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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Wednesday 16 June 2021

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 June 2021

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon, colleagues. I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. I ask that members take care to observe the measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber. Please use the aisles and walkways only to access your seat or when moving around the chamber.

The first item of business is portfolio question time. In order to allow as many members as possible to ask their questions, I request that questions and answers be succinct. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or enter the letter R in the chat function during the relevant question.

The first question is from Patrick Harvie, who joins us remotely.

#### Rented Sector Strategy (Tenants Unions)

1. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government when ministers last met with tenants unions to discuss the development of the rented sector strategy. (S6O-00025)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** Tenant participation must be at the heart of developing the new rented sector strategy. Our regional network of tenant organisations already helps us to involve tenants who live in the social rented sector, and we have committed in “Housing to 2040” to establishing a tenant participation panel for private tenants. The forums will help us to ensure that tenants’ voices are heard in the development and delivery of the strategy and future policy making.

I am keen to meet tenant representatives and organisations that support tenants. Invitations for meetings with shortly be issued to representatives of both those groups as we begin work on the rented sector strategy.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am grateful for that answer, although I am still not clear when ministers last

met any tenants unions. Nationally and locally, tenants unions such as Living Rent have been playing a critical role in protecting tenants from abuse of power by irresponsible landlords. That has been especially important during the pandemic, yet there is no tenant organisation on the private rented sector resilience group. Perhaps that is why, at its last meeting, the group was looking forward to the end of the eviction ban when it should have been discussing how to extend the protection for tenants. Will the cabinet secretary give an assurance that the voices of Living Rent and other tenants unions will be central to the development of the new strategy, instead of once again allowing the interests of landlords to be dominant?

**Shona Robison:** Patrick Harvie will be aware that I have been in the job for a matter of weeks. I am, of course, keen to meet tenant representatives and organisations that support tenants. As I said, invitations to meetings will shortly be issued to representatives of both those groups. I want to look at how we engage with tenant groups more widely.

The resilience group provides a forum for open discussion of issues in the private rented sector. Citizens Advice Scotland and Shelter Scotland, which provide crucial advice and support directly to tenants across Scotland daily, are members of the group and are well placed to raise the issues and challenges that renters face. We always keep such issues under review, and I am keen to meet as many tenant organisations as I can.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Pam Duncan-Glancy to ask a supplementary question.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, but I think that I should have waited to press my button during one of the other questions. I am sorry.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Okay. That is not a problem.

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** I thank Patrick Harvie for raising the issue, and I welcome the cabinet secretary to her role. She has already touched on the question that—[Inaudible.] Are there plans to continue with the cross-sector housing resilience groups that were established at the height of the pandemic?

**Shona Robison:** I think that I caught the gist of that question. I am keen for the PRS resilience group to continue. It provides a useful forum for open discussion of the issues and challenges that face everyone, including tenants in the private rented sector, so it is wise for the forum to continue for the foreseeable future.

### Green Spaces (Residential Housing)

2. **Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what provision it plans to make for the inclusion of greenspaces within new residential housing developments. (S6O-00026)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** Our national planning framework 4 position statement indicates our policy aim of facilitating significant expansion of green infrastructure, which includes that within housing developments. That is further supported by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, whereby local authorities will have a duty to prepare open space strategies, helping to ensure that places are greener and healthier.

**Craig Hoy:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and welcome her to her new role. She will know that most housing developments share green space and that those areas are commonly factored. Despite the Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011 and subsequent moves to toughen the code of conduct, too many residents still complain about rogue factors who down tools while jacking up fees. Residents across the south of Scotland have raised concerns about the current framework, which gives too much power to factors and allows them to increase bills while determining how, and in some cases if, they manage green spaces on behalf of residents. Will the cabinet secretary look again at the regulation of factors to toughen the rules, making it easier for communities to remove rip-off operators who overcharge and under deliver?

**Shona Robison:** The member raises important questions about rogue factors and the impact that they can have on shared green spaces. The best that I can do is to write to the member, setting out some of the detail of how we might take those issues forward. I will ensure that officials do that in the next few days.

### Covid-19 (Local Government Support)

3. **Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is putting in place to assist local authorities with recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00027)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** Scotland's councils have been allocated an additional £1.5 billion over this year and last in direct support through the local government finance settlement. Councils have also been granted additional financial flexibilities to address the financial pressures caused by Covid-19. Furthermore, the 2021-22 local government settlement of almost £11.7 billion provides a cash increase in local

government day-to-day spending for local revenue services of £375.6 million, which is an increase of 3.5 per cent. The Scottish Government will continue working in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities.

**Gillian Martin:** The minister has largely answered my supplementary question, but I will ask it anyway, in case he can add any information. Local authorities have continued delivering front-line services through pandemic, while also assisting with the vaccine roll-out and planning for recovery. What financial support has been considered to ensure that local authorities have the capacity to continue doing that? We are not out of the pandemic yet.

**Ben Macpherson:** Local authorities will receive an additional £259 million this year to support Covid pressures. They will be able to spend that money as they see fit to provide the maximum benefit to their communities. To date, the Scottish Government has also provided local authorities with more than £5 million of direct support for contact tracing and vaccinations. Ministers across the Scottish Government are in regular dialogue with COSLA and we will continue to ensure that local authorities have the capacity to provide the help and support that are required at this crucial time.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** The minister will be acutely aware of concerns regarding fair funding for local government. I have consistently highlighted the underfunding of City of Edinburgh Council and the previous attempts to cut the council's central grant, most recently in relation to the proposed £3 million cut to the 2019 budget. As an Edinburgh MSP, the minister will be aware of that.

With that in mind, do Scottish National Party ministers plan to deliver a new financial framework after the pandemic that will ensure that councils will receive a set percentage of the Scottish Government budget, so that we finally see fair funding for local government?

**Ben Macpherson:** I refer Miles Briggs to my previous answers about the significant support that is being provided to local authorities. I also draw his attention to the important fact that financial settlements are negotiated between COSLA as a whole, acting on behalf of all 32 local authorities, and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy.

Due to the pandemic, work was delayed on the collective Scottish Government commitment to undertake joint working with COSLA to develop a rules-based fiscal framework to support future funding settlements for local government. The Scottish Government and COSLA officials have

recommended those discussions, to determine the scope of the work that is required. It is important to keep in mind that, for any changes to be made to how local government is funded, there would have to be agreement with COSLA to ensure that there is consensus, and such changes would have to be considered in the context of the wider budget process and financial pressures.

### Island Tourism (Short-term Lets)

4. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with island tourism representatives regarding proposed legislation to regulate short-term lets. (S6O-00028)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** We engaged with residents, local authorities and tourism representatives from across Scotland, including island communities, as part of our 2019 and 2020 public consultations. In 2019, we also commissioned independent research on the impact on communities of short-term lets. Five case-study areas were selected, which covered a mixture of rural, urban and island areas; Skye was the island case-study area. An island communities impact assessment was carried out in 2020 and published in December 2020, as part of our consultation report.

**Liam McArthur:** I welcome my former Justice Committee colleague to her new role.

In the previous session of the Parliament, the Government's licensing order was widely criticised as unfit for purpose and withdrawn at the eleventh hour, with the Government committing to respond to stakeholder concerns. Given the wide range of business and tourism bodies with members in island communities who support the proposal that the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers has made for a mandatory registration scheme for short-term lets, will the cabinet secretary say what consideration she has given to the proposal? Will she also advise us of the timeframe for making revised regulations?

**Shona Robison:** It is worth saying, first, that at the heart of the licensing scheme is a set of mandatory standards for all short-term lets in Scotland, which are geared towards protecting the safety of guests and neighbours. The approach was brought in because of the concerns that were being raised. Many hosts and operators are already meeting the standards, as a matter of compliance with existing law and best practice, and we do not consider the standards to be onerous.

We considered registration as part of our 2019 consultation. Having considered the findings of the research and consultation, in January 2020 we

announced that we would proceed with a licensing scheme, using powers under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. Registration would not offer the same protection as licensing offers to guests, neighbours and local communities.

On the timescale for legislation, I expect to be able to provide an update on progress shortly, when the relevant committee has been established and its convener appointed.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary accept that the previous proposals for regulation caused widespread concern about extra burdens being placed on bed and breakfast businesses and rural providers of self-catering accommodation to tackle a problem that is, ultimately, about antisocial behaviour and the lack of housing in cities? Will she consider the more flexible approach of allowing local authorities to determine whether they need a licensing system to tackle local problems in their areas?

**Shona Robison:** A number of concerns about short-term lets were raised, including the impact on local housing supply, noise and antisocial behaviour, and the issues were not confined to our cities.

The important point is to ensure basic safety, which is an important factor in every let in Scotland. I hope that the member agrees that there should be basic safety standards for all lets, of whatever type, including B and Bs.

Local authorities have been involved in the discussions and will set the fees to cover their costs in establishing and administering the scheme. I reassure the member that we do not expect the fees to be onerous. The business and regulatory impact assessment contains an estimated range of between £223 and £377 to cover a three-year licence, which I do not regard as overly onerous.

### Community Services (Local Government Support)

5. **Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support local government in the delivery of community services. (S6O-00029)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** The 2021-22 local government finance settlement of almost £11.7 billion includes an additional £375.6 million—or 3.5 per cent—for day-to-day revenue spending. In addition, the value of the overall Covid-19 support package for councils now totals more than £1.5 billion over this year and last year. Ultimately, it is for locally elected representatives to make local decisions on how best to deploy the resources at their disposal to deliver services to

their communities on the basis of their local needs and priorities.

**Graham Simpson:** The minister will be aware that concern has been raised by the Scottish Information and Library Council that many libraries that have been closed during the pandemic will not reopen. In my Central Scotland region, 13 libraries are closed at the moment and there are concerns for their future. Councils have a statutory duty to provide such services, so what is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that all libraries that have been closed by the pandemic will reopen?

**Ben Macpherson:** As I emphasised in my first answer, the fact that we have different spheres of governance here in Scotland means that local councillors have to make decisions affecting local communities. However, I appreciate the significance of the point and the tone in which Mr Simpson raised it. As citizens and representatives, we know the value of libraries in communities. If Mr Simpson would like to write to me with more details of the circumstances in his region, I would be very glad to receive that correspondence.

#### **Local Authorities (Permanent Financial Settlement)**

**6. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the local government minister has had with the finance secretary regarding creating a permanent financial settlement for local authorities. (S6O-00030)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** The Scottish ministers remain committed to undertaking joint work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to develop a rules-based fiscal framework to support future funding settlements for local government. Due to the pandemic, work has been delayed, but the Scottish Government and COSLA officials have now recommenced discussions to determine the scope of work required, and we understand that COSLA has convened a cross-party working group to consider its position. Any changes to the way in which local government is funded would need the agreement of COSLA.

**Alexander Burnett:** As the cabinet secretary will know, the Scottish Conservatives have called for a fair share of funding for our local authorities, so that local taxes raised are used to pay for local services. For too long, the north-east of Scotland has been underfunded; Aberdeenshire Council recorded a shortfall of £43.3 million this financial year, which has led to a situation in which more than 60 bridges will become unusable in the next 10 years and there is a serious issue with severe potholes across the region. Will the cabinet secretary accept that that is unfair to our north-

east communities and pledge to consider giving local authorities a fair share?

**Shona Robison:** Collectively, local authorities in the north-east of Scotland will have £51.4 million more to spend on vital day-to-day services in 2021-22 compared with the previous year and have been allocated more than £218 million to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic through the local government finance settlement, over and above their regular grant payments. Aberdeenshire Council will receive its fair share of a further £137 million, which is currently undistributed. The council will also receive its fair share of the 2021-22 funding that has been discussed and agreed with COSLA since the announcement of the settlement.

Alexander Burnett may wish to have a look at the United Kingdom Parliament Public Accounts Committee's report on local government finance, which has just been published. The report states:

"Typical council tax bills will rise by an average of 4.3% across England in 2021-22, meaning that local people could be paying more for less."

Perhaps the member should reflect on the fact that the Tories do one thing in government but complain here about local government funding in another place.

#### **Two-child Cap (Discussions)**

**7. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland regarding the joint letter signed by the devolved children's commissioners, which described the two-child cap as a

"clear breach of children's human rights". (S6O-00031)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** I have not spoken to the Children and Young People's Commissioner about this issue, but the Scottish Government agrees that the United Kingdom Government's two-child limit and its associated rape clause are abhorrent policies that push families into poverty.

Scottish Government analysis indicates that the two-child limit takes at least £120 million from low-income families in Scotland, and we will continue to call on the UK Government to do the right thing and reverse that harmful policy. For the sake of clarity, Scotland's social security system does not—and, under this Administration, never will—have a cap on the number of eligible children.

**Michelle Thomson:** I thank the minister not only for that answer but for calling out the UK Government on the two-child limit. Is he able to give further information on what steps are being

taken specifically in Scotland to give our Scottish children the best quality start in life?

**Ben Macpherson:** Absolutely. First of all, the Scottish Government has continually and consistently called on the UK Government to scrap the two-child limit, which, like its abhorrent rape clause, is unnecessary and wrong-headed, and we have also urged it to stop its plans to cut universal credit by £20 a week at the end of September and instead to maintain that extra money.

The Scottish Government is doing what it can with the powers and resources that we have to increase incomes, reduce household costs and mitigate the impacts of poverty on children. That includes delivering new support to families with children under the age of six through the Scottish child payment, which is worth £40 per child every four weeks, and delivering bridging payments for older children and young people worth the equivalent of the Scottish child payment until that is fully rolled out. We have also committed to doubling the payment to £80 per child every four weeks at the earliest possible opportunity.

#### **Scottish Child Payment (Renfrewshire North and West)**

8. **Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many families in the Renfrewshire North and West constituency it estimates will receive support from the roll-out of the Scottish child payment. (S6O-00032)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** Using the latest available forecasts based on take-up assumptions for the payment that were published by the Scottish Fiscal Commission in January 2021, Scottish Government analysis estimates that the number of families receiving the under-sixes payment in Renfrewshire North and West could be around 1,200 this financial year 2021-22.

The Scottish Government is committed to rolling out the payment to under-16s by the end of 2022, subject to the Department for Work and Pensions providing us with the data that we need to do so. In 2023-24, the first full financial year of the payment for under-16s, the number of families receiving the under-16s payment in Renfrewshire North and West could be around 2,100.

**Natalie Don:** The Scottish child payment will make a massive difference and help lift many children in my constituency out of poverty. However, the United Kingdom Government's welfare policies are having the opposite effect. The Children and Young People's Commissioner

Scotland has said that, if the UK Government scraps the £20 universal credit uplift in September, "effectively it will knock out the benefits that the Scottish Child Payment brings into families."

Does the cabinet secretary think that the UK Government should start matching our ambitions and introduce anti-poverty measures instead of cuts?

**Shona Robison:** I thank Natalie Don for her very important question, and I absolutely agree with her and the children's commissioner.

While this Government is focused on tackling poverty through significant investment, including the introduction of the Scottish child payment, the UK Government's planned £20 cut to universal credit will push 60,000 families, including 20,000 children, into poverty across Scotland. That is not the only policy that penalises families; there is also, among other issues, the benefit cap, the two-child limit and the five-week wait for universal credit.

We have written to the UK Government on numerous occasions, asking for the uplift to be made permanent and extended to legacy benefits. The sheer scale of its cuts makes mitigation by the Scottish Government unsustainable. Because these policies hold back families in need, they must be scrapped, which is why we in Scotland need full powers to tackle child poverty.

### **Constitution, External Affairs and Culture**

#### **International Aid (United Kingdom Commitments)**

1. **Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what representations it has made to the UK Government regarding the UK's commitments to international aid. (S6O-00033)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** The Scottish Government has made clear its position, first through the First Minister writing in November 2020, and subsequently directly to the UK Government. Both his predecessor and—only yesterday—the new Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture have written to the Foreign Secretary to outline our opposition to the cuts to overseas aid. In addition, I wrote to the Parliament's cross-party group on international development regarding that matter in January of this year.

We believe the UK Government's decision to cut official development assistance spending from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent of gross national income to be a deplorable one. At a time when we are still

responding to a global pandemic, we should not be turning our back on the world's poorest and most marginalised communities.

**Michael Marra:** Perhaps the key issue that international efforts face at the moment is that of vaccination roll-outs. Scotland's partner nations, which include countries such as Malawi, currently have 0.1 per cent of their population vaccinated. It is clear that none of us is safe until all of us are safe.

What support with public health infrastructure is the Scottish Government offering partner nations so that vaccines can reach people's arms?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Michael Marra is absolutely correct to say that none of us is safe until all of us are safe.

The UK Government is a member of the Covid-19 vaccines global access—COVAX—scheme but, as a Government, we are not. However, we have responded to the pandemic in two different ways. First, last year, I undertook a review of our international development policy to ensure that it was fit for purpose. Secondly, in the previous session of Parliament, we committed £2 million in funding for UNICEF to use in the fight against Covid in our partner countries, including Malawi.

Michael Marra will also be aware of the additional £5 million that we committed to provide in our manifesto, the purpose of which is to help our partner countries in the fight against Covid. Support for the public sector in our partner countries, which Michael Marra touched on, and building up resilience will be a huge part of that effort.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary to a particular question, they should request to do so by pressing their request-to-speak button or entering R in the chat function while the relevant question is being addressed.

### Scots Makar (Appointment)

2. **Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the appointment of the new makar. (S6O-00034)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I welcome you to your place, Presiding Officer, and I congratulate Sharon Dowey on her election to the Scottish Parliament.

Jackie Kay's tenure as the national poet for Scotland, or makar, ended in March 2021, and I would like to thank her for all her inspirational work over the past five years. I am sure that I speak on behalf of all members in all parties across the chamber in wishing her well. The process to

appoint the next makar is under way and an announcement will be made once that process has reached its conclusion.

**Sharon Dowey:** I, too, want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the former makar Jackie Kay. Her poetry brought joy to many and she will be sorely missed.

Scotland's makar is responsible not only for celebrating our nation's poetry and language, but for conserving and cultivating it for future generations. However, that tradition is under threat. A recent study by language learning app Busuu named Scots as one of 12 European languages that are now vulnerable to extinction. Quite correctly, the Scottish Government has moved to encourage Gaelic speaking, but I represent Alloway, the birthplace of Burns and the cradle of the modern Scots tongue. Is the Scottish Government confident that it can halt the decline of Scots? What action is being taken to increase the number of Scots speakers? By when will that be achieved?

**Angus Robertson:** I thank the member for her question. It is great to hear that there is support for the Scots language—and also, I imagine, for Gaelic, as one of our indigenous languages—among Conservative members.

The Scottish Government is determined to keep working with the Scots-speaking community and the Gaelic-speaking community to do all that we can to ensure that the languages flourish and remain a vital part of Scotland's cultural identity. As part of the process to appoint a new makar, a panel of poetry experts with a range of experience, including of Scots and Gaelic poetry, has developed a shortlist, and the final decision will be made in due course.

### Covid-19 (Cultural Sector)

3. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the cultural sector. (S6O-00035)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I acknowledge the member's interest in the subject. I know that he was a member of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee in the previous parliamentary session.

The Scottish Government recognises that the culture sector has been among the sectors that have been hardest hit by the pandemic and that it will continue to face challenges even as restrictions ease. Since the pandemic started, we have worked closely with all parts of the sector to understand its impact, including what support is needed. We have provided more than £149 million

to the culture and heritage sectors, most recently through an additional £25 million for cultural organisations and venues that remain affected by restrictions. The member will wish to know that we remain committed to working with the sector to support its recovery and that we will continue to engage with it to understand and assess the impact of the pandemic and help to plot a way out of the crisis.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** This week, we have seen thousands of football supporters descend on Hampden park and the fan zone in Glasgow. However, many other outdoor events, such as arts performances, festivals and local agricultural shows, remain under strict limitations, with many people unable to take place because of restrictions or the uncertainty about the levels system. Those events are often significant drivers of our tourism sector and local economies across Scotland, particularly in my Highlands and Islands region.

What is being done to gather key information from this week's events in Glasgow? When will that information be made publicly available, and how can it be used to support other event organisers to plan ahead for their events with more confidence?

**Angus Robertson:** One of the first things that I did after my appointment as cabinet secretary with responsibility for culture was call a meeting of stakeholders, principally across the events sector, at which I heard at first hand the challenges that they are facing. We are acutely aware of the challenges that the sector is facing, and for many stakeholders they are existential challenges. We are doing as much as we can, given the Covid circumstances that we find ourselves in.

I am not certain whether the member was in the chamber yesterday when the First Minister updated us on the situation that we face in Scotland, but she made specific reference to the importance of the arts and culture sector. He—and we all—should expect to hear more on that next week. I assure him that we are absolutely seized of the importance of trying to open up Scotland's civic, artistic and cultural life as quickly, but as safely, as possible.

### **Brexit (Impacts)**

4. **Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its latest engagement has been with the United Kingdom Government regarding the impacts of Brexit. (S6O-00036)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I reiterate a pretty important point that needs to be stressed: Scotland voted against Brexit. We should never lose sight of that.

Nevertheless, the Scottish Government continues to engage constructively on readiness issues, as we have done up to now, and we will continue to press the UK Government to ensure that the Scottish Government has the information that we need to respond to the impacts of Brexit.

Several structures are in place for engagement between the Scottish and UK Governments, involving both the Cabinet Office and UK Government departments—at official and ministerial levels—for the purposes of sharing information and considering mitigations for the impacts of Brexit.

