need for more Government focus on neurological conditions, for which perhaps I need to get checked after that mistake.

In our roles as MSPs, we get exposed to many issues that we have perhaps not considered before, and we have had opportunities to learn more on a diverse range of topics. I got interested in many topics in the neurological field when I was a member of the Public Petitions Committee as we considered petitions related to them. I even launched the national care framework for Huntington's disease at a Holyrood reception back in 2017.

During a Westminster debate on the subject, Hilary Benn noted that there had been

“a striking unity of purpose and resolve”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 9 November 2022; c 122.]

in both the Scottish and UK Parliaments, and many of us will have spoken in members' business debates in this chamber on many such topics, from multiple sclerosis to motor neurone disease. We do so because we recognise the importance of bringing those conditions into the light as we seek investment in delivering treatments, and even cures. However, it is only when those conditions hit closer to home that they become real.

A few years ago, I was due to speak in a motor neurone disease debate when, on that very day, I heard from a good friend of mine, Derek Stark, that another friend of mine, Doddie Weir, had been diagnosed with the condition. The news was made all the rawer because I expected to see him that weekend at a charity golf day. Those of us who know him well will know him as a larger-than-life character, a former international rugby player and just a magnificent storyteller. He was down to speak at that event. I discovered that at that time, he was actually on the other side of the world with his family to watch the Lions play in New Zealand, while he still had the capability of creating memories with his family.

As I said, it becomes all too real. Doddie was given probably 18 months to live. However, in true Doddie style, he has tackled his condition in the way that he has tackled life: head on. I have not seen him for quite a while because of Covid. The last time was at an event for MND, when he was still walking and talking and taking the Mickey out of all of us. It was great to see him on Saturday on the pitch at Murrayfield; it made me realise that it has been a while.

Early on in his diagnosis, Doddie was very frustrated with slow progress in the development of a treatment for MND and related conditions. He decided to form the My Name's Doddie Foundation to try and help fund research for a cure, knowing that it would come too late for him—I think that that is quite remarkable. His foundation has raised a significant seven-figure sum, all of which will go to help deliver a cure and support for MND.

Doddie's journey, along with the journeys of other sporting sufferers such as Rob Burrow, and the way in which the cause has been galvanised by the sporting world is such an inspiration.

Alexander Burnett spoke about the “Together for the One in Six” report from the Neurological Alliance of Scotland, which highlights the significant work that needs to be done by Governments, including the Scottish Government, in matching the drive and ambition of Doddie and his friends. Progress is far too slow, not because of a lack of know-how, but because of a lack of research funding, which is a drag on potential breakthroughs. Diagnosis is too slow, as is access to treatment, which is so important with these life-limiting conditions.

For a number of years, there has been a call for GPs and other medical staff to be given the knowledge that they need to recognise the symptoms and to treat them as soon as possible. Surely it is time that that was acted upon.

There is a huge mental health component to a diagnosis of a neurological condition, and we know how stretched mental health services are at the moment. With such life-shortening diagnoses, one would hope that mental health services would be readily available. The report, unfortunately, says otherwise.

I conclude with Doddie's words:

“My attitude is you should do what you can today and worry about tomorrow when it comes. This is the card I have been dealt, so I shall just crack on.”

It is time that the Scottish Government and other Governments cracked on, too. Doddie and his like are truly inspirational. Sporting communities have rallied round and done immeasurable work to highlight these issues. Will the Scottish Government accept that same challenge?

17:19

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I think that, in future, we should all refer to the member who just spoke as Bob Whittle.

I congratulate Alexander Burnett on securing this important debate on improving outcomes for people with neurological conditions. I also congratulate the Neurological Alliance of Scotland on the publication of “Together for the One in Six”, which is an important piece of work that marks the first time that fieldwork in the area has extended beyond England to provide a UK-wide survey and give us an important picture of the situation across the country.

As we heard, neurological conditions are those that affect the brain and spinal nerves. As the title of the report suggests, one in six people in the UK suffer with a neurological condition. We suspect that that is vastly underestimated.

Living with a neurological condition can be difficult and debilitating. More than 80 per cent of the adults and 95 per cent of the children who were consulted in the survey said that their condition negatively impacts their mental health.

The Scottish Government’s approach to supporting people who live with a neurological condition is patchy, at best, and I hope that the minister will acknowledge that there is considerable room for improvement. We have heard, outside and inside the Parliament, impassioned pleas for better support from people who are suffering with ME, long Covid, MS and Parkinson’s, among many other conditions.