Since 1 January 2021, the Scottish Government has attended 26 meetings of the EU Exit Operations Committee. The meetings are chaired by Lord Frost and were previously chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. That committee continues as the main UK ministerial meeting on broader transition impacts. Invitations to attend XO meetings are issued by the UK Government when it considers that devolved issues are impacted, and the Scottish Government has accepted all invitations as routes to engage on our interests.

**Evelyn Tweed:** It is important that the UK Government meaningfully involves the Scottish Government in on-going EU and UK discussions such as those at the EU-UK Partnership Council and the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee, because those talks will directly impact on the lives and livelihoods of the people of Scotland.

Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the extent to which the Scottish Government has been involved in such talks? Does he believe that it is sufficient to ensure that the Scottish Government's views are taken into account?

**Angus Robertson:** I commend the member for asking that question. The Scottish Government should be involved in the full range of trade and co-operation agreement governance structures, including the Partnership Council and its advisory bodies, the specialised committees and the trade specialised committees. Our involvement should also extend across the joint committee and its associated specialised committees under the withdrawal agreement. Those are the two international treaties that oversee EU and UK relations, and both have significant implications for Scotland.

However, the scope of our role goes beyond the responsibilities for devolved areas of policy, and we have written to Lord Frost to set out that our interests also encompass all implementation responsibilities for reserved issues and a legitimate wider interest in reserved issues that have implications for Scotland.

My colleague Ms Gilruth attended the EU-UK Partnership Council meeting on 9 June on my behalf, although formal speaking roles were limited to the UK Government and the EU. The Scottish Government also requested of the UK Government that it be allowed to attend and speak at the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee meeting, which was held on the same day, but that request was declined. Those arrangements are far from satisfactory and we are pressing for significant improvements.

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary have concerns about the shortages of seasonal agricultural workers during the picking season due to the ending of free movement? Can he provide an update on the Scottish Government's latest engagement with the UK Government about steps that can be taken to address potential shortages of workers in key sectors, including hospitality and construction?

**Angus Robertson:** I commend Jim Fairlie. More than anybody else in the chamber, he understands the pressures that have been felt—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, please be mindful of the microphone, so that we can all hear you.

**Angus Robertson:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. It is my first outing, so I appeal for your forgiveness.

With his background, Jim Fairlie knows more than most in this chamber about the subject that we are discussing. The UK Government's new immigration policies fail to address Scotland's distinct demographic and economic needs, and they completely disregard key sectors, including those that were mentioned in the supplementary question. Scottish Government ministers have written to the UK Government multiple times to request engagement, but we have still not been offered a meeting to discuss the impact of the points-based immigration system. A one-size-fits-all approach to immigration is no longer appropriate—Scotland needs to explore a distinctive approach.

### **Travelling Artistes (Practical Support)**

**5. Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what practical support it has offered for travelling artistes, in light of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. (S6O-00037)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** The Scottish Government recognises the barriers that touring artistes are likely to face as a result of the UK's exit from the EU. We acted quickly to provide funding for Arts Infopoint UK, which will provide

advice and support on obtaining visas. Beatrice Wishart will also be aware of the manifesto commitment to develop a Scotland touring fund for theatre and music within the first 100 days of this Government, details of which will be shared very soon.

The Scottish Government has repeatedly called on the UK Government to negotiate visa and work permit-free arrangements for artistes who work in the EU on a short-term basis, and I continue to make the case for such arrangements in engagements with my UK counterparts.

**Beatrice Wishart:** I thank the minister for that answer. I am pleased to hear that progress has been made. As we know, artistes cannot tour at the moment, but time is needed if they are to plan ahead and make their way through new, complicated arrangements. Therefore, can the Scottish Government ensure that there is practical Covid travel advice alongside other guidance, such as guidance on regional restrictions in different countries?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Beatrice Wishart raises a really important point on the issue of practical travel advice, and I will certainly take that away. The reality that she sets out is that the work of many people in the field of international touring, exhibiting and production has been curtailed because of the ending of freedom of movement, but there are also increased costs relating to the potential requirement for visas and work permits, customs requirements and limits on road haulage. The last point is important for touring when performers carry a significant amount of equipment with them.

As I mentioned in my initial response, we have made our feelings on the matter very clear to the UK Government, particularly with regard to our supporting a four-nations approach to devolved competencies in the area. On that final point, I am due to meet the UK Minister of State for Digital and Culture tomorrow to discuss the issues in more detail.

**Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that the red tape that travelling artistes face as a result of Brexit is unacceptable and that the best way to support them would be through the restoration of the freedom of movement?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Natalie Don is absolutely correct. It is also important to remember that all the uncertainty and additional bureaucracy that Brexit has caused were entirely preventable. The UK Government could have extended the transition period but chose not to do so. Within the transition period, up until the end of December last year, freedom of movement was still possible. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement has a review

clause in it that allows both parties to revisit the list of permitted activities for short-term business visitors, so the UK Government needs to reopen discussions with the EU in order to develop a new model that looks at the needs of touring artistes. However, even that will not be a comparable substitute for freedom of movement.

### National Towns of Culture

**6. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans for national towns of culture. (S6O-00038)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** Our manifesto commitment contains a pledge to extend the reach of the arts by launching an open competition for further national towns of culture, using the successful example of Scotland's national book town, Wigtown, as a model. That could involve different art forms for which Scotland has a track record of excellence, including live music and visual art. The Scottish Government will consider how best to realise that commitment during the course of the parliamentary session, and we will communicate our plans in due course.

**Neil Bibby:** Paisley holds the distinction of being the first town to be shortlisted for the United Kingdom city of culture, having put forward a bid that linked cultural participation to social and economic renewal. Does the minister agree that a celebration of culture in a community can be a catalyst for action on economic and social need? Will she consider how the national towns of culture programme will focus on, and can help us to address, the stark economic and regional inequalities that are still faced by too many communities, particularly in the west of Scotland?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am aware of the good work that went into the Paisley bid to be the UK city of culture. Neil Bibby will correct me if I am wrong, but I think that Paisley was the only place in Scotland that was shortlisted for the 2021 title. The bid campaign was, of course, a really great celebration of Paisley's rich history and culture, and a catalyst for economic change, as Neil Bibby mentioned.

Neil Bibby has made an important point about the national towns of culture programme and the economic and social needs of towns. Right now, culture is more important than ever to Scotland's collective wellbeing and prosperity, and the past year has shown us how integral communities are to a sense of identity and purpose. I know from my own experience of celebrating and promoting the 70th birthday of Glenrothes how important it is to make culture relevant to people's lives and to instil a sense of pride in folk about the place that they come from.

I hope that Neil Bibby is assured that the Government will consider what he has set out with regard to social and economic needs in respect of our national towns of culture programme. I would be more than happy to sit down with him and discuss any ideas that he might have about how we can develop the programme.

### Edinburgh Festivals (Support)

**7. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support and assistance it is offering to the organisers of this summer's Edinburgh festivals. (S6O-00039)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I acknowledge the interests of the member for Edinburgh Southern. As fellow members of the Scottish Parliament representing the capital, we both understand how important Edinburgh's festivals are.

The Scottish Government is working closely with EventScotland, the City of Edinburgh Council and clinicians to deliver plans to allow certain exemptions to the existing guidance for a small number of outdoor cultural events at the Edinburgh international festival and the Edinburgh fringe. We are looking closely at Covid-19 mitigations at those events and the status of the pandemic. That is being managed through the flagship events process, which aims to support a small number of internationally significant events to take place this year.

In partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council, we have jointly made available £1.3 million to cover costs that will allow those festival events to happen safely. EventScotland is now preparing for contracting discussions with the relevant producers.

**Daniel Johnson:** I hope that I do not need to declare an interest when it comes to talking about Edinburgh.

Following the First Minister's announcement yesterday, the chief executive of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, Shona McCarthy, said that it is "hugely disappointing" that there is still no clear guidance on how the event can go ahead this year, in particular with regard to 1m social distancing. We can all understand the difficulties in stating when changes will occur, but the Government must be clear about what the restrictions will be when they come into effect. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that there will be no further delays to the social distancing guidance and that he will engage with the fringe festival on how it can implement the guidance once it is released?

**Angus Robertson:** I can give Daniel Johnson an absolute assurance. I am not sure whether he was in the chamber when the First Minister made her statement yesterday. If he was, he would have heard her make that commitment, which is very welcome.

I hope that we all agree that we want restrictions to be lifted as quickly but as safely as possible. I totally understand and acknowledge that, in the cultural community, people want maximum transparency and advance warning of when changes are possible. We have listened very closely to representatives of the sector in the broadest sense across Scotland and particularly in Edinburgh, given that the Edinburgh festivals are approaching in the next months.

In the meantime, I urge everybody and anybody to support the Edinburgh festivals. They are operating under different circumstances, but tickets are for sale. I encourage as many people as possible to support them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Annie Wells is joining us remotely for question 8.

#### **Covid-19 (Support for Arts and Culture in Glasgow)**

**8. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the arts and cultural sector in Glasgow, in light of the continued impact of Covid-19 restrictions. (S6O-00040)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** The arts and cultural sector in Glasgow is hugely important to the wider city economy, and I very much recognise some of the frustration that has been felt by the sector with regard to the Covid-19 restrictions. Glasgow has a rich and diverse cultural sector, and it is imperative that Government works to protect that.

Yesterday, I met members of the events industry advisory group, which includes representatives from Glasgow. Last month, too, the cabinet secretary and I met representatives of the culture sector, including people who are based in Glasgow. On Monday, I attended the Scotland-Czech Republic match at Hampden—we will not talk about the score—which was one of our flagship gateway events; the direct lessons that are learned from the event will inform our thinking as we devise, in partnership with the sector, a route map out of the pandemic.

**Annie Wells:** Painful Covid restrictions on Scotland's culture scene, from concert halls to cinemas, have had a brutal effect on people's livelihoods. Given that the First Minister acknowledged yesterday that there are perceived

anomalies in the rules, what action is the minister taking to reassure people who work in the culture sector—including in Glasgow, which remains in level 2—that their voices will not be ignored?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Annie Wells makes a salient point about the effects on people's livelihoods, and I want to convey to her that the cabinet secretary and I are very much in listening mode with the sector. Obviously, my ministerial responsibilities in relation to culture are new and the cabinet secretary is new, too, but we have had a lot of engagement thus far and have been listening to people in the sector.

The Scottish Government has supported organisations and individuals in Glasgow with more than £18 million through Creative Scotland's Covid-19 relief fund. For example, Glasgow Life received significant funding to help performing arts venues that were closed, including more than £500,000 for the Tramway and £250,000 for the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, Old Fruitmarket and City Halls, and the Kelvingrove bandstand.

Last week, further rounds of the performing arts venues relief fund and the cultural organisations and venues recovery fund were launched, in direct recognition of the on-going challenges that many businesses in the culture sector face, which Annie Wells set out.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions. We will have a short pause while the other Deputy Presiding Officer makes his way here.

## **Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) Scotland Act 2021**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon. I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. I encourage members to observe them, including when entering and exiting the chamber. Please use only aisles and walkways to access your seat and when moving around the chamber.

The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney giving an update on the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) Scotland Act 2021. The Deputy First Minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions during it.

14:48

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Following the successful passage of the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Bill on 11 March, the bill received royal assent on 23 April. I am pleased to provide an update on the development and delivery of the redress scheme that will be established under the act.

First and foremost, I confirm that the Scottish Government remains committed to opening the redress scheme as quickly as possible. I have previously stated that the scheme will be operational this year, opening in December at the latest, and I reiterate that commitment today. To that end, last week we laid the first set of commencement regulations to bring into force all the necessary provisions to prepare for that event.

Just as the bill was developed through engagement with survivors, our approach to implementation will continue to put survivors' needs first. We know how important it is to survivors and their families that we open the scheme for applications as soon as we can. We must take a number of steps to make that possible, including setting up redress Scotland and working with survivors to make sure that the application process is as straightforward as it can be for them.

Today, I will give Parliament and, more importantly, survivors, an update on the progress that has been made since March. Before I do that, however, I will give an update on the advance payment scheme.

The advance payment scheme has been open and making payments to elderly and terminally ill

survivors for more than two years. I am pleased to share that, in the second year of the scheme, despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, a total of 219 applications were received and 166 payments were made. We have now made a total of more than 600 payments to older and terminally ill survivors. We continue to take our learning from the scheme into the development of the statutory scheme to ensure that all applicants can expect the same level of service that has generated such positive feedback from survivors to date.

During the committee stages of the bill, I was asked to consider whether we might change the eligibility criteria for the advance payment scheme ahead of opening the new redress scheme later in the year. As I set out then, any changes to the scheme must be compatible with the exceptional nature of the powers that were used to introduce it. Having carefully considered the issue, and having given the temporary and specific purpose of the advance payment scheme, we think that it is appropriate to leave the criteria as they are, particularly as we remain on course to open the statutory scheme on schedule. In the meantime, the temporary advance payment scheme will continue to allow elderly and terminally ill people to access financial redress up to the point at which the statutory scheme opens.

Since March, significant progress has been made with the preparations for the statutory scheme. My officials are developing and drafting the secondary legislation that will set out some of the more technical detail on how the redress scheme and redress Scotland will work and function. That will be laid before Parliament for appropriate scrutiny following the summer recess.

Work is also under way on the statutory guidance that will assist with the interpretation of the act and provide further information about the processes that will underpin the scheme. Targeted engagement is taking place with survivors and others for the secondary legislation and guidance. Feedback that is received through that engagement will be taken into consideration in the development of those materials.

The assessment framework is a key document that was of specific interest to members during the passage of the bill through Parliament. Redress Scotland will use the framework to inform decision making on individually assessed payments in a fair and consistent way. We continue to develop the framework in consultation with clinical psychologists to ensure that we get such a vital document right. Similar to other redress schemes, the document will be published to provide applicants with an idea of how their individual circumstances might sit within the payment levels. We hope to publish the framework document in the autumn.

As well as developing the secondary legislation, we have identified legislative provisions that are required for inclusion in a section 104 order under the Scotland Act 1998. Discussions with the relevant United Kingdom departments about those provisions are well progressed, and they include legislative amendments to facilitate financial contributions from charities that are regulated under the law of England and Wales.

Engagement also continues with the relevant UK Government departments and devolved Administrations to ensure that benefits, social care entitlement, and tax disregards are in place for those who receive a redress payment under the scheme. It is of the utmost importance that survivors are not negatively impacted by receiving a redress payment. We are working to secure appropriate disregards before any redress payments are made under the scheme.

It is also important to a great many survivors that redress payments include contributions from the organisations that were responsible for their care at the time of the abuse. The quality of redress for many survivors comes, at least in part, in seeing their provider make a fair and meaningful contribution. I have said before and I will say again that it is morally imperative that our nation, collectively, including all those who played a part in the failures of the past, joins together in doing the right thing. The scheme encourages, facilitates and recognises those who are willing to make fair and meaningful financial contributions to redress payments to survivors.

In seeking to achieve that, the Scottish Government has engaged extensively with a wide range of public and third sector organisations on the issue of participation in the scheme. A significant number of those bodies has shown real integrity in their approach to redress, and we hope to be able to reach agreements with a number of organisations in the near future.

I will shortly publish the fair and meaningful principles that will underpin our approach to contributions. Draft heads of terms have already been provided to the principal potential contributors, and my officials are working closely with the charities regulator and others to draft comprehensive guidance for organisations considering being part of the scheme. We must ensure that survivors can have confidence in the agreements that will underpin the participation of care providers and other relevant bodies.

In relation to the design and delivery of the scheme, the Scottish Government remains committed to ensuring that the scheme is trauma informed, accessible and delivered with survivors' needs at its heart. Designing how the scheme will operate involves working with survivors and survivor organisations to develop, test, and

improve the service, and it includes getting feedback on draft application forms and other materials. Service design specialists are working alongside the officials who are responsible for recruiting staff to work in the redress scheme to make sure that the scheme looks and feels as it should and has embedded within it the principles of dignity, respect, and compassion.

The survivor forum will ensure that applicants have a mechanism through which to continue to provide feedback on how the scheme is operating and to make recommendations for improvements. A programme of workshops is being put in place to give survivors the opportunity to help to design the survivor forum, which will be in place once the redress scheme opens. Work is also under way to have support services in place for survivors when the scheme opens, including support through the application process and access to elements of non-financial redress such as therapeutic support.

The act establishes a new independent non-departmental public body called redress Scotland to assess applications seeking redress. Work is under way to ensure that redress Scotland has the right people, systems and processes to support its vital work. I am delighted to announce that, following an open and fair public appointments process, in which survivors played a key role, I have agreed to appoint Johnny Gwynne as chair of redress Scotland.

As many will know, Mr Gwynne is the former deputy chief constable of Police Scotland and a past director of the United Kingdom National Crime Agency with responsibility for tackling child exploitation. In leading the establishment of redress Scotland, he is resolutely committed to building the type of independent and transparent organisation that is capable of delivering justice for survivors. To do so, he will work from the outset to instil a trauma-informed culture right across the organisation. I am in no doubt that he will bring the needed leadership and empathy to that key strategic role.

Recruitment is also taking place for other key roles. A campaign seeking redress Scotland's chief executive attracted more than 40 applications, and interviews are scheduled for next week. By the end of the month, we will have launched a campaign to recruit independent panel members. Those panel members will bring relevant expertise from a range of areas, for example in the field of complex trauma. It will be those panel members who make determinations on applications seeking redress.

As I have stated many times in the chamber, some children in residential care in Scotland were failed by those who were entrusted to look after them, often with catastrophic results. Scotland is taking steps to face up to those failings by

establishing this financial redress scheme for survivors. It is the job of this generation to recognise and—as best we can—to rectify, and we are committed to doing so.

I hope that this update gives the chamber and survivors reassurance that the redress scheme is on course to open as soon as possible. The scheme will offer an alternative to court that is non-adversarial and more accessible to survivors than the existing routes that are available. It will provide elements of justice and acknowledgment, as well as some closure for those who have been wronged in the past.

We have reached an important milestone in the appointment of the chair of redress Scotland. I look forward to making further progress on the delivery of the scheme and to providing the chamber with further updates on this important matter in the very near future.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The Deputy First Minister will now take questions on his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will need to move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who intend to ask a question could press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank the Deputy First Minister for advance sight of his statement. I am pleased to be filling old shoes today as I speak on this subject. Members on the Conservative benches are still committed to working constructively towards the success of the scheme, for which survivors have been waiting a long time. For the record, I congratulate Johnny Gwynne on his appointment as chair of redress Scotland. The expectations of his role are high, and trust in it will be key to his success.

I will cut to the chase. The Deputy First Minister said that extensive engagement has taken place with a wide range of organisations that are would-be participants in the scheme. I am not asking which organisations, but how many have been in discussions with the Government on contributing financially to redress? Roughly how many of those organisations have indicated positively that they are willing or likely to proceed to the stage of agreeing contributions? Of those organisations that have chosen not to contribute, or that have refused to, what reasons have been given for their lack of participation? I ask because retention of the waiver, which was controversial during our debates on the issue, was a key argument for maximising participation in the scheme.

Finally, there is nothing in the statement about plans for a wide-scale public awareness campaign when the scheme launches later this year. Can we

be reassured that there are robust plans for such a campaign?

**John Swinney:** I thank Mr Greene for his on-going support of the work that is to be tackled and the appointment of Johnny Gwynne.

I have discussed with Johnny Gwynne the approach that will be required in redress Scotland. As a long-serving public servant, he is aware of the importance of having the characteristics of empathy, justice, fairness, dignity and compassion at the heart of the scheme, and I am confident that he will ensure that they are instilled in redress Scotland.

We have had extensive discussions with a range of organisations. I cannot give Mr Greene a precise number just now, but we are having a number of what I would describe as positive conversations with contributors about their contributions to the scheme. We will share information about the success of those conversations on an on-going basis, to reassure members and survivors about the degree of engagement that is taking place.

On the issue of public awareness, we will undoubtedly be running a public awareness campaign. Later this month, we will start to recruit individuals for the panels that will be required. That will be the first part of the public awareness work, and maximising the number of applications will be a major priority.

I am heartened by the fact that we have had so many applications to the advance payment scheme, and encouraged that our communication has been effective in reaching individuals, which must be ever more so when it comes to the full redress scheme.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I, too, thank the Deputy First Minister for advance sight of his statement.

We welcome the fact that we are now on the road to having a scheme to deal with the most terrible of wrongs that were perpetrated against some of the most vulnerable members of our society. For many, it has taken too long, and there can be no further delays.

When, in the Deputy First Minister's timetable, will details of the amount of financial redress to which survivors will have access through the scheme be available? I am sure that he will agree that, for many survivors, that will be a key moment.

Around 25 per cent of applications to the advance payment scheme were unsuccessful. Will the Deputy First Minister give some insight into why such a number were rejected and whether that seemingly high number of unsuccessful

applications shows that there is a need to widen the criteria until the full scheme is operational?

**John Swinney:** In relation to the level of financial redress that will be available to individuals, some of the detail is already set out in the 2021 act. Any further detail will relate to individual circumstances and applications that are made through the framework that has been legislated for by the Parliament. In the course of the next few months, before the formal establishment of the scheme, further information will be shared about the basis on which payments will be made.

In relation to the advance payment scheme, the issues that have affected the judgments around the scheme have principally related to ineligibility in relation to some of the fundamental criteria on age and condition. Those have been the principal factors. Other factors will relate to quality of evidence, but the overwhelming majority of cases for which any evidence is available have been approved.

As members will understand, there have been particular challenges over the past 12 months because of the need to physically access documents that have been literally inaccessible to some organisations because of Covid restrictions. We have, by exception, allowed a certain number of civil servants into an office environment, to scrutinise documents for the purposes of the advance payment scheme. We have not generally made such arrangements available to other civil servants, but we did it for that scheme. We have taken measures to try to make sure that, despite Covid, there was no interruption to the ability to meet the requirements of the advance payment scheme.

On whether there is a need to broaden eligibility, I am not persuaded by the argument that has been put forward. The fact that we will have a scheme in place before the end of the year gives me reassurance that we can meet the expectations of survivors.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** What support will be given to survivors who struggle to find or access records?

**John Swinney:** We recognise the difficulties that some applicants will face in finding evidence. They will be provided with assistance from officials in sourcing or accessing records. Indeed, some of the challenges that we have been wrestling with during the period of Covid have been about trying to assist individuals in accessing, as part of the process, documentation that is held by third-party organisations. The act creates the criminal offence of failing to comply with a request for information that would be relevant to such an application. There are strong aspects of legal enforcement.

In exceptional circumstances, redress Scotland has sufficient discretion to disregard evidence requirements if it is satisfied that the case merits an award. That approach is similar to some of the characteristics of evidence taking that have been adopted in the Scottish child abuse inquiry, which has been chaired by Lady Smith and which has taken a very considered approach to the gathering of evidence in that respect.

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** The cabinet secretary referred to the launch of a campaign for the recruitment of independent panel members. He mentioned that they will have a range of expertise in different areas, but will they have lived experience? That is very important for survivors and for making sure that they have the best possible representation on the panel.

**John Swinney:** Yes, that will be the case. It is critically important that the work of redress Scotland, and all of this activity, are informed by the experience and trauma of survivors. That has been a central requirement of the approach that we have taken. There was survivor input into the panel for the recruitment of the chair of redress Scotland, and the recommendation that came to me had survivor endorsement, which was critical to my judgment on that question. I assure Meghan Gallacher that those issues are very much at the heart of the approach that we are taking.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I thank the Deputy First Minister for his update and for the considerable progress that has already been made, and I congratulate Johnny Gwynne on his appointment. The expectation of survivors is palpable, and we will all take that forward as we progress. As the procedures and processes are put in place and the people of redress Scotland are recruited, what can Johnny Gwynne and the Scottish Government do to ensure that dignity, compassion and respect remain at the heart of all redress Scotland's interactions with survivors?

**John Swinney:** The inclusion of the requirement for all the approaches to be founded on compassion, dignity and respect was the product of an amendment lodged by Clare Adamson during the consideration of the bill in the previous session. In my closing speech of the bill proceedings, I made it clear that that had been the critical amendment of the whole bill process, because it had placed a requirement for those characteristics—those values—to be embedded in the construction of the scheme.

In my conversation with Johnny Gwynne, he used those words to describe to me the values that would be central to his leadership of redress Scotland. Given the significance of those words in the legislation and in Johnny Gwynne's approach to leadership, I am confident that those values will

be embedded in the culture and working practices of redress Scotland, which is critical to meeting the needs of survivors.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I have met constituents who are concerned to know what advice will be available and when, so that they can apply to the scheme. They have had fantastic support on redress from Future Pathways Scotland and Birthlink, and they have been told that they pass the threshold for minimum payment, but they are worried about where they will get the support for what will be an incredibly traumatic, complicated and challenging process. What financial support will be given to organisations such as those that I have mentioned and Wellbeing Scotland, which have played an essential role thus far in supporting survivors and which will be crucial in giving them independent advice going forward?

**John Swinney:** I think that all the organisations that Sarah Boyack mentioned benefit from public funding to carry out their activities. It is clear that there is a need for constancy of support provision for survivors. Survivors need to be assured that they have access to that constancy of support in which they trust. Specific assistance will be available through the channels of redress Scotland as well, but it is important that survivors are supported by individuals whom they trust and have confidence in.

Over the next few months, as staff are recruited to redress Scotland—staff will be recruited to fit with the values of compassion, dignity and respect—I suspect and hope that there will be a lot of collaborative working with organisations that are supporting survivors, to ensure that individuals are assisted to bring forward and be successful in their applications. That has very much been the working ethos of the advance payment scheme.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** With the support of the Government, the bill that enabled the establishment of redress Scotland was amended to include a review provision to look specifically at the impact that the waiver might have on the participation in the scheme of survivors and contributing organisations. Will the Deputy First Minister expand on how the review will operate, given that it is to be carried out over the first 18 months of the scheme's operation?

**John Swinney:** That will be one of the requirements that we will build into the operating processes of redress Scotland. We will gather evidence from the extent of contributions made by organisations. That will be supplemented by individuals' and applicants' experience, and we will gather data, evidence and perspectives on the significance of the waiver in the judgments that individuals are making. Over that 18-month period, there will be a need to gather evidence of the

effect of the waiver and to formulate a review that will be published and which Parliament will, of course, be able to consider. If any action is required in the light of that review, Parliament will be able to take the necessary action.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** What support will be available to survivors of historical sexual abuse in care to access the redress scheme, particularly where it might be difficult for them to access or use digital technology to do so?

**John Swinney:** We will ensure that digital considerations are not a barrier in any way to individuals applying to the scheme. Paper copies of all application forms will be available. As I indicated in my answer to Sarah Boyack, there will also be support available to individuals to assist them in the gathering of information and detail in that process. We will ensure that we have relevant discussions with organisations that can support us in ensuring that all those requirements are fulfilled.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's update, which shows that real progress is being made. I also welcome the appointment of Johnny Gwynne. It is so important that we get this right, and we all care deeply about ensuring that survivors' voices are heard, so I must convey the disappointment that will be felt by some survivors as a result of the decision not to lower the age limit for the advance payment scheme. Although financial redress will be important, does the cabinet secretary agree that a meaningful apology will carry much more weight for many?

**John Swinney:** I acknowledge Beatrice Wishart's point about the age threshold, but I come back to the fact that we are required to justify our use of the provisions for exceptional circumstances. Given that the scheme will be available in six months' time, I think that it is reasonable for us to have arrived at that conclusion. The Government will engage constructively with survivors on all questions about the implementation of the scheme.

I have tried, on a number of occasions, to give an apology to individuals on behalf of the Government and the state. The Government has also established the historical abuse inquiry with the purpose of ensuring that the experiences and trauma of survivors can be properly and fully acknowledged by the country. That is a very important contribution. I accept that there are probably no words that will properly address the suffering of individuals. However, I hope that the combination of the very public apologies that I and the former First Minister, Jack McConnell, have given and the abuse inquiry's powerful capturing of the testimony of individuals will help to address

the very legitimate sentiments that Beatrice Wishart has raised.

**Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP):** I welcome you to your new role, Deputy Presiding Officer.

I thank the Deputy First Minister for his statement on what is an extremely important issue. As he touched on, it is important that people who apply to the scheme do not then find themselves in a position in which receiving a redress payment has a negative impact on their benefits or social care entitlements. Will he provide more detail on the discussions that the Scottish Government has had with the UK Government to ensure that that does not happen?

**John Swinney:** I am happy to do so. We have had extensive discussions with the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and Social Care and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about the relevant disregards that are required. We have also had discussions with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and we have the required disregards from it in relation to tax entitlements and tax questions.

We are continuing our discussions with the UK Government, and I am confident that we will secure the necessary agreements. Taking forward that dialogue is being given the utmost priority.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am delighted that work is under way, through the survivors forum, on having support services in place for survivors when the scheme opens. That includes support during the application process and access to elements of non-financial redress, such as therapeutic support. Will the Deputy First Minister give a timescale for when such services will commence? Will emotional and psychological support be provided to those who require it?

**John Swinney:** A number of such services are facilitated by a number of the organisations that Sarah Boyack mentioned, such as Future Pathways. We try to put in place interventions that meet the needs of individuals who are trying to address trauma, and to provide the necessary support. Those services will continue under the umbrella of redress Scotland so that there is continuity of provision for individuals.

As we know from the evidence that was gathered during the passage of the bill, survivors face many obstacles and it often takes a long time before they are able to begin even to think about their suffering. New individuals will come forward in need of support, and that support will be made available to them.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I noted the Deputy First Minister's response to Mr Marra's question about the eligibility criteria. I will press on with that issue.

I have a constituent who was abused when he attended school as a weekday boarder. Because he returned home at weekends, he does not meet the eligibility criteria. It is my view that, during those weekdays—I am paraphrasing the legislation—the institution took decisions about his care and upbringing and was morally responsible for his physical, social and emotional needs in place of the parents, in which it totally failed.

Are the eligibility criteria completely closed to any extension of the definition of "residential care"?

**John Swinney:** I do not want to give Christine Grahame a definitive answer, because it is probably not appropriate for me to do so. It would be appropriate for her constituent to make the necessary application to redress Scotland in due course and to set out the circumstances that she has recounted. Every effort will be made to try to address the suffering of individuals, and there may well be cases of the type that she raises that perhaps stretch the margins of the legislation and its criteria. I assure her that all such cases will be considered carefully and sensitively by redress Scotland.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I welcome the statement: the sooner that redress Scotland is up and running, the better. With that in mind, I am concerned that the secondary legislation will not be passed until after recess and that the chief executive is not yet in place. Is the December start date safe? Will the Deputy First Minister explain what will be open from December? Will it be only the application process? Will he clarify when he expects redress Scotland to make the first payments?

**John Swinney:** I can put Mr Johnson's mind at rest about the timescale for the appointment of the chief executive and for the legislation.

The chief executive interviews will be on Monday and a fabulous range of candidates have come forward. I am confident that an appointment will be made; the panel will have a difficult choice to make, which is encouraging.

I am confident that we have enough time to deal with the statutory instruments after the summer recess. Mr Johnson will be aware that there has been some criticism of the amount of time that we are spending considering instruments before the summer recess and I do not want to add to that in another sphere.

The organisation will be up and running and receiving applications as quickly as possible. December is the latest date; I hope that we can do it earlier. I cannot give a definitive answer on when the first applications will be processed and approved, but I assure Mr Johnson that the history of transactions through the advance payment scheme shows that decisions under the scheme were made pretty swiftly—some were made in a matter of days.

Provided that we put the necessary foundations in place, we can be confident that the work can be taken forward in a way that provides swift responses to individuals who apply.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I thank the Deputy First Minister. We have overrun slightly but, given the nature of the issues raised in the statement, it was important to allow members to put their questions to the cabinet secretary.

We will now move to the next item of business. I will allow the ministerial team a second to change places.

I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and around the campus and I ask them to adhere to those measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber. Aisles and walkways should be used only to access seats or to move around the chamber.

## Brexit (Skills Impact)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-00382, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on mitigating, tackling and responding to the skills impact of Brexit. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or put R in the chat function if they are joining us remotely.

I call Richard Lochhead to speak to and move the motion—you have around 13 minutes.

15:24

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer. I welcome you to your new role in Parliament. I hope that all my years of being very nice to you have put me in good stead for this debate and beyond.

I am delighted to open this debate in my new role as Scotland's Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work. I take the liberty of using this opportunity to thank the people of Moray for placing their trust in me again to serve them for the next five years.

Today, I am asking Parliament to recognise and respond to many of the skills issues that are being experienced by key sectors of our economy, given the complex and unpredictable dynamics in our economy that have arisen due to the pandemic and which have unfortunately been compounded by a hard Brexit and the cessation of free movement. As we emerge from Covid-19, workers and businesses across Scotland face new and growing uncertainties. For many employers, something approaching a perfect storm is here. They face increased demands, but with a tightening labour market and a real prospect of staff shortages. For others, Brexit has introduced all kinds of onerous barriers to trade, weakening their ability to be fully productive as we emerge from the pandemic or even to export their products to Europe.

The United Kingdom Government was warned by the Scottish Government and many others to avoid going through with a hard Brexit in the middle of a pandemic, but those voices were ignored and we are now paying the price. Businesses and our economy have been severely impacted by a pandemic that no one wanted or expected and as a result of necessary measures to save people's lives. A hard Brexit was also not wanted but was, by choice, foisted on Scotland, despite damaging consequences being predicted and expected.

I am sure that members across the chamber will have read recent reports concerning the many employers that are currently struggling to recruit workers. Both Covid and Brexit are impacting on the labour market and the economy. For businesses such as Crieff Hydro, the end of free movement has now, as the owner, Stephen Leckie, put it, “come home to roost”. The imminent summer holiday period is a crucial time of the year for the hospitality sector, but businesses such as his have confirmed that they still have a large number of vital roles to be filled. Their difficulties are not unique but are characteristic of trends across the hospitality and tourism sector, among others.

In recognition of the challenges facing the hospitality and tourism sector, I am pleased to confirm that we will give additional support this financial year for upskilling and retraining in the sector via the national transition training fund. Furthermore, the Scottish Government is working with partners, including UK Hospitality Scotland and Skills Development Scotland, to promote the range of careers in the sector. I will shortly launch a marketing campaign to help to reduce the number of vacancies in the hospitality and tourism sector and to promote tourism as a career of choice among our target audience of 18 to 30-year-olds in Scotland.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Does this situation also present an opportunity for us to reflect on why industries were so reliant on migrant labour in the first place? Does the minister consider that there needs to be a look at wages and productivity in the round?

**Richard Lochhead:** Many industries in Scotland rely on overseas workers and have done so for many decades. However, Daniel Johnson’s points are valid in some cases, and I will return to that later in my speech.

The hospitality and tourism sector can be great to work in, and we should always remind people of that. We should all urge our constituents to seek out good opportunities in that area.

Employers in food and drink manufacturing also report an unprecedented drop in the availability of workers over the past six months in Scotland, which they attribute to Brexit’s immediate impact and the effect on labour mobility alongside pandemic-related disruption. Just this week, I received a letter from the director of Brightwork Recruitment, which provides at peak time almost 4,500 workers to the sector and works with clients such as Diageo, William Grant & Sons and Pernod Ricard Chivas, which is close to my heart as it is in my constituency. The letter highlights the concerns of many in the food and drink industry that, as they approach the fourth quarter of the year, the increasing skills shortages will be too great for

many businesses that manage our great Scottish products.

We have been working closely with the sector to launch a food and drink recovery plan that contains a range of activities that support the skills needs of businesses in food and drink to mitigate and reverse the damage that has been caused by both Covid-19 and Brexit. We are also delivering a new youth employment programme across the industry to encourage more young people into it.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** The minister’s speech thus far has been more about Brexit grievance than about the real crisis in Scotland, which is to do with skills availability and levels. Can he explain why modern apprenticeships, which are very much part of his remit, have collapsed across Scotland between 2019-20 and 2020-21? There were 13,719 in quarter 2 of 2019-20 compared with 3,633 in the same quarter of 2020-21.

**Richard Lochhead:** I will not take any lectures from Conservative members given that their amendment to the motion is a rant against Scottish independence and our industries are speaking about the impact of Brexit. This Scottish National Party Government has delivered record numbers of apprenticeships, but in the past year to 18 months we have, of course, experienced a pandemic in which it has been difficult to deliver many of the apprenticeships. I think that everyone in Scotland apart from the member understands that.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You will get your time back.

**Richard Lochhead:** Okay.

**Willie Rennie:** The national transition training fund has been underutilised by a significant degree. Why has that happened? The fund is an important factor in trying to get people into work.

**Richard Lochhead:** Willie Rennie, as the Labour amendment does, raises an important point that I am just about to address. Modern apprenticeships are seen as one of the key drivers in building businesses’ resilience, productivity and long-term sustainability in the food and drink sector. We will continue to work with Skills Development Scotland to maximise the uptake of apprenticeships and support current apprentices to complete their training.

Meanwhile, Logistics UK has reported a shortage of around 76,000 heavy goods vehicle drivers across the UK, and the Road Haulage Association has reported that one in 10 companies are now experiencing severe barriers to recruiting

drivers—*[Interruption.]* I have taken a lot of interventions so far.

I am aware of the Road Haulage Association's 12-point plan to increase the number of HGV drivers. It seeks a seasonal visa scheme and the inclusion of the occupation on the UK's skilled worker shortage occupation list, as well as other measures. Although some of its asks are for the UK Government—we hope that the UK Government is listening—we stand ready to work with the industry to develop solutions that ensure the flow of goods in and out of and across Scotland. One issue is the backlog to testing. The RHA estimates that around 30,000 HGV tests have been delayed, which prevents new drivers from taking up their posts. I am encouraged by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's prioritisation of driving tests for HGV drivers.

For Scotland's small and medium-sized enterprises, the impact of Brexit should not be underestimated. A Federation of Small Businesses report found that 40 per cent of small firms in Scotland pre-Brexit employed a worker from the European Economic Area compared with the UK average of 26 per cent. Scotland is second only to London in terms of reliance on EEA workers. In tourism and hospitality, the figure jumped to 45 per cent. The FSB also reports that SMEs with workforces led by international workers generate around £13 billion for the Scottish economy, so the impact will be significant for the sector at the end of free movement.

Emmanuel Moine, who is chair of the Inverness Hotels Association, said:

"Two years ago, 60 per cent of my staff were from the EU. Where do I go now to replace them?"

The true scale of the challenge remains unclear, but it is known and widely evidenced that a skilled and dynamic labour force is crucial for this country's economic prosperity. That is why the Scottish Government is investing £2 billion in the skills system every year and has committed to invest an additional £500 million to support new jobs and reskill people for jobs for the future over the course of this session.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I realise that the member has taken many interventions and I am grateful to him for taking this one. In relation to skills of the future and the green economy, we know that much of wind farm construction, for example, is done abroad and imported and we know that those who service that sector are imported as well. We also know that, in the health sector, there are many medical professions where the number of those applying for those positions from Scotland far outstrips the number of available places. Does the minister

consider that there is an opportunity for our home-grown talent to get into those industries?

**Richard Lochhead:** There are of course opportunities for home-grown talent, but we have to look at the demographic projections for Scotland, which show that our working population is decreasing and we are increasingly reliant on people moving here to live and work, as they have done for decades, if not centuries. Such people are made most welcome, because we are an outward-looking, welcoming and internationalist country.

In October last year, we introduced the national transition training fund to address some of the challenges and in response to the threat of rising unemployment, which members have mentioned. However, demand for support was suppressed by successive furlough extensions, which is why we have perhaps not seen the uptake that we anticipated, as the Labour amendment mentions. We agree with much in that amendment, but I just wanted to cite the reason why that is the case with the fund. The fund delivered more than 6,000 interventions for the first phase, and delivery of the provision through colleges and universities will continue until the end of July. As always, we will keep the initiative under review.

We will press the UK Government to extend the furlough scheme for those who need it, and we will continue to offer retraining opportunities for those who need them. We will support the sectors that face the greatest challenges. We will continue to invest in retraining and upskilling opportunities to ensure that Scotland's workforce is ready for the jobs of the future. We have committed to delivering, within the first 100 days of the new session of Parliament, a green jobs workforce academy to equip our workforce with the skills that are needed to enter into or progress in jobs that are essential for our green recovery.

The Government has long argued that Brexit will be a disruptive force for Scotland's society and economy. Thankfully, Scotland remains an attractive location in which to live and work. As last week's EY survey demonstrated, overseas investment in Scotland bucked the UK trend by increasing during 2020 despite the many restrictions that were in place.

Although investment has held up, it is clear that Brexit disruption is beginning to manifest itself. Constituency and regional MSPs must speak to businesses in their areas every other week and get the same feedback: that Brexit is having a massive impact on many parts of our economy. That is certainly the case in my area, and I am sure that it is the case throughout the country and in other members' experience. Of course, it is not just about the lack of labour; the costs of trade barriers and the difficulty in sourcing materials that

have arisen from Brexit are also causing massive problems for the economy in Scotland.

I return to what we can do in Scotland and what employers can do for themselves, which members have mentioned. At a time of skills shortages, it is important that employers grasp the opportunities to become more competitive. The key to that is fair work. The Scottish Government believes that we need more than just jobs. Our commitment to the fair work principles is vital to creating the kind of society that values wellbeing as well as prosperity. We are committed to creating jobs that are greener and fairer and which benefit our economy and society.

Through promoting diverse and inclusive recruitment and working practices and adopting the fair work principles, and by investing in workforce development, training and upskilling, employers will benefit from greater innovation and productivity. Not only is that vital to addressing the skills shortages, employers will benefit from an enhanced reputation that will help them to attract talent. A fair work employer will stand head and shoulders above others.

The Scottish Government, guided by the independent Fair Work Convention, which will soon look at sectors such as hospitality, can support employers to create much fairer workplaces. Ultimately, of course, it is for the employers to make that change. I am pleased to say that I have heard some good examples from hospitality companies that I have spoken to in the past few weeks of how they are improving wages and working conditions, scrapping split shifts and talking about four-day weeks. That is the way forward, and it is an important indication of systemic change in the sector, which I hope we will see across many sectors.

In the employer skills survey that was undertaken between October and December last year, 74 per cent of employers highlighted that upskilling would be needed in the year ahead. Our commitment to delivering a skilled and productive workforce that meets the needs of employers and equips the current and future workforce with the skills for the future predated the pandemic. We will continue to invest in skills and our workforce.

Our economy requires workers from across Europe and beyond if we are to benefit from world-class sectors such as hospitality, tourism, agriculture, health and social care and higher education and research. We value those who come here to work and make Scotland their home. Their contribution not only supports our industries but enhances our culture and society. We need people to contribute at all levels of the economy, including in vital roles in tourism and some of those other sectors. UK Government immigration policy fails to address Scotland's distinctive

demographic and economic needs and disregards the workers on whom we have come to rely and who have been vital during the pandemic. Migrants have been closed off and put off by the UK Government's hostile immigration policy and Brexit.