The motion that I lodged last year on the need for specialist Huntington’s disease services received the support of 99 MSPs, but action has been slow. I would welcome the minister outlining how she will ensure that every area of Scotland gets—at last—the specialist Huntington’s care and support that is required. That was promised by the Scottish Government, which backed the national care framework for Huntington’s disease. However, the areas with the greatest need for support—NHS Borders, which has no HD specialist, NHS Forth Valley, which has no community-based HD specialist, and NHS Tayside, which has no formalised HD clinical lead—are still suffering from a lack of provision.

“Together for the One in Six” outlined that, although the pandemic has undoubtedly played a part in worsening the outlook for people with neurological conditions, the challenges were around long before Covid-19 first appeared on the horizon. There is also no doubt that the cost of living crisis will exacerbate the challenges, because it disproportionately affects people with neurological conditions.

As we have heard in the debate, data, workforce, mental health support and access to early diagnosis and services are of key importance. The statistics are bleak. As Alexander Burnett said, 50 per cent of adults experienced delays in accessing routine appointments with their specialist nurse. Some 30 per cent of adults and 38 per cent of children left the consulting room with no information about their condition and no idea where to go for further support, and 69 per cent of patients were not able to access specialist support when they needed it. We do not have up-to-date, accurate figures on how many people suffer from neurological conditions. If it is important, let us count it: we need data, because that is how we plan services.

Campaigners were fighting for action on the matter long before this debate, but the sense of urgency has never been greater. It is not good enough to leave people bearing the weight of neurological conditions without access to services and support. Up and down the country, people with neurological conditions feel ignored. They want and deserve to see action from this Government. At the very least, they want the Government to spend the money that Alexander Burnett highlighted as being underspent in the budget.

That is where the recommendations from “Together for the One in Six” come in. They are all actions that the Scottish Government can take now. The Neurological Alliance of Scotland has done the heavy lifting for the Government. It has spelled out what is needed. It is now up to the Government to act.

I hope that the minister will commit to seeing those actions through, for all people who live with a neurological condition and for the people who might one day receive such a diagnosis.

17:24

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I thank Alexander Burnett for bringing the debate to the chamber. The “Together for the One in Six” report from the Neurological Alliance of Scotland has highlighted a number of worrying issues, and I will draw on two examples from my constituency to give a bit of context.

The first example relates to essential tremor. I have raised the issue of making magnetic resonance-guided focused ultrasound—that will be the last time that I say that in the debate—available on the NHS in Scotland for essential tremor patients. The issue was raised by my constituent Mary Ramsay in her petition to the Parliament. We have the equipment and the skills available in Scotland, yet we are referring—and paying for—patients to be treated south of the

border because MRGFUS is available on the NHS in England.

Despite the long waiting lists in Scotland for deep brain stimulation, the Scottish Government refused to support the roll-out of MRGFUS on the NHS, although it is a less invasive and considerably less expensive procedure, which is available in Dundee. I hope that, next March at the drop-in event in the Parliament, the cabinet secretary will meet those who deliver MRGFUS treatment.

I turn to the provision of MS specialist nursing. Clinical standards were launched in 2009 to set out the level of care that people with MS should expect. The MS Society Scotland estimates that around 15,750 people in Scotland are living with MS, and the prevalence of MS in the Western Isles is among the highest in the world.

In 2011 in Parliament, I raised the issue of an MS specialist nurse for the Western Isles and, subsequently, an MS specialist nurse post was created in the Western Isles, in line with every mainland health board in Scotland. However, NHS Western Isles has now chosen to cut its specialist MS nurse post, along with its specialist epilepsy nurse, and replace them with a more generalist advanced neurology nurse. That was done without consultation with local people or national stakeholders, including the MS Society Scotland, which had provided pump-prime funding for the post initially.

The case load for that one generalist advanced neurology nurse has increased significantly—right now, it is estimated that that nurse supports 1,000 patients. The recommended case load for one nurse who is treating just MS patients is around 315, and that is with additional support that is not available in the Western Isles. Even under the NHS Western Isles proposal to have two full-time general neurology nurses, the case load is still far too high. I am concerned that the decision, which was made without consultation with patients, will be copied throughout Scotland, placing standards of care and accessibility of treatment at risk.

Let me be clear: the decision is one that does not save money; rather, it increases the cost and burden on the NHS. In a cost of living crisis, surely we should be supporting more localised delivery of specialist services. MS specialist nurses play a vital role in helping those who live with MS to access important rehabilitation, treatment and disease-modifying therapies that are shown to reduce the progression of their MS. Removing and reducing access to that vital care is putting patients at risk.