As we move forward, we all have a part to play, and I am asking employers to innovate to attract workers into sectors and occupations that are crucial to our economy. I call on the UK Government to listen to and act on the concerns of those Scottish industries that face the twin challenges of the pandemic and Brexit, and to work with us to support employers and workers through the times ahead.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that a skilled and productive workforce is vital to addressing labour market inequalities, creating fairer workplaces and delivering an inclusive, green recovery; recognises that employers in sectors disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are now reporting skills shortages as a result of the ending of free movement, and that colleges and universities share concern over the impact of Brexit on staff and student mobility; agrees that delivering a skilled and sustainable workforce will require action and collaboration from both the Scottish and UK governments, along with employers and key partners, and welcomes the Scottish Government's continued commitment to upskilling and retraining, including through the extension of the National Transition Training Fund to 2021-22 and commitment to invest an additional £500 million over the current parliamentary session to support new jobs and reskill people for the future.

15:40

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** Listening to the minister, it would be all too easy to forget that we are assembled here in the world's most powerful devolved Parliament—a Parliament with the power to change the lives of people in Scotland for the better. In a tidal wave of doom, members would be forgiven for letting the fact that we have a Government that is answerable to this chamber, and that could act not tomorrow but today, wash over them.

The people of Scotland deserve better. They deserve better than a Scottish National Party Government that has had coming on for 15 years to do something about such issues, and better than ministers who have the brass neck to come here and voice disquiet about the action of others, but who have nothing to say about the fact that they have been caught out doing nothing themselves.

Although the events of the past year—whether we are talking about the global health pandemic or the decision of the people of the United Kingdom to forge a new future outside the European Union—have made the skills shortage more visible, the truth is that those events did not create

it. No—our skills shortage was created here in Scotland, and telling us that someone else is responsible will not solve it. Instead, we need a bit of humility and honesty from the SNP. Of course, I am not expecting us to get that.

**Daniel Johnson:** Do we not need a bit of humility from not just the SNP Government but the Conservative Government, given that, ultimately, Brexit is costing jobs and having an impact on businesses, and has resulted in us having fewer people here to do the work? Therefore, perhaps a little humility from Conservative members would be in order, too.

**Oliver Mundell:** I simply do not agree with Mr Johnson. I think that Brexit presents real opportunities for people right across the UK and, in years to come, I believe that we will see that it was the right decision.

I do not expect the SNP to let the facts get in the way of constitutional grievance. I will not say who does gloomy better, but it is clear that Michael Russell has passed the baton of Brexit doom-mongering on to Richard Lochhead. That trademark tactic is a sure-fire sign that the SNP is in trouble, and it is no wonder that it wants to create a smokescreen, because its record on skills speaks for itself. The SNP promises future action, but talk is cheap.

**Richard Lochhead:** Will the member give way?

**Oliver Mundell:** Certainly.

**Richard Lochhead:** I thank Oliver Mundell for giving way, especially as I could not give way to him, as I had taken so many interventions.

A few years ago, if I remember correctly, the Parliament unanimously backed the devolving of immigration powers to Holyrood. Why has that not been delivered, given that many sectors in Scotland are asking for such powers to come to this Parliament so that we can help them to get through the current crisis?

**Oliver Mundell:** I think that Mr Lochhead is incorrect in that recollection. Although it is true that our immigration system needs to work better, many sectors of the Scottish economy value having a UK-wide immigration system. We need proposals that work not only for people here in Scotland but for the United Kingdom as a whole. That is what the people of Scotland backed when they voted to stay part of the UK back in 2014.

The SNP forever promises that it will act. It forever promises new plans and proposals on skills, but it does not back them up with the level of commitment or investment that is needed. We know that a skills revolution and mass retraining is possible. To see that, we do not need to look much further than the events of the past year.

I do not claim that this is a positive example, but it shows that it can be done. There are literally thousands of people across Scotland who have shown that it is possible to reskill and retrain in a heartbeat—sadly, not because they wanted to, but because they had to. Throughout the pandemic, we have seen numerous examples, including the bar workers who started driving delivery vans, the chefs who moved into construction, the beauticians who worked in supermarkets, the tour guides who became home carers and the theatre costume designers who turned their hand to manufacturing face masks. Each and every one of them are unsung heroes of this pandemic who have gone above and beyond, not just to look after their own families, but those of others, too.

However, the truth is that that type of thing should be normal and not exceptional. In normal and not exceptional times, it should be driven by individual choice and not just by economic need, and it should be supported by the Government, because gone are the days of a job for life.

It is time to get serious about supporting people to retrain and upskill, and that means moving past a point where we expect the majority of learning and training to be completed by the age of 22. It means adopting much more innovative and flexible policies such as the individual learning accounts that CBI Scotland is promoting, which would mean people being incentivised and financially supported to enhance their skill sets at key points in their lives.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** The member makes an interesting point about the flexibility of the workforce, but another fundamental component is the need to ensure that there is sufficient demand in the economy for people to be employed at income levels that give them dignified and uplifting lives. Does he recognise that there is potentially an issue in that regard with economic planning at both the Scottish and UK levels? Does he agree that we are simply not providing enough jobs to allow those opportunities and that expecting people to chase jobs that do not exist is actually a form of abuse?

**Oliver Mundell:** The member makes an important point. Those things are all parts of the package, but skilled job opportunities already exist in our economy. We have to find a better way of supporting people to move into the jobs that exist, and we need to help them to train to take advantage of those opportunities.

That does not mean just dipping our toe in the water; it means getting behind system-wide change and acknowledging that the SNP Government's plans for apprenticeships do not go far enough. That is why the Scottish Conservatives want unlimited apprenticeships for Scotland's young people. We want a demand-led

model that ensures that funded places reflect employer and economy needs, not just arbitrary and unambitious SNP targets.

It also means recognising that progress is all but impossible in an environment where college funding has been cut to the bone and our further education sector is looking at how to survive in the here and now rather than helping to drive future strategy or supporting learners to gain the skills and knowledge that they need to fulfil their potential and benefit our economy.

If the SNP Government is serious about skills, can it explain why we have a trend of decreasing college student numbers on its watch? Rather than hang their heads in shame, SNP ministers come to the chamber and defend the indefensible. They hide behind grudge and grievance. Why did Richard Lochhead not turbo-charge the college sector when he was responsible for it? Was Brexit to blame?

Likewise, in the here and now, colleges and universities are being badly served by this Government, which seems not to understand the urgency of getting back to face-to-face, small-group learning. It is almost impossible to see how we can properly prepare learners in technical and science-based subjects without enabling some in-person tuition.

**Richard Lochhead:** Does the member recognise that our college sector has exceeded its targets for college places?

**Oliver Mundell:** Thousands of short-term, part-time places have been cut. That is not the feedback that I get from my constituents. The minister says that members should go away and listen to people. I think that he should reflect on what people in the college sector—and, I suspect, many of his constituents—are saying.

At the height of the pandemic, we needed to be cautious, and we need to be cautious now, but we also need to find a pragmatic balance that recognises the consequences of holding back another year of learners in our further and higher education settings. With lead times for starting up new courses being anywhere from six to eight weeks, we urgently need a plan to be set out now. We were able to do it for schools, so let us not pretend that it is impossible to set out a detailed route map for further and higher education.

I turn to the most ridiculous and hypocritical part of the motion. Let us remember that we are in the midst of the greatest challenge that humankind has faced in generations and the whole planet is continuing to grapple with the effects of Covid-19. Here, in Scotland, the Scottish Fiscal Commission has forecast that our economy will not return to pre-pandemic levels until at least 2024, and businesses that have been unable to trade for

over 400 days are still being forced by law to close their doors. Many people continue to experience the health consequences of Covid.

In that context, most Governments are rightly focused on protecting jobs, remobilising health services and making sure that young people catch up on lost learning, not to mention trying to roll out vaccinations to their populations.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** I agree with the member that Governments should be focused on those things. Why, then, did the UK Government proceed with Brexit at the very height of lockdown?

**Oliver Mundell:** The huge difference between Brexit and Scottish independence is that we had already set an exit date for leaving the EU before the pandemic started. Throughout those negotiations, as we have seen during the vaccine debacle and in Northern Ireland, the EU was probably the least reasonable negotiator on the planet, so the idea that we could have knocked back our exit from the EU and got a better deal than the Government delivered is fanciful.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government is willing to put our recovery at risk by continuing unnecessarily to dangle over our country the prospect of a further divisive referendum, which the people of Scotland did not vote for—unlike the people of the UK, who did vote to leave the EU. There seems to be no acceptance of reality or the huge uncertainty and instability that a referendum would fuel. I cannot see how SNP ministers have the bare-faced cheek to come to this chamber and tell us that Brexit is having a negative effect on the labour market but that, somehow, putting up a hard border at Gretna would be a positive. Not only would it be a huge betrayal of the many people, families, businesses and organisations across the country who are treading water just to survive; it would be a massive distraction from tackling the issues that we are discussing today.

Therefore, rather than stoking up the arguments of the past, whether they be on Brexit or independence, we need a Government that is willing to pull its finger out and get on with using the powers that it has to do something to address the skills shortage that it has overseen.

I move amendment S6M-00382.1, to leave out from “that employers in sectors” to end and insert:

“the changing labour market and the potential skills shortages created and highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and calls on the Scottish Government to take further action to mitigate these shortages, including creating more apprenticeships, reversing the trend of decreasing college student numbers that has occurred under the current SNP administration, setting out plans for a return to in-person small group learning in higher and further education and introducing Individual Learning

Accounts as called for by CBI Scotland; notes the need to work constructively with the UK Government to maximise the opportunities for Scotland outside of the EU, and calls on the Scottish Government to avoid needless disruption to the labour market by abandoning its plans to hold a divisive independence referendum while Scotland is recovering from a global pandemic.”

15:51

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests: I am a member of the GMB and Unite trade unions.

The long and tortuous progress of Brexit, which has bedevilled us since 2016, is often debated as a constitutional issue that stands separately and drags us away from the class politics that underpin a socialist analysis of our economy and society. However, it is easy to forget that constitutional wrangling creates victims, too, most of whom are working class people, whether the issue is lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights, women’s rights or immigration and trade and—as we debate today—the skills that underpin policy in that regard.

Immigration was front and centre of the Brexit debate in the lead-up to the referendum. We saw Nigel Farage’s infamous posters, which will go down as a shameful moment in our history. We heard the same myths—repeated over and over—about migrants’ negative impact on wages and public services, when we know that all evidence points to the contrary. We also witnessed a wave of hate crime against migrants and against British-born people of colour, who were told that they do not belong in the Brexiteers’ nationalist utopia.

Today, almost five years after the Brexit vote, millions of EU nationals still find themselves in limbo. Those who arrived in the UK under the freedom of movement arrangements are being forced to apply just to be able to stay in their own homes with their loved ones. We hear harrowing stories of people who have spent years or decades living and working in Britain but whose settled status applications are being rejected by the Home Office.

The Tories failed to recognise any of those issues in their amendment, and if they have their way, millions more people will soon be subject to the hostile environment that brought us the Windrush scandal. Although the Green Party’s amendment was not selected today, the Labour Party whole-heartedly endorses its endeavour in that vital matter.

Scotland cannot let migrant workers be an afterthought in the Brexit process. Polish nurses and Romanian cleaners are just as much a part of the working class as their colleagues who have British passports. For example, the feminist

organisation Engender estimates that one in five workers in the social care sector was not born in the UK. Migrant workers occupy some of the most important yet undervalued roles in our society, and the Scottish Government must use all its power to ensure that they are treated fairly. That is why Scottish Labour is calling for the extension of trade union recognition, to prevent the exploitation of migrant labour in undervalued sectors.

Trade unions have achieved what was previously thought to be impossible, by building up popular recognition of key workers during the pandemic into a determined campaign that extends beyond mere goodwill to a fight for terms and conditions that would allow every worker to live a dignified life. As we move towards a national care service, the Scottish Government must take the next step to ensure that all those who employ workers in Scotland across health and social care formally recognise trade unions and their right to bargain collectively on behalf of their members.

We face an economic challenge in Scotland that we tried to address in previous years under a Labour Government—most noticeably through the fresh talent initiative in 2004, which was successful in reversing Scotland’s historic population decline. From 1801 to 1901, the Scottish population grew by 180 per cent, but from 1901 to 2001 it grew by just 10 per cent. It is projected that the working-age population in Scotland will grow by just 1 per cent in the next 10 years. That presents a huge demographic challenge for Scotland.

There are many reasons underlying that trend, and it cannot simply be blamed on Brexit, although erecting borders, with all the friction that they bring, certainly does not help matters. The fundamental structure of the Scottish economy is in critical and urgent need of reform. We need to build on previous initiatives, such as the fresh talent initiative, and ensure that the national transition training fund realises its full capacity, in order to drive towards a high-skill, high-wage economy that has community wealth building at its heart.

We must robustly challenge the idea that migration is simply a tool to provide low-skilled, low-wage, casualised and seasonal work in fragile communities in which young people, such as those in my generation, are deprived of economic security.

**Richard Lochhead:** I welcome Paul Sweeney to his role and to Parliament.

Irrespective of whether the Conservatives have ever voted for immigration powers in this Parliament, the Parliament has voted many times for immigration powers to be devolved. Given that many businesses and sectors would welcome the

Parliament having more powers over immigration—powers to grant visas, for example—does Paul Sweeney support such an approach?

**Paul Sweeney:** That is certainly an exciting and interesting point. I hope to reach the detail of our proposal in my speech. I will save it until later; I will get to it in due course.

It is certainly not a question of immigration undermining wages and conditions. We have to look at the positive aspects of immigration. Organised labour has been under systematic assault for many years. That is what has driven down wages and that is why wages have stagnated. The power of organised labour to bargain collectively in this country has been systematically undermined for years. That is the root cause and the heart of the problem. It is compounded by a reactionary approach to industrial development in Scotland that sees investment in high-skilled jobs and technologies diverted out of the country as more of our industries fall under foreign ownership. We saw that at the Caley railway works in Springburn, and we are seeing it play out once again at McVities in Tollcross.

Our amendment calls for an effective industrial strategy, to prevent such tragic loss of jobs, secure Scotland-owned industrial development and promote upskilling in the workplace.

International movement of labour is a class issue. The kind of skills-based system that the Tories are planning for will inevitably favour wealthier migrants over poorer ones. The proposed minimum income requirements would not only deprive Scotland of the talent that keeps our economy afloat; they would mean that living and working legally would become a privilege awarded to the lucky few, not the many.

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** Does Paul Sweeney agree that tackling the attainment gap is crucial to upgrading skills in Scotland? You talked about upskilling, and the SNP has failed to tackle that. Do you think that that should be at the forefront?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The only “you” here is the Presiding Officer.

**Paul Sweeney:** Pam Gosal’s intervention was timely. I completely agree that the attainment gap remains a mark of national shame in Scotland. Every party has to put its full weight behind addressing it. We saw the issue being played out in the Scottish Qualifications Authority exams scandal last year; I was astounded by the incredible level of structural inequality that that revealed. We should urgently address the matter.

Let me respond to the minister’s point. Labour is calling on the Scottish Government and the UK

Government to collaborate on the development of a flexible visa scheme that would empower workers to resist exploitative employers and underpin efforts to unionise workers who are fearful about their immigration status. Canada’s immigration system, which is co-managed by the federal and provincial Governments, could provide a useful benchmark for us to consider in Scotland and the UK as a whole. I say to the minister that the Scottish Government will certainly have an ally in the Labour Party should it pursue that idea in seeking to reform our constitutional arrangements in a positive and constructive fashion.

I have worked with Scottish Enterprise on promoting initiatives such as the ScotGrad scheme, which has brought in international graduates and foreign language students to help to promote Scottish exports abroad, and I can say that the Tories’ xenophobic migration policy is a real threat to the future economic prosperity of this country. However, the Scottish Government could do much more, too.

On a Scottish, British or European level, Labour will always promote and support policies that are rooted in advancing economic opportunity, human dignity and the ability to grow our collective potential as a country. That is why I invite colleagues across the Parliament to support our amendment.

I move amendment S6M-00382.3, to insert at end:

“; notes the disappointingly low uptake of the National Transition Training Fund to date and believes that upskilling and reskilling Scotland will require more ambitious interventions; acknowledges that the Scottish Government must do more to enhance the standard of living in Scotland, work with the UK Government to support flexible visa schemes and build on previous initiatives, such as ‘Fresh Talent’, in order to effectively address the skills shortages within key sectors of the economy and make Scotland an attractive location to live, work, study and do business; recognises the need for an effective industrial strategy, and calls on the Scottish Government to develop such a strategy to prevent the loss of skilled jobs, promote upskilling in the workplace and promote the extension of trade union recognition to prevent exploitation of migrant labour and secure future fiscal sustainability.”

15:59

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** In June 2016, on the eve of the Brexit vote, Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Priti Patel made the following statement:

“there will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK. These EU citizens will automatically be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK and will be treated no less favourably than they are at present.”

Five years later, despite those three individuals now occupying the highest offices in the UK and having absolute authority to make good on that

promise, we know it to be yet another leave campaign lie. The UK Government's settled status scheme is the opposite of an automatic right to indefinite leave to remain: it is conditional, as members said, and until the UK Government was shamed into dropping this policy, there was a £65 application fee for the privilege of even making the attempt. That is hardly living up to the commitment to treat EU citizens no less favourably than they were treated previously.

With just two weeks left before the deadline for applications to the settlement scheme, hundreds of thousands of applications are stuck in a backlog. The UK in a Changing Europe, a research body from which Parliament has heard a number of times, has warned that the backlog leaves a large number of people facing legal uncertainty, even if their applications were lodged on time. There is far greater concern for the unknown number of people who have not yet applied to the scheme and who will not do so before the deadline.

The UK Government has confirmed that it will make allowances for those with "reasonable grounds" for missing the application deadline, but it has not said what those reasonable grounds are.

**Stephen Kerr:** The member will be aware that the UK Government has said that the legal status of those EU nationals will be unaffected by the passage of the deadline, and that their cases will be considered in due time, so there is no threat to their rights. The spectre that Mr Greer is creating does not exist. It is another example of the scaremongering that this Parliament could do with less of.

**Ross Greer:** I am sure that Mr Kerr genuinely believes that, because I am sure that he sincerely wishes to believe that the radical right-wing agenda through Brexit that he supported is not causing significant damage to his constituents, but it is causing damage. We all know that, from our inboxes. We have already seen our constituents being discriminated against because, for example, landlords are taking advantage of the application scheme backlog to raise questions about their tenants' eligibility to stay in this country.

The UK in a Changing Europe think tank is non-partisan—it is seen as credible by members of this Parliament and the UK Parliament and even by the UK Government—and it is raising the spectre of people being, in essence, legally undocumented after the passage of that deadline. The UK Government was warned of the backlog—

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the member give way?

**Ross Greer:** I will happily give way to Mr Kerr if he can explain the grounds that the UK Government has set out in relation to people whose applications have not yet been processed.

The UK Government has said that everything will be fine but it has not set out any mechanism for resolving that issue.

**Stephen Kerr:** Kevin Foster, the Minister for Future Borders and Immigration, said:

"We have already confirmed that someone who has applied to the EU settlement scheme by the 30 June deadline, but has not had a decision by then, will have their rights protected until their application is decided."

That could not be clearer. It is in black and white; it is a fact.

**Ross Greer:** As I explained to Mr Kerr a moment ago, the delay is being used by unscrupulous landlords and by employers—there are two examples. The UK Government is simply not enforcing such an approach. It has not provided enough support for those individuals. It is fine for Kevin Foster to say that, and of course we welcome the UK Government giving clarity that those applications will be processed, but the fact is that that Government is not supporting the very people whom it put into this position in the first place. The UK Government has used those individuals as pawns, first in a negotiation and since then in multiple election campaigns, and now it has left them in limbo and uncertain of their legal status. Mr Kerr needs to recognise the incredible level of uncertainty that many of our constituents feel.

The impact that the situation is having on individuals and families is severe, and that should be our primary concern, but the wider economic, social and cultural hit cannot be ignored. Scotland relies disproportionately on inward migration to meet our labour needs, largely because of our reliance on the tourism, agriculture and university sectors, but that is not a priority for the UK Government.

When it became clear that the post-Brexit immigration system would be deeply damaging to Scotland, this Parliament's Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee put questions to the chair of the UK Government's Migration Advisory Committee. It was pointed out to him that the UK Government's proposed rules would be seriously detrimental to tourism and agriculture, in particular, and that those sectors make up a far larger share of our economy than is the case for the economy of the UK as a whole. His response was that those sectors might simply need to "contract". Given that Mr Kerr is so keen to contribute to this debate, it would be welcome if he could tell members whether he agrees with that. Given the area that he represents, does he agree with the chair of the UK Government's Migration Advisory Committee that maybe the Scottish tourism and agriculture sectors just need to contract, because their needs do not match the agenda of the UK Government?

**Stephen Kerr:** I am more than happy to confirm that—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Kerr, could you wait until you are called before you intervene? Thank you.

**Stephen Kerr:** To be absolutely clear, the member answered his question with what he said. The Migration Advisory Committee is an advisory body, not a Government spokesman. That was not someone enunciating Government policy. It is an advisory body that gives advice. Advisers advise and Government ministers decide. That is not the Government's policy.

**Ross Greer:** The Government accepted the MAC's recommendations in full, and those sectors are now explaining the impact that those policies have had. Mr Kerr is absolutely right to say that advisers advise, but the Government accepted that advice and is now implementing that advice, and we are now seeing the impact of that advice on the Scottish economy.

A moment ago, Mr Kerr mentioned Kevin Foster, a UK immigration minister. He came to this Parliament to defend UK Government policies on the premise that we could somehow create a higher-wage economy in the UK. He could not quite explain the connection between the UK Government's immigration policies and the desire for a higher-wage economy, and he was not willing to take the one step that is immediately available to the UK Government to create a higher-wage economy, which is to raise the minimum wage to a level at which people can actually afford to live. If the UK Government is committed to seeing wages increase, it should take the easiest tool that it has at its disposal, which is the national minimum wage, and raise it to a level above the poverty line.

The question of wages takes me to the other important point, on which I will close. The UK Government's policy choices are a combination of the malign and the simply ridiculous. The labour shortages that are noted in the motion are not all down to immigration and wage policies. They are down to employers who are not willing to treat their staff with dignity. They are down to far too many employers in tourism, hospitality and agriculture who will not pay their staff a living wage and offer them a secure contract. I have no sympathy for a business that advertises for staff with poverty wages and zero-hours contracts and is unable to fill those posts.

That is one area in which the Scottish Government has some control. It cannot set wages but it issues hundreds of millions of pounds in business support grants, with no attached condition of paying staff a living wage. If the Scottish Government is committed to a high-wage, high-skill economy, one of the easiest tools at its

disposal is its ability to set a basic condition on the public grants that are given to businesses that they should pay their staff a wage on which they can afford to live. I would welcome it if, in his closing remarks, the minister could respond to that point.

I recognise that I have run over my allocated time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You certainly have, Mr Greer, as you invited a couple of those interventions.

16:07

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Oliver Mundell is a mild-mannered and gentle member of the Parliament, so I cannot believe that he drafted the Tory amendment. It is not possible that such an intelligent member could draft such an ignorant amendment.

There is, of course, no doubt that we should recruit locally when we can, and that we should seek to upskill, reskill and educate the workers of this country and make sure that they can access lifelong learning. However, that cannot be done overnight in the way that Oliver Mundell has sought to impose on the Government.

**Oliver Mundell:** Will the member give way?

**Willie Rennie:** I will let Oliver Mundell in shortly. He completely ignores the problems that have been created by the points-based immigration system. He does not mention them in his amendment and did not seek to raise them in his speech. He has completely ignored the seasonal agricultural workers scheme pilot, which was bedevilled by problems that were caused by the UK Government. He did not mention the EU settled status scheme, which, despite protestations, still has problems with its registration process.

**Oliver Mundell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Willie Rennie:** I will, in a second. It is impossible to have a rounded debate about the problems that we are facing with recruitment, employment and training in this country without acknowledging the biggest elephants in the room—the problems that have been caused by the UK Government.

**Oliver Mundell:** The member mischaracterises my speech, because my point is exactly that we have had almost 15 years of SNP government and some of those things should have started a long time ago. It is not good enough just to keep bringing in migrant labour to plug the gaps. We need to start doing something here in Scotland to

train our young people for the future. Does he agree?

**Willie Rennie:** Oliver Mundell tries to paint it as a black-and-white picture, but it is not an either/or. Of course this Government should have performed better over the past 14 or 15 years—we agree with that. However, we do not agree with simply cutting off the supply of workers.

We need to constantly regenerate our economy, because we do not have the growth rate in our population that we need—although it could be said that that is also the Scottish Government's responsibility. The problem is that we cannot simply switch off the supply of workers overnight. The construction industry is very clear about that. It says that, ideally, we would recruit more people locally and train people better to make sure that we have more drivers and more workers here. That is incredibly difficult to do overnight, but that is what the UK Government has forced on the country.

My criticism of the Scottish Government is pretty straightforward. I know that it has failed in many areas of life over the past 14 years. However, to have a proper, rounded debate, we need to recognise that the UK Government has put a wrecking ball through many sectors in the economy. That is intolerable. I thought that Oliver Mundell, being a much more intelligent member, would have recognised that and contributed to the debate in a much more rounded way. *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention just now.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rennie, you will have to take your seat—Mr Mundell has a point of order.

**Oliver Mundell:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The member has questioned my intelligence twice. I am used to taking part in robust debates and I am pleased when members intervene on me to disagree on the substance of a speech, but I do not think that it is fair to question my intelligence twice in that way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I thank Mr Mundell for his point of order. The exchanges have been robust so far, but I am not sure that the references that Mr Rennie made were out of order. In a generally robust debate, I encourage everybody to have respect for colleagues across the chamber.

I invite Mr Rennie to continue.

**Willie Rennie:** Perhaps I did not make myself clear, but I was praising Oliver Mundell for being a very intelligent member of this Parliament, which is why I was surprised by his contribution and his amendment. I am full of praise for Oliver Mundell

and the contributions that he makes in the Parliament. I will not step back from that.

It is important to recognise that the pandemic has also contributed to the country's difficulties. The situation is not straightforward and, as much as I am a big critic of Brexit, it is not all Brexit's responsibility.

For example, the foundations of the problems in the social care sector in particular relate to the amount of money that we pay the workers. Although the recruitment issues were eased during the pandemic, we need to recognise that they are back to being exactly where they were previously. Brexit has, of course, compounded the situation by restricting access to good workers who can be employed in that sector. That is why, in the reforms that are coming, the Scottish Government needs to make sure that it pays the workers appropriately.

The seasonal agricultural workers scheme is another area that has been through great difficulty. It was supposed to lead to 30,000 workers coming to the UK, because we recognised that there was not a sufficient number of workers. Last year, many people who were on furlough worked in the sector, but that is not available to the sector—

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Willie Rennie:** In a second—I am running out of time.

As I said, 30,000 workers were supposed to come. However, as a result of the late deployment of two operators in the seasonal agricultural workers scheme pilot, we have rotting fruit in our fields and flowers left unpicked, and vegetables are potentially under threat as well. That is all because the UK Government did not do as it promised, which was to make sure that the scheme was in place. I could go through lots of different sectors, too.

We need to make sure that we have a rounded debate and a rounded policy so that we can achieve the high-skilled, high-wage economy that we seek for the country. We need to be open to good immigration to refresh our society. People who work hard and play their part in society deserve a good job so that they can look after their families, yet they are often let down on both fronts—by the UK Government and by the Scottish Government. We can do so much better.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. We are a bit tight for time as a result of interventions and points of order, so I encourage members to include interventions in their allocated time.

16:14

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Skills shortages are not just about Brexit, nor are the economic difficulties simply about the impact of the pandemic. There is no doubt that there were shortages and difficulties before either of those issues raised their head. There is also no question but that Brexit presents some real hurdles, which we need to get over somehow or other.

As I referred to earlier this afternoon, the ending of freedom of movement will have enormous consequences for farmers, with potentially huge shortages of seasonal agricultural workers during the picking season. It was on that issue that I tried to intervene on Mr Rennie. The UK Government has deliberately delayed the allocation of two licences, which has meant that the companies will have difficulty in recruiting staff and getting them over here in time for the picking season. We will be left with crops unpicked and rotting in the fields—and it is not as though that has not happened before.

I can see the same issues putting pressure on other areas of our economy, including food processing, factories, abattoirs and the red meat sector. How we will build back at all, let alone build back better, if the construction industry cannot get the workers that it needs is beyond me.

The Tory amendment in Oliver Mundell's name is frustrating, because, yet again, he focuses on something other than the real challenges that we should be working together to find solutions to. As we saw in their leaflets during the election campaign, all the Tories want to talk about is preventing an independence referendum. The irony is that it is you, not us, who keep talking about the independence referendum. You have a constitutional obsession based on the principle of denying democracy and preventing the people of Scotland from deciding their own futures.

As for Mr Mundell noting in his amendment

“the need to work constructively with the UK Government to maximise the opportunities for Scotland outside of the EU”,

I remind him that, during the election campaign, it was his leader who told the country, in a live debate, that under no circumstances would he work with Nicola Sturgeon on anything, let alone on major issues such as climate change, because we in the SNP believe in independence.

If you want to intervene to square that circle, please do so.

**Oliver Mundell:** Mr Fairlie is using the usual SNP trick of cherry picking parts of the amendment. I am interested in whether he agrees that his Government has failed when it comes to supporting our colleges, and whether he thinks

that that is acceptable or good for young people in this country.

**Jim Fairlie:** No, I do not agree. I will give an example of one of the things that the Scottish Government is doing right now. The Scottish Government and the Scottish food and drink industry are working together as part of the industry recovery plan. The Scottish Government is funding a careers programme, and, in its first three months, more than 300 teachers have signed up to the good food champions initiative to promote career opportunities in the sector. The Scottish Government is working across a range of sectors to help people into work. [*Interruption.*] No, I will not take another intervention.

The same UK Government completely ignored not only the Scottish Government but a raft of organisations in the agricultural sector when they made propositions about the Australia trade deal. You did not listen then, so why would we think that you will listen now?

The amendment says that the Scottish Government needs to work with the UK Government. How can we possibly work constructively when the Scottish Government has been given no role in any of the negotiations for one of the biggest deals for the country—a deal that will decimate an industry and affect a large part of my constituency?

When the time is right, it is absolutely right that the Scottish people will have a referendum. We will unite this country and remove ourselves from a body that deliberately makes sure that we are cut out of negotiations that directly affect the people of Scotland.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will Jim Fairlie make up his mind whether borders that are imposed are a good or a bad thing? Right now, I am confused as to where he sits on that issue.

**Jim Fairlie:** I am not confused at all. It is simple—Scotland should be an independent country.

We know for certain that the Tories in this chamber and in Westminster are deliberately making decisions that will definitely harm the people and the industries of Scotland, particularly those in the area that I represent.

In the interests of using conciliatory language, I say that am acutely aware that we all need to be less partisan. That is why I am so disappointed that you mentioned the independence referendum in your amendment.

We certainly need to look for short-term support for the fresh meat, hospitality and soft fruit sectors, which are particularly important in my constituency. It would be good to look at allowing a Scotland-wide unique immigration programme—

such a programme exists in Canada, as has been mentioned.

I have spoken to numerous hotels, businesses, restaurants, bakers, builders and haulage companies in my constituency. All are crying out for workers. We need a solution to the problem that we have right now. The Scottish Government should be allowed to have its own system, so that we can bring in the staff that we need.

We have a crisis across so many industries—you are sitting there laughing. What is funny?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Fairlie, not only is your time up, but you have referred to “you” on three occasions in your speech. The chair is the only “you”.

**Jim Fairlie:** My apologies.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Your allocation of time is over.

16:21

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** We live in one of the most industrious and creative countries in the world. However, we are not giving people the right opportunities to fulfil their potential.

As I mentioned during my maiden speech, I left school with no qualifications, and further education was the springboard that I needed to get back on track. Since the SNP's coming into power, there are 140,000 fewer college places for people to train, learn and get on in their lives. Training should not be exclusively for people who are leaving school, especially as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic. We are seeing a shift in many sectors, and many people—old and young—across Scotland will be contemplating where to head next and what their career will be.

My region has been hit particularly hard in recent times. Two major employers in Bishopbriggs have announced plans to relocate; 1,700 jobs are being taken away from the local area. That means that 1,700 people will have to find a job in a tough market. HarperCollins Publishers is leaving after a 50-year presence in the local area, and Aviva Insurance is moving to new offices on the other side of Glasgow.

In addition to larger businesses, numerous small and medium-sized businesses have closed their doors due to the pandemic, having waited for SNP Scottish Government help that they never got, or that they got too late to save jobs and businesses.

The west of Scotland has a huge tourism sector, which has been placed in stasis for over a year. Many places have reopened but are not yet working at full capacity. As a result, many people are still on furlough or have been made redundant.

Whether through training or support into new employment, we need to do everything that we can to upskill our workforce. Lives and livelihoods are at stake. Families on the breadline need real solutions. Those people have mortgages, bills and dependants to pay for and provide for, just as we do. People who have, sadly, lost their jobs need help, encouragement, action and confidence that their Government will give them every possible opportunity instead of throwing them on the scrap heap and pointing the finger at the UK Government or at Brexit as an excuse to wash its hands of the situation.

Questions must be asked of the Scottish Government and about its approach to education and skills in general. Its absolute failure to close the attainment gap is having compound effects on young people later in life.

**Daniel Johnson:** I am grateful to the member for giving way. She is absolutely right to ask those questions of the Scottish Government. However, I ask a question of her: does she accept that businesses up and down Scotland are facing very real costs because of Brexit?

**Pam Gosal:** That is an interesting question. I have been speaking to a lot of businesses. My family owns a lot of hospitality businesses, too. We need to see Brexit as an opportunity instead of talking about going back in time. To be honest, standing here today, I have heard about borders, Brexit and immigration, but that is all a smokescreen so that the SNP can talk about an independence referendum to break away. Yes, there are problems for businesses, and we must address those. There are attainment gaps. There is a lot going on, but that is down to the SNP, which has failed over the past 15 years. I hope that we will see a lot from the SNP over the next five years, because all I heard from the member today was, “We will—”. Let us see.

I will get on with my speech.

In West Dunbartonshire, for example, the number of pupils leaving school for a positive destination fell by nearly 4 per cent in the last academic year. The SNP's track record on the skills gap is just as distasteful as its record on pretty much everything else. The SNP spends a measly £3.8 million on individual training for people—just £200 per person. The Scottish Conservatives promised more than double that. The SNP has cut spending on innovation and industries by a whopping £66 million. To top it all off, the SNP flagship digital growth fund to boost skills in digital industries has not even paid out 20 per cent of its funding. The SNP has failed.

The SNP may scoff and sneer at the UK Government's Turing scheme, but one cannot help but wonder: if it had a European flag instead of a

union flag, would its attitude be different? The new Turing scheme will be a targeted scheme, which will be fairer and more balanced than the Erasmus programme. Leaving Erasmus will ensure that, no matter where a person is from—*[Interruption.]* Let me finish, please.

**The Presiding Officer:** The member has no time.

**Pam Gosal:** No matter where a person is from or their background, they will be given the same opportunities as everyone else.

In our manifesto, we proposed retraining solutions that would see a training and upskilling revolution take place in Scotland. Our proposals include unlimited apprenticeships for young people. Those apprenticeships would benefit the Clydebank campus of West College Scotland, which has been restricted in its ability to offer places to learn practical skills in recent years. Our proposals—

**The Presiding Officer:** The member should wind up.

**Pam Gosal:** This is my last sentence: our proposals for sector-specific job security councils would give people the safety net that they need to rely on when times are hard.

16:27

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I am grateful for the opportunity to be sitting down as I give my speech today. I will begin by welcoming my colleague Richard Lochhead to his role, and I really look forward to working with him during this term of government.

During my election campaign, I had the opportunity to meet several businesses and organisations that have suffered the double whammy of Brexit and Covid. That has been compounded particularly by the area's reliance on the fishing, farming and tourism industries. Fishing sector leaders tell me that they have witnessed the selling out, yet again, of their industry. More recently, that has also been the case for farmers, who are deeply alarmed by the selling out of the Scottish agricultural sector.

For example, it is claimed that Brexit has caused a "massive hole" in the number of people coming to the United Kingdom to pick fruit in the summer, putting growers on the brink. Stephen Taylor, the managing director of Winterwood Farms Ltd, said that the labour market has become "tighter and tighter" and that the impact of Brexit on the flow of workers to UK farms is only getting worse. He said:

"We are not talking about a few tens of thousands, we are talking hundreds of thousands of people less to work in the UK."

Think tanks, independent research, business sector representatives and accountancy firms are all telling us what we now know: the north-east of Scotland will be the hardest hit by Brexit. We are bracing ourselves for the realities of that hard Brexit, which is only just beginning in its cause of bringing more pain and suffering to the people I represent. The Banffshire and Buchan coast sits within the captivating beauty of Aberdeenshire and Moray—a region that can easily be described as a shire with two tales to tell. It is frequently described as wealthy or affluent, but that description is far removed from the experiences of many in my constituency.

The 2020 Scottish index of multiple deprivation identifies Fraserburgh and Peterhead as being in the top 10 and 20 per cent of the most deprived areas in Scotland. That is compounded by many coastal communities facing the most difficult of times due to the pandemic and the economic consequences of Brexit.

The stark inequalities between those who have a lot and those who have little or nothing are as shameful to us as they are to visitors, who can see poverty and decline from devastating Tory-inflicted policies. When they arrive to take in the beauty of our landscape, many visitors will not be aware of the hidden deprivation that lies under the surface.

That is why I am grateful for the Scottish Government's commitment to invest an additional £500 million to support new jobs and reskill people for the future, and for the much-needed extension to the national transition training fund. The places that were most at risk economically will struggle to bounce back, but I know that the SNP Government will ensure that we prioritise them in all that we do in providing opportunities for recovery.

The underlying resilience of our economy relies on fair work and quality jobs for all, in order to create a more equal society. However, it goes beyond that. I used the word "recovery" a lot during my campaign and I meant it, but I meant "recover to better than before". Tackling inequalities, including gender economic inequality, and providing fair work that unlocks people's creativity, confidence and wellbeing is our case for an economic recovery that will benefit all.

The business case for an inclusive economy is strong. It helps our businesses to innovate and grow, it helps them to compete more effectively on the world stage, and it helps to develop, attract and make the most of our talents in Scotland. There is an opportunity to build a strong national consensus around a national purpose, to learn from other small nations and to adapt lessons to Scotland's specific circumstances, so that we enable a shift towards our wellbeing economy. We have the opportunity to be ambitious and to rethink

how we invest in places and, importantly, who benefits from the investment.

The coronavirus pandemic and Brexit have exacerbated inequalities between and within our communities. I know that this might not be customary, but I want to innovate and to bring together industry experts—the people who work in their sectors every day—to plan for economic prosperity in the north-east. During the recent campaign, I pledged to form and chair a new tourism forum that is composed of businesses and other stakeholder organisations, so that we can come together and speak in a unified voice to support more jobs and investment along my coastal community.

We cannot discuss the implications of Brexit on skills without acknowledging the huge contribution that EU nationals make to our country. The fishing, farming, hospitality and health and social care sectors are reliant on them. The UK Government's immigration system is not fit for any purpose in Scotland because, in contrast, we value and cherish our EU nationals and their decision to work here and make Scotland their home as they contribute culturally, socially and economically to our country's prosperity.

Perhaps it is an apt time to highlight the possibilities that could come with having power over all our decisions in an independent country. We would have the opportunity to take charge of our own future. Those who say that we cannot concentrate on more than one thing at a time should perhaps drop the unionist agenda and leave the multi-tasking to us, because full economic prosperity and health and wellbeing come hand in hand with an independent Scotland.

16:33

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I am pleased to speak in today's debate on mitigating, tackling and responding to the skills impact of Brexit. I think that we can all agree that a skilled and productive workforce is vital to addressing labour market inequalities, creating fairer workplaces and delivering an inclusive, green recovery. Obviously, as a result of Brexit and the pandemic, there has been major disruption in the labour market. However, skills shortages and the availability of a skilled and sustainable workforce are deeper-rooted issues; they did not start with the recent turn of world events and their impact on Scotland.

Although the events of the past 18 months have had, and are having, a detrimental impact on jobs, and although there has been a negative impact caused by Brexit—which the Tory amendment fails even to acknowledge—it is the failure of the Scottish Government over 14 years in education

and skills and its failure to put in place a joined-up strategy for jobs across all parts of Government that is at the root of the skills shortage and the problems in national workforce planning. I have made the argument before that, if we want to see a high-skill, high-wage economy, we must do more to invest in education, skills and training.

It is widely accepted that the UK suffers from a chronic shortage of engineering skills, with around 400,000 engineering roles unfilled according to the Scottish National Investment Bank. Reports also state that three quarters of Scotland's information and communications technology employers report difficulty in finding workers with the right skillset. The Scottish Government recognises that problem, noting in the future skills action plan that a shortage of technical skills can delay the development of new products, services and technologies.

I emphasise again the failure of the Scottish Government to recognise that Scottish education is not only failing to adapt to the changing needs of our economy but fails thousands of young people in the way that it prepares them for 21st century Scotland. We must halt the decline in educational standards: teachers face burnout, class sizes are far too large and pupils are not getting access to the levels and standards of education that are required to equip them for the modern world of work.

**Oliver Mundell:** Does the member agree that our education system has moved too far away from knowledge and that helping young people from the most deprived and challenging backgrounds to access skills requires sharing knowledge with them and making sure that they are learning something in school?

**Alex Rowley:** A report on curriculum for excellence is due to be published sometime soon. There is clearly an issue with curriculum for excellence, and we must review what has happened. I believe that schools are failing many children and that we must look at the curriculum, but that does not get away from the fact that Brexit is also causing major problems. It is right to raise Brexit, but, if we are serious about the long-term future of the economy, we must address the major failings in our education system.

**Richard Lochhead:** The member has said that our schools are failing our young people. Does he regret making that comment, given that society is complex? The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and other sources of information, research and data have explained how what happens outside the classroom, including poverty and other socioeconomic factors, has an impact on what happens inside the classroom.

**Alex Rowley:** We have a major skills gap. All my life, I have seen that people who get education, skills and opportunity can have a trade and can have certainty about their future. Most of those people will do well. The people who do worst in life are those who come through an education system that fails them, and that is happening to far too many pupils in Scotland after 14 years of an SNP Government. We must address that, and we can start to do so by being honest about the number of children in Scotland who are being let down. Teachers warn that they are overwhelmed and under pressure. We can talk about all the other skills, but children who do not have the basics will not succeed in life. That is the level of failure that we must address.

We cannot simply bring skilled workers from abroad to plug the skills gap in Scotland. That is not sustainable. On the subject of economic migration, there is again a Scottish Government failure in joined-up planning and a particular failure to put in place the basic public services that workers require, such as housing. There has also been a failure to explain the case for economic migration to the wider public.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please wind up, Mr Rowley.