The evaluation project, generating evidence in MS services—GEMSS—suggests that on average, each MS specialist nurse saved £77,400

per year. I ask the Government to live up to its promises and ensure that MS nurse posts are retained.

17:28

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I thank Alexander Burnett for bringing this important matter to the chamber. It gives me great pleasure to take part in his debate, given the work that he carries out through the cross-party group on autism. I direct members to my entry in the register of members' interests—I am very pleased to be the vice chair of the ADHD Foundation.

I come from a perspective and with a knowledge of neurodevelopmental disorders and I apologise if I stray into those issues, which I think are very much neurological conditions. Given the broad range of neurological conditions, which encompasses epilepsy to autism, motor neurone disease to cerebral palsy, conditions that are lifelong to those that are sudden onset, and those that are chronic but stable to those that are degenerative and ultimately fatal, we need a broad understanding of the broad range of requirements that people have and the help and assistance that they need. It strikes me that the point that Alexander Burnett made in his introduction is therefore vital: we are talking about a broad range of conditions and needs, therefore we must have data. If we do not have data, we cannot ensure that we are addressing those conditions properly and properly providing services.

Data is not just important in itself. The act of capturing that data and screening it can help individuals. That is something that is well known and has long been called for. We frequently miss the opportunities to identify individuals who are at risk at the point that they come into contact with public services. We must capture the data not only to inform public policy, but in order to help individuals.

There is a real cost of not understanding these conditions, and certainly the conditions that I know most about. If we look at the criminal justice system, we see profound public policy failure. Around 25 per cent of the prison population is estimated to have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, compared with 5 per cent of the general population; 50 per cent of the prison population is dyslexic, compared with 15 per cent of the general population; autism is about three times overrepresented in the prison population; and 60 per cent of the prison population have suffered a traumatic brain injury.

That is shocking. It is a sign of public policy failure and I would say that it is a sign of injustice. It is something that we need to correct, and unless we understand the problem and collect the data,

we will never be able to do that. I ask the minister to say in her remarks whether there is an opportunity for those issues to be included, or at least thought about, when the Government makes its recommendations for a commissioner on learning disability, autism and neurodiversity. If not, they need to be given some consideration.

The issue is not just about ensuring that there are services and treatment for people, but about wider public policy. We are talking about conditions that are very often invisible disabilities, and therefore the issue is not just about services and treatment, but about making wider public policy decisions to maximise accessibility and ensure that people can lead a normal day-to-day life.

I echo and reinforce the points that have been made around access to diagnosis. The survey work is welcome, but it grossly underestimates the severity of the problem. My casework is full of people who are not just struggling to get a diagnosis or assessment within 12 months, but struggling to get it within two or even three years. That is an appalling failure. We cannot help people until they get the diagnosis that they need and understand their condition. The waiting times that people are currently experiencing are unacceptable. I would be very grateful to hear from the minister what is being done to improve waiting times for assessment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Maree Todd to respond to the debate.

Your microphone is not switched on, minister.

17:33

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** Many apologies for that rookie error, Presiding Officer.

I am absolutely delighted to respond on behalf of the Government to this important motion. As we continue to reform the delivery of health and social care in Scotland, I have been keen to hear at first hand about the neurological community's experiences and priorities. That is why we funded the Neurological Alliance of Scotland to facilitate a patient experience survey. We actively supported the alliance to produce the "Together for the One in Six" report and I discussed its findings with the cross-party group on epilepsy in June.

We want to know about people's experiences. We want to know where the gaps are. We want to improve services. We want to understand the experiences of those accessing care in Scotland, so that we can work in partnership to identify good practice and to drive up standards.

The timeframe for the report encompasses the most severe pressure that our NHS has ever

seen. We know that people have faced delays to diagnosis and treatment. We know that further action and investment is needed to ensure that people with neurological conditions access timely diagnosis and care, and we are working hard to address that through strategies such as our NHS recovery and workforce plans.

That is why our NHS recovery plan is backed by more than £1 billion of funding over five years. The plan will support increased diagnostic procedures and in-patient and out-patient activity in order to increase capacity and address backlogs of treatment as we work towards achieving the 12-week treatment time guarantee.

Through our neurological care and support framework, the Scottish Government and the centre for sustainable delivery are addressing workforce issues and care pathways. Through that neurological improvement work, we are supporting NHS boards to appoint the right staff, address neurology waiting times and improve training and career pathways.

Despite the disruption to health and social care services during the pandemic, we have sustained our efforts to deliver the commitments in our neurological framework. The focus of and funding for the framework have been maintained, and we have spent more than £2.1 million over the past two years on work to improve neurological care across Scotland. The work that has been commissioned has a wide scope and reach, and it will have a direct impact on improving patient care and support through patient and carer information, better integration of services, improving care pathways and workforce capacity planning.