**Alex Rowley:** We must start to address those issues if we are to address the failings of the Scottish economy.

16:40

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I thank Richard Lochhead for lodging the motion for debate, and I welcome him to his new position.

I will focus on the issues in my constituency around skills shortages caused by Brexit, but I will also focus on the Scottish Government's actions in mitigating those shortages in the next 100 days and beyond. The motion is quite right to focus on the impact that Brexit has had on our local and national economy and our skills base, and its severe impact on certain sectors.

East Lothian has traditionally had low levels of unemployment and high levels of employment. With its proximity to Edinburgh, up to 50 per cent of our working population travel into the city to work. However, East Lothian's job density rate is lower than that of the rest of Scotland: it is about three quarters of the Scottish average. I want to attract businesses in the financial technology, life sciences and financial services sectors, among others, to locate in East Lothian, which needs a strong skills base to create more wealth and tackle poverty. We need to encourage talent from not only Scotland but the UK and Europe. This point has been mentioned previously, but Scotland

needs an immigration policy that complements our economy, not one that hinders it.

East Lothian has a few key sectors, which the minister touched on earlier, and I will address the impact that Brexit is having on them. I have mentioned previously in the chamber the importance to East Lothian of the tourism and hospitality sector. The sector employs 5,000 people in East Lothian and generates £260 million for our local economy every year. However, I met VisitScotland last week and found that it is already hearing of staff shortages in the sector. Many of those from Europe who were employed in the sector have left because of the impact and uncertainty of Brexit and the EU settlement scheme, which has been mentioned in the debate. A key thing that we all need to do is raise the profile of the sector and create clear career pathways. I am encouraged to hear that Edinburgh College and Queen Margaret University are keen to engage with me on that issue in East Lothian.

On food and drink, I spoke last week about the importance of farming to our local economy in East Lothian. We have over 180 farms and thousands of people employed in the industry. Many farmers in East Lothian supply the food and drink sector, and many of them export all over the world—it is the fastest-growing sector of our economy. In last week's debate on the Australian free trade agreement, we were assured by Finlay Carson that that was not a done deal and that Scottish farmers would be looked after. Yesterday, we heard news of a deal agreed in principle.

So, were our farmers and our food and drink sector looked after? NFU Scotland president Martin Kennedy stated:

"As detail on the proposed terms of agreement around an Australian trade deal emerge, deep concerns will remain about its impact on Scotland's farmers, crofters and our wider food and drink sector ... The cumulative impact of all such trade deals on extremely vulnerable sectors such as farming, food and drink could be hugely destructive."

That is a damning indictment of the self-proclaimed party of business: all that for a trade deal estimated to improve gross domestic produce by 0.02 per cent at the most over the next five years. [*Interruption.*] No. I am sorry, but I do not have enough time.

I ask the Scottish Tories: is that a price worth paying? I think not.

The EU settlement scheme is a disaster waiting to unfold this picking season, with many farms struggling to recruit. I want to work with NFUS and Scotland's Rural College to attract new entrants into farming and the food and drink sector, which we need to make as attractive as possible. The Scottish Government must be commended for the extension of the national training fund, which has

helped the tourism and hospitality sectors and will continue to do so—careers in tourism and hospitality are rewarding. The Scottish budget includes £125 million for skills and employment support, including the young persons guarantee and the national transition training fund, which I just mentioned. Those are really important. I was also glad to hear the announcement about the continued support for tourism, leisure and hospitality.

That funding is alongside an additional £230 million for Skills Development Scotland. I will have a meeting with SDS tomorrow, to look at how we can target investment into our tourism and food and drink industries. We also need to address issues that have been raised in briefings regarding the construction and social care sectors. Again, clear career pathways with complementary skills networks are key to success.

The Scottish Government is working in collaboration with colleges and universities to create 5,000 industry-focused courses and is working with SDS with an additional investment of £230 million to create new training opportunities and mitigate the skills shortages that are caused by Brexit. It is working with employers on the young persons guarantee and it is providing an additional £45 million to support local partnerships to ensure that no young person is left behind.

Time after time, the Scottish Government has to mitigate Tory policies that damage my constituency and Scotland. It is clear beyond any doubt that the only way to protect Scotland's interests, its businesses and its place in Europe is for us to become an independent country.

**Stephen Kerr:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The member did not take an intervention during his speech. I acknowledge that it is technically impossible, if a member is remote and being broadcast into the chamber, to intervene on a speech, but is it in order for a member to give a speech from an office in the Parliament building when there are so many empty spaces in the chamber? That does not facilitate the debate that we intended to have.

**The Presiding Officer:** I am aware of that occurrence. I will certainly consider your comments and the context in which the member participated.

16:46

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** My first speech as an MSP, five years ago, was about Brexit and my first speech in this session is about Brexit. The difference this time is that Brexit has happened. Some of us have moved on from that, but the SNP has not.

The title of the debate is negative and the contributions from the SNP have matched that tone. For a party that is built on division and grievance to stage this debate takes quite a collective brass neck. We are having the debate against a backdrop of an economic calamity that has been caused not by Brexit but by Covid, and we do not know how it is going to play out. The signs are that the UK economy could come back very well, but responding to Covid is the biggest challenge that employers face right now. At least the Government motion mentions that.

On the UK bounce back, the unemployment rate has been falling and the employment rate rising, but to listen to some of today's speakers, one would think that it is impossible for anyone to come to Britain to work. EU citizens who are already here could apply to stay under the EU settlement scheme, and should have done so, and there is a host of other visas and work permits that are open to the world. We have the skilled worker visa, the health and care worker visa, the temporary seasonal worker visa, the youth mobility scheme visa, the global talent visa and the frontier worker permit—Britain is not closed.

**Willie Rennie:** The member is right about those issues, but why are people choosing not to come here? It is because they have other countries that they can choose to go to that are much easier to get into. If we are trying to compete to get the best people to come here, we should make it as easy as possible, which was the situation when we were members of the European Union.

**Graham Simpson:** I have just outlined a host of ways in which people can come here. They are welcome to come here and Mr Rennie should recognise that fact. Net migration from non-EU countries has risen to its highest level for 45 years. For the year ending March 2020, an estimated 316,000 more non-EU citizens came to the UK than left; the figure for EU citizens was 58,000.

I was interested to read a paper from the Construction Industry Training Board. Its research shows that 8 per cent of the construction workforce in Scotland was born outside of the UK and that 23 per cent of construction companies that operate in Scotland employ non-UK-born workers. The CITB says that the dependence of employers in Scotland on migrant workers is low—its words—and that only 3 per cent of employers that operate in Scotland feel dependent on migrant workers.

Most construction industry employers that operate here do not expect the introduction of the points-based immigration system to have an impact on their company. Of those that employ migrant workers, 91 per cent do not expect the number of non-UK workers that they employ to

change over the next 12 months. That is what they have told us.

That is not to say that there are not challenges. As Willie Rennie said, it is not a black and white issue. I have been speaking to hauliers, too. There is a shortage of lorry drivers, which the UK Government could help to address by relaxing some of the rules—we have to be honest about that. However, with well-paid jobs such as a lorry driver, I have to ask why we cannot train enough of our people to do it and get youngsters interested. The skills gap in the haulage sector has existed for a while and cannot be blamed solely on the UK leaving the EU.

Age Scotland has highlighted the number of vacancies in the care sector, although those figures are quite out of date, given that we have been through the pandemic in the meantime. I suspect that, whatever the current figure is, it will have more to do with the pandemic than with anything else. However, it is a challenge to fill vacancies in that vital sector, and it has been for a long time. That is where our amendment comes in, as it talks about the need to create more apprenticeships, to reverse the trend of decreasing college student numbers that has occurred under the Scottish Government, to set out plans for a return to in-person small-group learning in higher and further education, and to introduce individual learning accounts, as called for by the Confederation of British Industry Scotland.

The Government needs to concentrate less on trying to score cheap political points and more on filling the skills gaps that we have had for years, which is something that should unite us all. All parties will have ideas, and Mr Lochhead should be reaching out rather than trying to stoke grievance.

My biggest fear is not Brexit, which I see as a land of opportunity; it is that we will have a large group of young people left behind because of Covid. The unemployment figures do not tell the full story. Many thousands of people do not show up in the figures. Those people are not claiming benefits; they are just waiting, often in desperation, for things to open up again. Let us give them the hope that they deserve.

16:52

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I very much welcome this timely debate. I must start with the declaration of an historical interest. In late 2017 and early 2018, I was a co-author of two reports on Brexit and Scottish business that drew attention to the prospect of a hard Brexit having significant implications for skills availability. Brexit has been harder than was anticipated by any of

the over 200 business leaders with whom I engaged. It is fair to say that none of the business leaders anticipated the attitude of the UK Government would be characterised by an “eff business” approach. As a direct consequence, Scotland’s skills challenge is even greater than expected.

I agree completely with the motion when it stresses the challenge to our labour market from the utter madness of the Tory Brexit. Skills shortages are increasing. Ending free movement is hugely damaging. We face a future filled with uncertainty, and the disruption to international trade raises huge questions for business. So one thing is clear—[*Interruption.*]

I shall not give way. For the record, Presiding Officer, I have noticed a huge difference between this Parliament and Westminster in that the vast majority of members here engage in substantive debate, whereas Westminster is characterised by barrack-room lawyers—hence my refusal to give way.

One thing is clear: the labour market that we need to prepare for is not the labour market of pre-Brexit and pre-pandemic Scotland. Thankfully, the Scottish Government has not been standing idly by and has commissioned a range of work. In this speech, I will reference the Higgins report and the Cumberford-Little report, both of which give a clear sense of what is needed if we are to have the skills to meet the challenges of the future.

The Cumberford-Little report, “One Tertiary System: Agile, Collaborative, Inclusive”, makes a telling observation when it states:

“we must insist on excellence rather than competence within the content, assessment, and currency of technical and professional qualifications.”

That is a welcome call from an excellent Government-commissioned report.

The call for a focus on excellence is mirrored in other quarters—for example, in the Higgins report, “Towards a robust, resilient wellbeing economy for Scotland”, which gives considerable prominence to the importance of skills development in building a sustainable future. Of particular interest is its emphasis on ensuring the provision of high-quality skills that effectively reflect real-world business and economic needs. For example, it raises an issue of business concern in the following terms:

“Many apprenticeships have high value in the labour market, but this depends on their quality ... Expanding the number of apprenticeships in this period of depressed economic activity will be challenging. Generating new apprenticeships that are not of high quality will undermine the reputation and value of apprenticeships.”

Therefore, as such reports make clear, putting quality at the heart of skills development is of fundamental importance.

I hasten to add, however, that I wholly appreciate the competing demands and complexities that the Scottish Government faces. It is right to have a concern for short-term challenges, particularly for young people, given the potential that exists for serious long-term damage to be done to individual figures and the economy, but our concerns regarding the wider economy, business and young people are not mutually exclusive. It is perfectly rational to have short, medium and long-term ambitions for the skills sector, where issues of excellence and quality are one of the golden threads.

From a business and economy standpoint, the Government has also undertaken a great deal of work in recent times to develop effective policy frameworks that set a clear international context for our needs. Excellent work that was led by Ivan McKee in producing “Scotland: a trading nation” identified 15 priority 1 countries and 11 priority 2 countries for our exporting ambitions. Separately from that, the office of the chief economic adviser to the Scottish Government conducted a competitor analysis across 66 goods sectors and 19 service sectors, using data from more than 100 countries. That formidable piece of work identified eight key competitor countries for Scotland.

There is a tie-up there. Remarkably, seven countries are priority 1 countries and also our key competitors. I will not list all those countries, but research shows that they have a very high commitment to skills development to international standards. Therefore, I ask the minister whether there might be a case in the future for looking at international skills benchmarking with such countries.

The work that the Scottish Government has done in commissioning external research and undertaking its own research is to be commended. As we move forward, the Scottish Government will have my full support as it faces the complex and developing skills challenges.

16:57

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** This is a crucial debate for us. We need to make sure that the Covid pandemic and the fallout from it do not mask the skills crisis that Scotland was already facing. As the SNP Government’s motion acknowledges,

“a skilled and productive workforce is vital to addressing labour market inequalities, creating fairer workplaces and delivering an inclusive, green recovery”,

but those warm words have not yet translated into Government action with tangible outcomes.

As a result of the pandemic, the Scottish Government has received additional consequential from the UK Government. The

Scottish Parliament is one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world, but we face a skills crisis and a jobs crisis—which have, of course, been exacerbated by Brexit—that need to be tackled. Therefore, we need to make sure that the additional consequential are invested wisely. We need to create a system for reskilling that works for Scotland and pushes the boundaries of what is possible. In the process, real leadership must be shown so that we can address the inequalities and skills shortages that predated Covid.

It must be made clear that the crisis that we are talking about is a Scottish crisis. Over the past 14 years in Scotland, there has been a steady decline in employees receiving job-related training. People who are already in employment—especially those who are on low incomes—need access to training. I will come back to that point. One of the most striking issues to be raised in the excellent briefing that members received from Edinburgh College last week was the number of people in Edinburgh who are in low-paid employment who need access to skills and decent training. To deliver on that urgent training requirement, our colleges need more funding. I hope that ministers will respond to that point.

It has been revealed that the SNP’s national transition training fund has had an unacceptably low uptake. Leadership means accepting it when things have failed, going back to the drawing board and starting again. The motion welcomes the extension of the fund to 2021-22 and the commitment to invest an additional £500 million in the current session of Parliament, but we need to know what lessons have been learned from what did not work previously. We need to know how success will be measured and, if success is not delivered, how the scheme and the £500 million will deliver the change that we need. I would like to hear a specific comment on that.

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** The national transition training fund was designed with the expectation of a significant upturn in unemployment, but that did not transpire. I presume that we all agree that that is a good thing. However, I ask Sarah Boyack to reflect on the fact that, even in those circumstances, it supported 6,000 people in phase 1.

**Sarah Boyack:** Yes, but we need to do more to accelerate this. The points that Alex Rowley made about the social and educational inequalities that hold people back were right. We need access, and I would like the minister to think about free training opportunities for people on low incomes and precarious or short-term contracts.

How will people be supported to get access to those opportunities and develop their skills, for example in the care sector, which several members have mentioned? We need to make sure that, if training will involve time off work, financial support is available to fill the gap of the missing hours, or uptake will be low. What impact do caring and childcare responsibilities have in preventing women in particular from accessing opportunities?

Scottish Labour has repeatedly raised the issue in relation to the principle of a national care service. Far too many people in the care sector are paid low wages and do not have opportunities to develop their skills or progress professionally, so the sector is not attractive to them as a long-term option. That is why we want nationally negotiated terms and conditions, and training needs to be linked in to that. I want the importance of training in the care sector to be highlighted, because it is becoming more and more vital. We need to recruit more people but also to retain them.

The Scottish Government's ambitions need to be matched by real goals so that we can identify how they relate to people's working experience. We also need to think about the job losses that have occurred during the pandemic, which have particularly hit women who have lost employment as they have had to home school or act as carers.

There are some opportunities here. In North Ayrshire and through the work of our UK colleagues in Preston, procurement has been used in such a way that apprenticeship and training opportunities have been created. I would like the minister to address that in his closing remarks.

Members throughout the chamber have mentioned specific sectors that have been hit by Brexit as well as by the pandemic. More needs to be done in those areas to support people to stay in employment and keep businesses going.

Paul Sweeney made some important points about flexible visas, which are also mentioned in our amendment. When Scottish Labour was in power, the fresh talent initiative made a huge difference to our economy. It enabled people to seek employment here after graduation and to switch into work permit employment or other legal migration routes that they qualified for. There was also a scholarship scheme for overseas graduates that enabled them to combine postgraduate study with a year of work experience. That is a good example of how we negotiated vital changes with our UK colleagues to meet our country's needs at the time.

Something that has come across in this debate is the need for the SNP Government to work

constructively to make more demands on the UK Government, but it is also important for the Scottish Conservative members of this Parliament to advocate change for Scotland within their party. As Graham Simpson said, different visas are on offer, but they simply do not meet the needs of the employees that we need in Scotland now.

I want to finish with a point about Edinburgh—

**The Presiding Officer:** Please do finish.

**Sarah Boyack:** —because we have a particular issue regarding the festivals. I want to know what the Scottish Government is going to do to support people in the city to get access to training, because we are losing huge numbers of jobs due to the pandemic. We are also losing out in retail, and we need urgent action to target those industries.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to the closing speeches.

17:04

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** As other members have done, I welcome Richard Lochhead to his new role, and I also welcome the expression of priorities in his motion. Although the Scottish Government might once have placed all the emphasis on narrow ideas such as economic growth, it is good that the motion prioritises addressing inequality, “creating fairer workplaces” and “an inclusive, green recovery”.

The Government has taken some criticism for even bringing a motion that acknowledges the direct harm from Brexit, but it is absolutely necessary to identify and name the problem, however uncomfortable the Conservatives are about taking responsibility for what they have done.

Although we oppose the Conservatives' amendment, I acknowledge that they are not all enthusiasts for Brexit like Mr Mundell; others are merely apologists for it. Some of the Conservative speeches today were vaguely coherent, but none appeared to take responsibility for the profound harm that Brexit has done; nor did they acknowledge that pro-independence parties were returned with a strengthened mandate in the election just six weeks ago, so their concern about needless disruption to the labour market can hardly be taken seriously.

The Conservatives' position is that disruption arising from their anti-European obsession is just fine, even when 62 per cent of the people voted against it. Yet, at the same time, even considering asking the people about independence is somehow intolerable disruption. There is not the slightest hint of consistency in that position. Mr Mundell's threat of a hard border at Gretna is just

one more reminder that it is the Conservatives who seek hard borders, because they want borders to be things that divide and control people, rather than free and open places where people can meet and mix as they wish.

The Greens certainly have common ground with much of the Labour amendment, from the need for wider trade union recognition to stronger action to improve standards of living, and we will vote for it at decision time. I know that Paul Sweeney wants to see deep changes to the UK Government's immigration system, but I wonder whether he really thinks that years—even decades—of anti-immigrant policy from successive UK Governments will disappear if we just ask for humane immigration policies. If the UK Government was remotely interested in ending its anti-immigrant stance, we could work together to achieve a lot of what Paul Sweeney seeks, but I do not think that Mr Sweeney imagines that Priti Patel would even pick up the phone to discuss that.

Ross Greer set out clearly what a fundamental betrayal of EU citizens the EU settlement scheme represents. I hope that Stephen Kerr now has some understanding of the harmful impact that his Government has had on EU citizens in Scotland and throughout the UK. Ross Greer also mentioned other issues that were raised in the Green amendment that was not selected for debate. At the moment, there is ambiguity from the Scottish Government on the idea of a physical token in relation to the EU settled status scheme. When we raised it before the election, the Scottish Government appeared to be generally sceptical about the idea, but its manifesto subsequently opened the door to that policy. I am still unclear whether it will proceed, and, surely, that decision should have been taken by now.

EU citizens in Scotland make a critical contribution to our society, especially in sectors that suffer from widespread job insecurity, low pay and poor working conditions, as multiple speakers have recognised. We seek action to fix those long-standing problems, not only because so many people's work is vital to our wellbeing as a society, but because nobody should be expected to live with exploitative working conditions.

The cabinet secretary responded to a challenge from Daniel Johnson on that issue by saying that sectors such as hospitality also offer positive opportunities. However, that risks implying that we should give indiscriminating support to employers, regardless of how they treat their workers. We need to address individual abuses—such as those suffered by staff at the Glasgow bars AdLib and Blue Dog, who are owed hundreds of thousands of pounds in unpaid furlough—but we also need a systemic approach. That requires determination

from Government to intervene in order to raise standards across sectors such as hospitality, retail, social care and further and higher education, because those abusive and exploitative conditions are at least as much of a problem in recruitment as are any of the other factors that members have discussed today.

People are clearly suffering because of Brexit and because of the deliberate policy choices of the UK Government, but they are also suffering because of their treatment by employers. Because all employers are now dependent on state intervention in the Covid recovery, there is an unprecedented opportunity for the state to clearly set the conditions for that support, in order to raise standards. If we want an economic recovery that works for everyone, it is vital that we do not miss that opportunity.

17:10

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

There was an important debate to be had today about the future economy. There is a challenge. Many people have recognised that, as much as Covid presents us with challenges, it has accelerated many factors that were present in the economy before.

We have to embrace a knowledge economy that is grounded in skills, but, critically, we also have to focus on productivity based on investment. Ultimately, today's economy is global; it does not recognise borders. Those who seek to construct borders are trying to push water uphill. However, we have not debated that today. It seems that we have had parallel debates, with two parties of government speaking from parallel universes—both have been on an entirely different planet.

I find myself, not for the first time, in active agreement with Willie Rennie. We have had a debate in which two parties have tried to present things as black and white, but they quite simply are not so.

I say politely to the Scottish Government that it has to recognise the context in which we entered Brexit—it was not one without any issues whatsoever. A characterisation of the economy that I read discussed high unemployment but low productivity, low-quality jobs, a need for increased research and development, shortages and mismatches in the labour environment, and a hollowing out of the labour market. Those things were not stated in some random report, but in Benny Higgins's report on the future of the economy. They were stated very clearly on an explanatory page. Those were the issues that the Scottish economy faced, and those are the issues that the Scottish Government should have been tackling over the past 14 years. Quite simply, it

cannot escape the legacy of its own policy decisions.

Equally, the Conservatives have to face up to the fact that Brexit causes costs: businesses face challenges and there is a shortage in the labour market. Those are simple and unarguable facts. We were in the European Union for decades. *[Interruption.]* I will take an intervention in a moment.

The single market was created in 1992. From that point, we benefited from the free movement of goods, people and capital, on which businesses came to depend. Costs are created when we break up such a union and put up a border, and businesses cannot simply switch overnight. That is the fundamental reality that is being faced in the economy, and that is why we have skills issues.

If Stephen Kerr can answer those points, I will be glad to give way to him.

**Stephen Kerr:** Daniel Johnson has made a strong point about the disruption of Brexit and the changes that are effected by it. Does he accept that there are costs and opportunities, that we should have confidence in Scotland's producers, exporters, businesses and entrepreneurs and that we can go into the world and sell more than we have sold in the past?

**Daniel Johnson:** I keep hearing about those opportunities, but I seldom hear them defined, let alone quantified. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that I will not give way. Until that happens, I will struggle to take a word that is said about such opportunities seriously, let alone acknowledge them.

**Oliver Mundell:** Will the member give way?

**Daniel Johnson:** Okay—if Oliver Mundell can define one opportunity.

**Oliver Mundell:** Does Daniel Johnson agree that it is a good thing to see tariffs on Scotch whisky removed?

**Daniel Johnson:** I will gladly look at the removal of tariffs. However, on trade deals that amount to little more than 0.2 per cent of gross domestic product, we will see in a single year—in the first year of the deal—beef exports from Australia to the UK quadruple in comparison with what Australia was able to export to the EU as a whole. I am very sorry, but—*[Interruption.]* If Mr Kerr would like to intervene again to define and quantify an opportunity, I would be happy for him to do so, but I suspect that he is remaining in a sedentary position for a very good reason.

**Michelle Thomson:** Mr Johnson just made the mistake of saying that a 0.2 per cent contribution to UK GDP from the Australia-UK trade deal was

anticipated. It is actually a 0.02 per cent contribution.

**Daniel Johnson:** I am grateful for that intervention.

We must talk about how we address the long-term skills needs. Fundamentally, it is about people and skills, and investment in and support of enterprise and industry.

It seems to me that the Scottish Government has overly relied on the national transition training fund and has simply restated figures around modern apprenticeships. We welcome the apprenticeships and the support, but the Government has to acknowledge that the national transition fund has fallen well short of what it was set up to do. Apprenticeship starts are 20 per cent down on where they were in quarter 4 of last year. Quite simply, young people deserve better because we know that they will be the hardest hit in any downturn. They were the hardest hit in the 2008 financial crash, when youth unemployment almost doubled, and we have seen 15,000 more young people become unemployed in the past year.

However, we must also see better investment and support, because there is an over-focus on skills. Unless we have investment in productivity and in plant and equipment, we will simply continue to be reliant on the low-wage, low-value jobs about which a number of members—in particular, Paul Sweeney and Ross Greer—set out their concerns.

**The Presiding Officer:** The member should close now, please.

**Daniel Johnson:** I will do. It is important that we look at the sustainability of the economy, so that we do not rely on low-wage migrant labour. It is important that we have a high-wage, high-productivity economy. That is what Scotland deserves.

17:16

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am sorry not to be in the chamber in person, but it is nevertheless a great pleasure to be speaking in my first debate of the new session, after having listened to so many excellent contributions from new MSPs from all parties over the past few weeks. However, it is somewhat depressing that, although we might be in a new session of Parliament, this afternoon the SNP appears to be restating many of the same tired arguments about Brexit that it made in the previous session.

No one denies that skills should be at the forefront of policy making right now, given the issues that many businesses face with job

vacancies. I am making this speech from the Highlands, where the hospitality industry depends on a skilled workforce and is bearing the brunt of over a year of disruption because of the pandemic.

However, let us be in no doubt that the wide panoply of problems that exist did not suddenly begin on 23 June 2016, when the Brexit vote occurred, nor did they begin when we left the EU and formalised a new relationship with our European friends at the start of this year. There have been long-standing challenges in skills in Scotland for many years, and the Covid pandemic has exposed and accentuated many of those issues. This is less about Brexit and much more about the frankly dire record of the SNP in Government over the past 14 years.

As others have said, it is a shame that the Scottish Government has not taken a more positive approach to this debate. We should be debating how we reskill and upskill people in Scotland, especially in light of Covid. We should be debating economic recovery for our communities. We should be debating how to restore Scotland and how we concentrate on people's everyday priorities. Instead, today the Government is yet again trying to blame Brexit for issues that are very much of its own making.

Graham Simpson said today that there are, indeed, challenges now, but the key to solving them is filling the skills gap, which is something that we all need to contribute to in terms of policy work. Covid-19 has starkly highlighted the increasing skills gap that already existed in Scotland. It is not a new problem but a consequence of years of failing to make significant investment in crucial areas. For instance, we know that the Scottish Government spent only £3.8 million on individual training accounts last year, which were worth just £200 each. Fewer than 20,000 people have successfully applied for them, and the SNP has set a target of only 28,000 for this year. Quite simply, that lacks any ambition at all. We also know that the Government has cut funding for innovation by £66 million since 2019 and that it failed to pay out more than 80 per cent of its digital growth fund, which was designed specifically to boost digital skills training—to repeat, a staggering 80 per cent of that fund went unused.

In education in general, closing the attainment gap would mean that more young people from the poorest backgrounds would be able to access high-quality further and higher education places. That is critical to ensuring that we have a strong domestic workforce that is able to meet the needs of emerging businesses in high-skill sectors. However, we know that the attainment gap has not narrowed in the past few years. In fact, in some cases, it has been growing. Between 2017-19 and

2018-19, the expected gap in the standard of literacy between S3 pupils in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas increased.

It is particularly disappointing that the SNP has committed only £20 million to education catch-up. That is a far cry from our call for £85 million to be spent on a national tutoring programme to help children to catch up with learning following the disruption that has been caused by the pandemic. All of that and more points to a Scottish Government that is happy to deflect from its failings in developing the skills of our working population and young people rather than focusing on delivery.

I will turn to immigration. I stood in Argyll and Bute in the recent election. Predicted depopulation in that constituency in the coming 20 years is very stark and hugely worrying. However, just as the causes of that are far more about the Scottish Government's decade-long failure to revitalise the local economy and improve connectivity, housing and job creation, so the solutions are increasing investment, improving the road network and helping local business. That has nothing to do with immigration or Brexit and everything to do with economic recovery.

We, in the Conservative Party, value the hard work of those who have come to live, work and raise a family in Scotland. We welcome the fact that more than 260,000 EU citizens have applied for settled status in Scotland, with more than 5 million EU citizens applying across the UK. I join others in calling on anyone who has not yet applied for settled status to do so before the 30 June deadline.

Equally, the Scottish Conservatives welcome those people who come from all over the world to Scotland and want to contribute to our society. At the same time, however, it is important to have an immigration system and process that is fair and robust, and we also support the points-based system as a means of delivering that. It is a system that was once supported by the SNP in its 2014 white paper on independence.

We also believe that it is critical that we continue to have a UK-wide immigration system that recognises where skills gaps exist and looks to close them. To answer Richard Lochhead's question about the devolution of powers over immigration, we need look no further than the view of leading organisations such as Scottish Chambers of Commerce, which said that it does not

"believe that devolution of immigration powers to Scotland is necessary to achieve a business solution to migration targets".

CBI Scotland also noted

“the importance of maintaining a single UK-wide immigration policy that gives Scottish businesses the flexibility they need to attract talent.”

It is critical that we have an immigration policy that works and acts to complement a reskilled and upskilled domestic working population. That is why the UK Government should be commended for recognising the need to offer young people more opportunities to retrain and reskill. It is also why the Scottish Conservatives have called for a retrain-to-rebuild scheme that would be worth £500 every year to every single adult in Scotland, and for unlimited apprenticeship opportunities for Scotland’s young people. Those proposals would be life changing for many, and we call on the Scottish Government to implement them.

The Scottish Conservatives want the next five years to be more than a rerun of the past five years. The SNP spent that time obsessing over the constitution rather than getting on with the day job. As a result, the skills gap has grown, the attainment gap has widened and the SNP is failing the people of Scotland. As Oliver Mundell said during his opening speech, the people of Scotland deserve better. The Scottish Conservatives have bold ideas for taking our country forward, and we want to work with others to ensure that Scotland recovers from the pandemic and that we reboot our economy in a way that rewards hard-working people. That is our driving aim, and I encourage the Parliament to support our amendment tonight.

17:23

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** Mr Lochhead and I lodged the motion for debate in a spirit of optimism. Sadly, that optimism came crashing to the rocks during the debate. It is interesting that Donald Cameron said that today should have been an opportunity to discuss how we will reskill Scotland’s population. That was the purpose of today’s debate. That is the very reason why we lodged our motion for debate today.

In that regard, I agree with the point that was made by Sarah Boyack and Daniel Johnson about the criticality and importance of these issues. I readily concede that not all of the challenges that we face are as a consequence of Brexit—indeed, I would say that our motion also concedes that. Some of them are of long standing, and we have sought to respond. However, the idea that Brexit has had no consequences for the skills base of Scotland’s population or impact on our economy or society is a non-starter.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I will give way to Mr Kerr in a second, because he certainly said some things that I want to respond to—I assure Mr Kerr of that fact.

There are parts of Mr Mundell’s amendment that I have no problem with. For example, I have no problem with the idea of creating more apprenticeships, which we have sought to do year on year, although there have, of course, been some challenges over the past year. However, his amendment cannot be held to be a serious contribution to a debate about the impact of Brexit when it removes, as it seems to, any reference to the consequences for businesses across Scotland—a point that was made by Mr Rowley.

**Stephen Kerr:** Truthfully, we all wanted to have a substantive debate on skills this afternoon. However, from the minister’s opening speech, it has been a litany of Brexit this and Brexit that. When I intervened and asked a question about the number of modern apprenticeship starts in Scotland quarter on quarter—on which I gave the minister the numbers—it was pooh-poohed and dismissed. I want to understand what is going on in our modern apprenticeship programme and what ministers are going to do to stimulate more modern apprenticeships.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Mr Kerr wants numbers, and I am happy to give him numbers. In 2015-16, we delivered 25,818 modern apprenticeships against a 26,500 target. In 2016-17, we delivered 26,262 modern apprenticeships against a 26,000 target. In 2017-18, we delivered 27,145 modern apprenticeships against a 27,000 target. In 2018-19, we delivered 28,191 modern apprenticeships against a 28,000 target. In 2019-20, we delivered 29,035 modern apprenticeships against a 29,000 target.

That suggests to me that a year-on-year reduction in apprenticeship numbers—as I heard from Mr Kerr—does not stand up to scrutiny. It is fundamentally inaccurate—[*Interruption.*] He wants more figures—I am happy to give him more figures. In the same period in England, we saw 285,300 apprenticeship starts in 2015-16. Over that same period, by 2019-20, we saw 171,600 starts, which is a reduction of nearly 114,000 starts. I will therefore take no lessons from Mr Kerr and the Tories on the administration of apprenticeships in Scotland.

I am happy to confirm that we will support Mr Sweeney’s amendment. I agree with the broad thrust of what it lays out. However, as people will have sensed, I take some issue with what it terms the

“disappointingly low uptake of the National Transition Training Fund”,

which Sarah Boyack also reflected on. I again make the point that the fund was designed primarily to respond to an upturn in unemployment that we had expected to see but which we have not seen. I would imagine that we would all think that that is a good and welcome thing. Nonetheless, in the past year, 6,330 people were supported by that fund and, indeed, the delivery of some of that fund continues through colleges and universities. However, I will not quibble over that minor form of words when we agree with the essence of the amendment, which we will support. We have, of course, also committed £20 million to the fund in the coming year.

Pam Gosal mentioned the Turing scheme and suggested that we would somehow be in love with it if it was branded with the EU flag as opposed to the union flag. We might have appreciated it more if it was a scheme that matched the breadth and scope of Erasmus+ rather than guaranteeing funding only for one year, having no provision for inward mobility to the UK and, critically—this is the important point—offering no support at all for adult education and youth work. Youth clubs and adult learners are cut out of the equation when it comes to the Turing scheme, which reinforces historical inequalities and shows a worrying value judgment as to who the Tories consider deserve the opportunity to experience international exchanges. So much for the Tories' concern about the attainment gap.

Ross Greer made a valuable contribution, and I agree with the fundamental points that he made about the uncertainty that EU nationals face. In the context of today's debate, it is important that we send a clear message to EU nationals in Scotland—those who have chosen to make Scotland their home—that they are welcome and we want them to stay here. It is also important that we remind them of the looming deadline for applications to the EU settlement scheme and of the necessity of applying to that scheme, as laid out by the UK Government. We do not think that they should have to do so, but we need to make EU nationals aware of the application deadline.

In his amendment, Paul Sweeney mentions the fresh talent initiative. That initiative was not without merit—indeed, I think that we, as a party, welcomed it at the time—but I am sure that Paul Sweeney would agree that the context in which it was delivered was rather different from the current one. Through our moving to Scotland programme, we will be providing information and advice in order to create a talent attraction service to encourage the workers we need to Scotland.

The impact of Brexit on our economy and our society is serious, and it requires a serious response, as does the question of how we ensure that our population has a skill set to respond and

adapt to the times that we are in. We are willing to engage with others, including colleges, universities, training providers and employers, to get that right. We are also willing to engage with others in the Parliament. However, I do not think that today's debate has been a proper reflection of the necessity to engage with serious intent. I reiterate the offer to every party in the chamber to work with us towards that end.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on mitigating, tackling and responding to the skills impact of Brexit.

## Business Motions

17:32

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

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-00396, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 22 June 2021

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: OECD Report on Curriculum for Excellence

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Coronavirus (Extension and Expiry) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Financial Resolution: Coronavirus (Extension and Expiry) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.30 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 23 June 2021

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Finance and Economy;  
Education and Skills

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Tackling Child Poverty Progress Report

*followed by* Stage 2 Debate: Coronavirus Extension and Expiry (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

6.30 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 24 June 2021

12.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Coronavirus (Extension and Expiry) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.30 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 31 August 2021

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 1 September 2021

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 2 September 2021

12.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Health and Social Care

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 30 August, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-00411, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out changes to tomorrow's business.

*Motion moved,*

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

for Thursday 17 June 2021—

after

followed by Ministerial Statement: Provisional  
Outturn 2020-21

insert

followed by Scottish Government Debate:  
Appointment of Law Officers

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time—[George Adam.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

### The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to speak to and move motions S6M-00398 and S6M-00399, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

17:33

### The Minister for Parliamentary Business

**(George Adam):** I know that this is everyone's highlight of the week. Luckily, I have only two motions to speak to today.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No 24) Regulations 2021 amend the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 to move the Moray local government area to level 2, its having previously been kept at level 3 due to high case numbers, and to add the areas of Bedford Borough Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council to the list of places in the common travel area between Scotland and which travel is not permitted unless a person has a reasonable excuse. The changes are being made as a result of a substantially increased prevalence of the coronavirus in those areas, particularly with the new B1.617.2 variant being present in those areas. The regulations came into force on 22 May 2021, except regulation 4, which came into force on 24 May 2021.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No 11) Regulations 2021 make further amendments to the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Regulations 2020: to limit the exemption of seafarers and inspectors and surveyors of ships from the requirement to enter Scotland only at a designated port and the requirement to take out and comply with a managed self-isolation package of hotel accommodation, transport to it and testing; and to make a saving provision such that a person who arrived in Scotland at or after 12.01 am on 8 June 2020 but before the coming into effect of an amendment that is made by the regulations must comply with the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 as they were at the time at which the person arrived in Scotland. The amendment regulations came into force on 25 May 2021.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 11) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/212) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 24) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/211) be approved.—[*George Adam.*]

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

## Decision Time

17:36

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-00382.1, in the name of Oliver Mundell, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00382, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on mitigating, tackling and responding to the skills impact of Brexit, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:36

*Meeting suspended.*

17:40

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** Members should cast their votes now on amendment S6M-00382.1, in the name of Oliver Mundell.

The vote is closed.

### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)

Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**Abstentions**

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-00382.1, in the name of Oliver Mundell, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00382, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on mitigating, tackling and responding to the skills impact of Brexit, is: For 29, Against 73, Abstentions 21.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S6M-00382.3, in the name of Paul Sweeney, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00382, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on mitigating, tackling and responding to the skills impact of Brexit, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Stewart. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)

Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-00382.3, in the name of Paul Sweeney, is: For 93, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that motion S6M-00382, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on mitigating, tackling and responding to the skills impact of Brexit, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### Abstentions

Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-00382, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on mitigating, tackling and responding to the skills impact of Brexit, as amended, is: For 91, Against 29, Abstentions 1.

### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that a skilled and productive workforce is vital to addressing labour market inequalities, creating fairer workplaces and delivering an inclusive, green recovery; recognises that employers in sectors disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are now reporting skills shortages as a result of the ending of free movement, and that colleges and universities share concern over the impact of Brexit on staff and student mobility; agrees that delivering a skilled and sustainable workforce will require action and collaboration from both the

Scottish and UK governments, along with employers and key partners; welcomes the Scottish Government's continued commitment to upskilling and retraining, including through the extension of the National Transition Training Fund to 2021-22 and commitment to invest an additional £500 million over the current parliamentary session to support new jobs and reskill people for the future; notes the disappointingly low uptake of the National Transition Training Fund to date and believes that upskilling and reskilling Scotland will require more ambitious interventions; acknowledges that the Scottish Government must do more to enhance the standard of living in Scotland, work with the UK Government to support flexible visa schemes and build on previous initiatives, such as 'Fresh Talent', in order to effectively address the skills shortages within key sectors of the economy and make Scotland an attractive location to live, work, study and do business; recognises the need for an effective industrial strategy, and calls on the Scottish Government to develop such a strategy to prevent the loss of skilled jobs, promote upskilling in the workplace and promote the extension of trade union recognition to prevent exploitation of migrant labour and secure future fiscal sustainability.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to put a single question on the two motions on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, unless any member objects.

The final question is, that motions S6M-00398 and S6M-00399, in the names of Michael Matheson and John Swinney, on approval of SSIs, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 11) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/212) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 24) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/211) be approved.

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

## Historical Forced Adoption

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. Members should take care to observe the measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber, and they should use the aisles and walkways only to access seats and when moving around the chamber.

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-00138, in the name of Monica Lennon, on historical forced adoption. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak button.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament condemns the historical practice of forced adoption, where up to 250,000 mothers were unfairly coerced, resulting in their new-born babies being taken away from unmarried mothers; notes that, in the UK, it is estimated 60,000 of the women resided in Scotland; acknowledges that the babies were taken away against their mother's will and placed for adoption; understands that lawyers examining the birth mothers' cases have focused on the period between 1945 and 1975, before a change in the UK adoption law, when around 500,000 babies were adopted, mostly from mothers who were under 24, denying them the right to care for their children; notes the view that the UK and Scottish governments should follow the lead of the Australian Government in 2013, by taking responsibility for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, and further notes calls for the Scottish Government to initiate an inquiry regarding the practice in Scotland, acknowledge to the public through a formal apology that there had been wrongdoings and ensure that support is available to women and families in Central Scotland and across the country who have had to live with the consequences of the actions of government in the past.

17:51

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I am grateful to members for supporting the motion and for taking part in the debate.

Historical forced adoption was most common from the 1950s to the 1970s, but the pain of the victims continues to this day. What happened was beyond cruel. Women were shamed for being pregnant outside marriage. State-sanctioned abuse made them believe that they were unfit to be mothers. That can never be justified.

The practice of separating unmarried mothers from their babies and removing those babies for adoption was not unique to Scotland and the United Kingdom. In other countries—notably Australia, Canada and Ireland—Governments have apologised on behalf of the state for the injustice that changed the course of the victims' lives for ever. There has been no inquiry and no

apology for the 60,000 women in Scotland who were the victims of forced adoption. Many women have already gone to their graves believing that they were bad mothers.

Dr Cynthia McVey, who has spent decades supporting the victims of forced adoption, says that many of those women will never be able to forgive themselves without an apology from the Scottish Government. I cannot think of one single good reason to delay or deny them a formal apology.

Evelyn Robinson was a victim of forced adoption in Edinburgh when she was 19. Her journey took her to Australia, where she became part of the Australian apology, which was issued by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard on behalf of the Australian Government in 2013. That landmark apology shows us what is possible and continues to give hope to women in Scotland. In Gillard's opening words, she said:

"Today, this Parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, takes responsibility and apologises for the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering."

If Australia can acknowledge the profound effects of such policies, why can Scotland not do so? Campaigners in Scotland have been waiting for eight years to hear those words from the Scottish Government. The act of forced adoption is the historical injustice that we are debating tonight, but the lack of an apology is today's injustice.

Award-winning journalist Marion Scott has supported campaigners for more than a decade, giving them a platform and forcing us, the politicians, to listen. Marion is a fierce advocate for women and I hope that her persistence pays off. Time is running out for the women Marion supports.

Two weeks ago, my colleague Neil Bibby spoke powerfully at First Minister's question time on behalf of his constituent Marion McMillan, a victim of forced adoption who continues to campaign for an apology despite being terminally ill. I have a statement from Marion, whose son was taken for adoption from a mother and baby home in 1967. Marion said:

"I sincerely hope that Scotland will finally take the opportunity to make an official apology to the 60,000 vulnerable mothers who had their babies taken from them simply because they were not married.

What happened to all of us was a dreadful abuse of our human rights, and set in motion lifelong pain and psychological damage to the women and the children.

Mothers spent their lives searching for the babies they were forced to hand over.