The framework was published in 2019, and the health and social care landscape has significantly changed because of the pandemic. The shifting infrastructure has brought new challenges in implementing aspects of the improvement work. In the light of that, we are continually assessing how we prioritise and focus our efforts to best effect. Under the guidance of our national advisory committee for neurological conditions, we are prioritising the outcomes that will have the most impact. Despite those difficulties, we have demonstrated substantial progress and, in July, we published a mid-point report that sets out the significant impacts that have been made to date and the on-going work to bring about lasting improvements to neurological services.

Today, my colleagues have urged for better data collection, and I am pleased to say that a search of the Scottish primary care information resource data system has been completed for neurological conditions. We will publish new prevalence data for such conditions on 13 December, which will help to support future service planning.

**Brian Whittle:** Daniel Johnson said that neurological conditions are far too overrepresented in places such as prisons. As part of the work that the minister mentioned, will the Scottish Government consider how investment on one side of the ledger affects what happens on the other side of the ledger? That would allow us to continue to invest more in addressing neurological conditions.

**Maree Todd:** I am keen to look at how we invest money that will have the greatest impact. That is not about just the clinical impact; we will look at person-centred care and take a holistic approach in considering the entirety of people's needs.

There are challenges. We are talking about neurological care today, but I know that there is a big overlap with neurodevelopmental conditions. I think that Daniel Johnson was largely talking about the overrepresentation of neurodevelopmental conditions in prisons. The important thing is ensuring that individual patient needs are met and that we are able to treat people holistically in a person-centred way, wherever they present.

**Daniel Johnson:** I clearly pointed to TBI, which certainly has neurological aspects. We absolutely need to take a holistic approach, but it is also key to think about how, when people come into contact with public services and bodies, we use that as an opportunity to help them and to capture data in order to better understand the situation. That is important whether it relates to the Scottish Prison Service or the health service. Does the minister agree?

**Maree Todd:** I absolutely agree. There is a real opportunity to improve prisoners' health during their time in prison and to make an impact on their lives that will last way beyond their stay in prison. I could not agree more with that.

Alexander Burnett raised the issue of the workforce plan. Although the NHS recovery plan and the workforce plan were not condition specific, the aim is to effect whole-system recovery and support prioritisation and planning. I mentioned our national advisory committee for neurological conditions, which is identifying priorities to strengthen the neurological workforce, alongside the national workforce strategy, the remobilisation plan and the rehabilitation framework.

**Alexander Burnett:** Because we are so near the end of the debate, I will be so rude as to repeat the substance of the main question, which I asked, Jackie Baillie asked and the people in the public gallery have come to ask, too. Will the minister commit now to allocating the remaining £2.3 million by 2025?

**Maree Todd:** On allocating the remaining funding, we are continually assessing how we

prioritise and focus our efforts, under the guidance of the national advisory committee members, some of whom are also in the public gallery. They are guiding us and prioritising the actions that will have the greatest impact for people who are living with a neurological condition.

**Jackie Baillie:** I absolutely endorse the process that the minister outlined, but the question is simple—is the money still available to be spent?

**Maree Todd:** Yes, the money is still available to be spent, but we want to spend it with the greatest impact.

I will quickly cover a couple of other points that have been raised. I have met the Scottish Huntington's Association to discuss the points from Jackie Baillie's motion. Since 2015, we have committed more than £500,000 of funding to the association for work towards the development of a national care framework and to support the organisation's specialist support devices and its initiatives to raise awareness of the condition.

On patient information provision, through the neurological framework, we are funding several projects to improve the provision of good-quality information to people with neurological conditions. We are also working with NHS Inform, which is a fabulous platform and is, basically, our Scottish NHS on the web. We are working with consultant neurologists and third sector partners to review and create content on neurological conditions for that website. New and updated pages have been published for conditions such as MS, epilepsy, functional neurological disorder and Huntington's disease.

Because I have taken a few interventions, I am a little short of time. I thank everyone who contributed stories and experiences and I close by returning to the findings of the "Together for the One in Six" report. We know that data is not just data, because human stories and individual experiences are behind the numbers. I assure everyone that we will continue to work with the data, in order to understand the underlying factors, and to listen to lived experience as we develop solutions. We will also continue the improvement work that we have begun through the framework, by collaborating with partners across the statutory and third sectors, in order to achieve better outcomes and maximise the quality of life for people with neurological conditions.

*Meeting closed at 17:42.*





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