I remember crying and telling the authorities that my baby already had a mummy. But they simply took my son from my arms, and left me weeping.

Our children suffered too. They also had no choice in what happened to them.

Many were left deeply scarred, told their mother did not want them, or their mother was dead. Those policies condemned many to a lifetime searching for who they really are, looking for their parents within a system which put many barriers in the way of any reunion.

In 2015, I met with government ministers to ask if Scotland would take the step taken by Australia, an official apology is something which would acknowledge the wrong that was done to all of us.

It saddened me greatly the opportunity was not taken then.

However, I hope the government will listen carefully now to the personal stories of those affected, and finally take the step of apologising for what was done.

Those simple three words 'we are sorry' seem to have been the hardest of all, and we cannot understand why?

Scotland still has the opportunity to lead the way in the UK by doing this, and I hope the support from all political parties will show that the time is right for us to do the right thing."

It is clear that Marion McMillan is not giving up, despite the bombshell revelation reported in *The Ferret* today that, ahead of that ministerial meeting in 2015, Scottish Government officials warned ministers not to apologise, and to avoid the issue when meeting Marion and other campaigners. Documents that have been released to *The Ferret* confirm that. I have the briefing to SNP ministers in my hand. It warns:

"A commitment to replicate the public apology made by Australia on forced adoptions should be resisted."

Officials also contacted the UK Government to ask for a steer on the issue, and the Department for Education confirmed:

"our lines also resist calls for a public apology."

Although it is welcome that the Joint Committee on Human Rights in Westminster, chaired by Harriet Harman MP, will be investigating historical forced adoption, we simply cannot wait for the UK Government to act. I know that the minister is due to meet her UK Government counterpart, but it is time for the Scottish Government to act.

In 2015, a University of Edinburgh report warned the Scottish ministers that as many as one in three mothers with experience of forced adoption might suffer from severe mental health issues. Researchers concluded that

"tens of thousands of birth mothers in Scotland would benefit from acknowledgement of their experiences and an offer of help in dealing with the life-long consequences of adoption."

I appeal to the minister and to Nicola Sturgeon not to wait for the UK Government to act, to ditch

the bad advice and to find the compassion and courage to do the right thing. They should deliver this long overdue apology and finally give the women and the families that were affected the recognition and support that they deserve.

17:59

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I am pleased to speak in this very important debate, and I thank Monica Lennon for lodging the motion and bringing the debate to the chamber.

This is a story that has to be told. It is a terrible indictment of our society that, not so long ago, in my lifetime, an estimated 60,000 women had their child forcibly removed after birth simply because they were not married. The cruelty and inhumanity of that beggars belief. As a mother, I cannot imagine the horror of it.

I am aware of women who have suffered that trauma—women who were told that their grandmother was their mother and whose mum was the woman whom they had thought of all their life as their sister. Despite that being utterly wrong and against all the rights of the biological mother, at least those women grew up with the child in their life.

Many women, such as Marion McMillan, whom we heard Monica Lennon speak about and who featured in the excellent report by Marion Scott in the *Sunday Post*, did not even have that. I am talking about women not just in Scotland or the United Kingdom but throughout the world. In 1967, Marion McMillan was a single teenage mum from Stranraer who was forced to hand over her baby at a Salvation Army mother and baby home. She begged to keep him, but he was given to a married couple, and Marion did not see him again for almost 40 years. Ironically, she was unaware that, while she was searching for him, he spent years searching for her.

Speaking to the *Sunday Post*, Marion said:

“We were vulnerable young women who were bullied and told if we really loved our babies, we’d give them up so they could have a mummy and a daddy.

I remember crying and telling them ‘but I’m his mummy’, and begging them not to take my son. I was told not to be silly. I’d get over it and I could always have other babies when I was married.”

Incredibly, despite her lifelong trauma, Marion found the strength to reunite hundreds of mums and their children, and she gave testimony to Australia to secure an official apology there in 2013. She is also spearheading a campaign to get an official apology for mothers across Scotland, which Monica Lennon calls for in her motion. I whole-heartedly support that, and I am pleased

that, in the chamber just a few weeks ago, the First Minister expressed her support for it, too.

Marion said:

“I can’t express how important an official apology is. It’s unimaginable something like this could happen in Scotland. But it did and the legacy of pain devastated many lives, especially those who never found each other.”

There are thousands of silent, traumatised women in Scotland who will relate to that—whose pain and anguish has been held within them for years. An apology will not right the wrongs that have been done to them but, if it gives them some comfort, it should happen.

What happened to those women was unforgivable. Thankfully, it would not happen today, but it serves as a reminder that we must always be aware that equality and women’s rights must never be rolled back. I am talking about women’s health; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex equality; misogyny; violence against women; reproduction rights; pension rights; and much more. We must never allow those who would push their own agenda of judgment and moral high ground to impede the advances that we have made in equality.

What has happened to 60,000 women in Scotland should serve as a reminder that human rights and democracy can be fragile. I want the women who have suffered that inhumanity to achieve not just an apology but a promise from us as legislators in the Parliament that we will protect future generations, including their children and grandchildren, from ever having to face the horror that they have had to endure throughout their lives.

18:03

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** I commend Monica Lennon for securing the debate and bringing an important issue to the Parliament.

Every member in the chamber recognises the pain and suffering that the historical practice of forced adoption has caused to many women and children throughout Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. I add my voice to those of my colleagues and express my deepest sympathy to every person who has been impacted by those events for the anguish that they have felt.

Behind each figure that is mentioned in the motion is a young woman who found herself unexpectedly pregnant and was hidden away from society and told to give up her child because she was unmarried. The women behind those figures were told that by organisations that they trusted. Some were told that it was for the best, some were berated and it was even suggested to some that they were unsuitable mothers. Others were told

that it was for their own self-respect that they should hand over their newborn baby to a married couple who could look after the child better, as they had stability. There was no support, and there was very little sympathy. It was a matter of having the child adopted or finding a way to fend for themselves.

In preparation for the debate, I read stories about women who had had their child taken from them. I could not believe the stories that I read. Women pretended to be married to keep their child, and women tried to hide their babies. Others sought refuge with a charity before their child was taken from them. The policy was horrific, and I can only imagine how those women must have felt losing the child whom they loved.

Since 1975, many brave women have put their head above the parapet to talk about their experience and how they lost a child, not due to an illness or sad circumstance but simply because they had fallen pregnant at a young age. One of the many stories that I read was that of Marion McMillan, who is rightly campaigning for the Government to investigate historical forced adoption in Scotland and issue a formal apology. It is disappointing that, after six years of hard work and effort, Marion and others are still waiting for their apology. Although we all accept that society has come a long way since then and that attitudes towards younger parents have changed, for the women who were told to give up their child, the pain and suffering live on.

Many women who were affected are now in their 70s or 80s, and time is of the essence. As Monica Lennon said, some women have sadly passed away without hearing the apology. We know that an apology will not rectify the life-changing events that young mothers experienced, but it could go some way to acknowledging the wrongdoing and how they were failed by organisations, Governments and society.

The devastating consequences for the mothers and their adopted children are clear. The mothers often talk about how they feel guilty, how they are ashamed and how they grieve, as many do not know whether their child is still alive. The adopted children have also suffered. Those who are reunited with their mothers can feel rejected and can struggle to reconnect and bond, as they spent the majority of their life living with an adopted family and not their biological parent. In truth, those people were severely let down by society. That is why the Scottish Conservatives agree that an inquiry should take place regarding the practice of adoption in Scotland, and that a formal apology should be issued as soon as possible to acknowledge any wrongdoing.

I also strongly agree with the wording of Monica Lennon's motion in relation to the support that

must be offered to families who were impacted by historical forced adoption. As I mentioned, women have been campaigning for an apology for more than six years. In 2013, Australia became the first country in the world to apologise for its history of forced adoptions. We can no longer drag our heels on this important issue. We need to follow Australia's example and ensure that we provide the women and children who have been impacted with a heartfelt and appropriate apology.

I support the motion that has been brought before the Parliament. MSPs have a duty to start an inquiry soon and to ensure that those who were impacted receive the outcome and the justice that they deserve.

18:07

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Forced adoptions, in which women were coerced by those more powerful than them to give up their babies—as happened to many young Scottish women in the 1950s, 1960s and even into the 1970s—are perhaps among the most heinous of injustices that our society has inflicted on women. They were a tragedy for all involved: for the babies taken from their mother's arms and forced to live with no knowledge of their birth parents or wider family; for the families whose relationships were often broken beyond repair; and for the women, who were shamed and shunned by society. We should never forget or ignore the appalling cruelties that were inflicted on those young women—some of whom we would now perceive as being children themselves at the time—or the lack of power and agency that they had.

I therefore congratulate my colleague Monica Lennon on facilitating the debate. Forced adoption is one of the greatest hidden and untold scandals of the 20th century. As Monica Lennon and others have outlined, the scale is truly staggering. It is nearly five years since STV screened a documentary on the subject that exposed the injustice of forced adoption on national television, yet the women and their children are still waiting for the Scottish Government to issue an apology on behalf of the entire nation. The *Sunday Post* has drawn attention to the tragedy and to the hurt that was inflicted on my constituent Marion McMillan and her son, as well as to Marion's long campaign for Scottish ministers to say sorry.

Marion, who was originally from Stranraer and now lives in Paisley, was 17 when she was sent to a Salvation Army mother and baby home. There, her son was taken from her, even though she begged for him to stay. Marion speaks movingly about hearing her baby crying in a nearby room and having to sneak in to cover him because contact was forbidden and was punished with extra chores. Newspapers have printed one of the

only photographs of a young Marion with her baby son, which was taken with a camera that the mothers had to hide so that they could have a permanent reminder of the short precious time that they would have together with their babies.

Marion's baby was eventually adopted and she was told that she could be jailed if she ever attempted to find him. Despite the fact that they both searched for each other, it was 40 years before Marion and her son would meet again. To its credit, the Salvation Army has apologised to Marion, but many other organisations that were involved in the cruelty of forced adoption have yet to apologise.

For years, Marion worked to support women from around the world who experienced such injustice. She helped to reunite families. Alongside Evelyn Robinson and many others, she gave evidence in support of a national apology in Australia. Australia went on to become the first country in the world to issue a formal apology for what happened.

As Monica Lennon said, Marion now has terminal cancer and her dying wish is that the Scottish Government will follow where Australia led and issue a formal apology to the women and children here who suffered as she did for so many years.

The women affected are largely now in their 70s and 80s. As others have said, sadly, many are no longer with us. However, it is vitally important that what they went through is acknowledged and remembered for generations to come, so let there be a permanent record in the Parliament of Marion's words:

"We were told we were unfit and inadequate and that our babies would suffer if we denied them the chance to have two parents to love and look after them. We were told if we really loved them, we'd let them go to a good home, that we'd be selfish not to sign the papers. Our only sin was to fall in love in a different era."

She said:

"an official apology ... would mend some of our pain."

This has been a shameful chapter in Scotland's history. It is time for the Scottish Government to acknowledge that and issue the apology that Marion and many others have waited for for so long. Marion deserves to have her dying wish granted.

18:11

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I congratulate Monica Lennon on securing this evening's debate on an extremely important, sensitive and, indeed, heartbreaking issue.

I want to contribute to the debate as one of the few female members of the Parliament who was around as a teenager and a young woman in the 1960s and 1970s. I want to put the issue in the context of the time. Contraception was top secret. Young men would go to the barber's to be offered "something for the weekend". Contraception for women was not publicised or available except in the context of marriage and, even then, it was difficult to access. Parents—mine, at least—told their children nothing about sex. Indeed, it was almost a taboo subject. In my day at school, there was no sex education. We had to pick up bits of information from magazines, science textbooks and friends, and much of what friends said was often simply wrong.

"Good girls" did not have sex out of wedlock but, for boys, it could be put down to "sowing their wild oats". Those terms were much in currency then, but how odd they sound now. The consequences of becoming pregnant for an unmarried girl were drastic, particularly for those for whom there was adoption under duress, of which I knew nothing then. The girl was labelled cruelly as "a slag" and her child as "a bastard". Those are not terms that I endorse, but they were common and accepted parlance at the time.

In most cases, the girl's options—the boy was not usually held to blame—were limited. If the family was supportive—some were—there could be a shotgun wedding to the father, who was usually young, too. Alternatively, as others have said, the child, once born, could be presented as the child of the grandmother and the child's mother as a sibling. The other options were adoption, often under family pressure or what later became known as institutional duress, and, of course, illegal abortion and all the ensuing dangers.

That was the culture of the day, to which I, like my peers, subscribed. The contraception that was used by most girls and young women then was fear of pregnancy and that alone. It was only with the introduction of the contraceptive pill that women were able to take control of their sex lives and relationships, and when and if they had children. That had a huge liberating impact on them. As I look back on those days through the prism of retrospect, I say now that it was so wrong and so unfair to women, who often paid a huge price: entering too young into marriages that were unhappy for both parties; masquerading as a sister of the baby; abortion; or forced adoption.

This is more controversial. Do I think that current Governments should apologise? The wrongs that were committed were not wrongs against the pervading culture but wrongs that were in tune with it. In general terms, the question is whether it is relevant to ask those who are in

power today to apologise for historical actions that society willingly accepted at the time. That is why I hesitate to support what are known as official apologies. I recognise why women seek them, but I sometimes wonder what their value is in real terms.

**Monica Lennon:** We in Parliament were all proud when the First Minister gave an apology to men who had sex with men who were criminalised because of who they loved. That was the right thing to do and it had huge value. Do these women not deserve the same?

**Christine Grahame:** This is a personal view and nothing to do with the Government. Even in that case, I thought, “What is this about an official apology?” What we need to do is right the wrongs of today. In my view, if we go back through history, where do we stop? What things do we apologise officially for, and what do we not apologise for?

Do not think for one minute that I am diminishing the position of the women. I knew that it would be a difficult point, but I felt that it is necessary to say it. Sometimes we use an official apology as a solution when it is not.

I will come to Monica Lennon’s point about homosexuals. Just as homosexuals were once pilloried, even criminalised, the blame does not lie on those today or even on those in the past—not if society willingly accepted those moral rules, wrong and cruel as we now correctly say they are. We cannot apologise for everything in the past that is rightly seen as wrong today, even though it was very wrong. Each generation must be responsible for the mores by which it lives and regulates its citizens, if it is done by the consent of the citizens.

However, when historical actions breach the laws and morals of that society, there must be accountability. Forced adoption, by its very terms, was morally and legally wrong. That is why I support a UK-wide inquiry into which institutions are responsible for those actions. It is they who should be held to account and from whom apologies, at the very least, are due. I am talking about continuing institutions.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** That is a very considered point about individual responsibility for the issue. However, Parliament does something to embody the nation, the spirit of the nation, and the population as a whole. If we as a community can apologise to people who have been so grievously wronged, our Parliament will perform that higher role in our country. Do we consider that to be a worthwhile thing to do?

**Christine Grahame:** That is an interesting debating point, but we would then have to decide how far back to go and what particular wrongs that we now recognise as wrongs should be apologised for. Do we rank them? There is a big

philosophical debate to be had here and I had to say what I have said because I have always had issues with us taking this route without proper consideration.

**Rona Mackay:** If an apology gives the women comfort, should that not be why we do it? If it gives them comfort, surely it is the right thing to do.

**Christine Grahame:** As I said, I want us to examine how far back we should go and who else will come along, but by no means am I diminishing what happened to those women. I want to separate the pain and anguish caused by institutions and individuals from the general question of official apologies, where we are going with them, what they mean, how far back we have to go, which cases we take up, and so on. This is an important matter to explore, and I have threaded it into this debate because I feel a certain discomfort when we say that we will just badge everything with an official apology. I think that that is worth discussing.

We should seek apologies from those individuals and institutions that were to blame. Thankfully, today we have different values. Women and their rights have come a long way, although there is still much to do. Adoption laws have moved on; I remember it happening when I was a lawyer. The biological parents in an adoption can retain rights to contact with their child. They used just to be wiped away, and that was bad.

We must recognise the awful pain and guilt that these mothers, who were often young, endured then and endure to this day. As a mother of two, I cannot begin to understand how awful it must feel for them. We need to help them to reconnect—if they wish, and if it is appropriate, to do so—through the various agencies with their children, who are now grown-ups. That is what Governments today should do, while recognising so much that was wrong all those decades ago by initiating an inquiry, supporting and helping those mothers when such support and help are needed and requested, and calling to account those who are to blame.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Thank you. I notice that Ms Grahame herself is impervious to the waving of “the Christine Grahame pen”. [*Laughter.*] I call Miles Briggs.

18:20

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I welcome you to your position in Parliament and congratulate Monica Lennon on lodging this important motion for debate—I was pleased to give it my full support. I also congratulate my friend and colleague Meghan

Gallacher on her excellent speech, and I welcome her to the Parliament.

In her contribution, Christine Grahame set out an important historical context. I do not necessarily agree with the conclusion that she reached regarding a national apology, but the first part of her speech set the context, which many of us find completely alien and shocking.

Debates such as this make me desperately want to see the day when Parliament can open its doors and let the public back in. I think that we would have seen a full public gallery for tonight's members' business debate, and I have no doubt that the people who are watching want their voices to be heard in the Parliament.

The forced adoption scandal has clearly directly affected mothers, and this evening we have heard from many members, in harrowing terms, about the unimaginable impact that the scandal continues to have—every waking moment of their lives—on the mothers who are still alive. However, we must also consider the impact that it has had on children and fathers.

I will use the time that I have this evening to speak about my constituent Marjorie White, who is 70. A former nursery teacher, Marjorie believes that she is one of the oldest forced adoption babies in Scotland today. Marjorie spent 30 years searching for her father, Peter McAllister, only for him to sadly die before they could meet in person. She says that the frustration and sadness of being unable to hug her own dad, and of having only a few short conversations on the phone, was truly devastating and traumatic for them both. Marjorie was deeply affected by the sheer waste of it all. She has spoken out now because she believes that the children of forced adoption were never given a choice and many of them are suffering equally today.

Marjorie believes that Scotland needs to find a way to make records more accessible to individuals who are trying to trace their parentage. We have not really touched on that aspect in the debate. Marjorie spent her whole adult life searching for her father and was able to discover the link; however, for many people, the current systems put up barriers to their being able to find out about their past. It is important to consider that, because, with advances in modern medicine, people want to investigate whether they are at risk from genetic diseases, cancers and other illnesses that might be passed through the generations. That is an important aspect of the debate, because it is only possible for people to investigate if there is a way for them to access family medical records. That is a debate for another day, but it is one that we should have, because people are asking the Parliament to consider the matter.

It is increasingly important—and, arguably, now a basic human right—that individuals know whether they are at risk from a genetic disease. I would welcome a response from the minister, perhaps in writing, about how that aspect of the debate can be considered.

The true extent of the scandal whereby mothers were forced to give up their babies for adoption between the 1950s and 1980s because they were not married is only now being truly understood. As others have done, I thank the *Sunday Post* and, most important, campaigning journalist Marion Scott, for the relentless campaign that they have led over a number of years to uncover the personal stories, which were difficult for the affected people to tell. For many women, that period of our history destroyed their right to a family life, and they have had to live with their experiences in secret.

Today, many of them will be reading stories about the scandal or watching interviews about it on national television—they might even be watching the debate. That will be retraumatising for them. In many cases, it will also be difficult, if not impossible, to tell their partners, children and grandchildren about that period of their personal history. Therefore, we need to ensure that consideration is given to what support must be made available for the women who come forward. I hope that ministers will start discussions about that as soon as possible.

Like Monica Lennon, I pay particular tribute to Marion McMillan, who is a truly remarkable lady. She has driven forward the campaign and should be incredibly proud of what she has achieved for so many women. Many people owe her a great deal for the strength that she has shown. If it had not been for her bravery in telling her heartbreaking story, many people would never have known about this dreadful human rights scandal in Scotland whereby 60,000 mums had their babies taken away and families were torn apart. The damage done was incalculable. It is only now that we know how many people were impacted, although it might be that we are really only starting to scratch the surface of the scandal.

I welcome the First Minister's commitment to examining how a national apology can take place. That would give Marion and many other women not closure but the opportunity to know that the nation acknowledges the pain that they have been through. I hope that the Scottish ministers will take care as they consider that and make sure that the Government gets it right.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to wind up fairly soon.

**Miles Briggs:** I will draw my speech to a conclusion.

I am concerned that the matter has sat on ministers' desks for far too long, as have other scandals such as the mesh scandal. I hope that we will see action. The pressure that has been brought by campaigners has led other countries to act, and it is important that we, as a nation, now act.

No one is pretending that an apology to the women can right the wrongs done to them, but I hope that a national apology will give many some comfort. These people are ageing and, in many cases, suffering ill health. We cannot right the wrongs of the past, but we can say sorry, support everyone as they move forward with their lives and acknowledge how negatively many of our fellow Scots have been impacted.

18:27

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** Welcome to your new role, Deputy Presiding Officer.

I thank my colleague Monica Lennon for securing this important debate. Monica's motion and, indeed, her work on the issue over many years have enabled us all to give voice tonight to the painful experiences of so many in our recent past.

I also highlight the work of my West Scotland colleague Neil Bibby with Paisley resident Marion McMillan, whose story we have heard articulated powerfully once again in the chamber. Neil is to be commended for his work with Marion on the issue over many years.

The emotion that has come through members' speeches shows how deeply and personally everyone has been affected by people's stories. We are at this point because of Marion and many like her who have bravely told their stories and argued tenaciously on behalf of the 60,000 women who were unfairly coerced, which resulted in their newborn babies being taken away from them simply because they were unmarried.

Much of what we have heard tonight is hard for us to imagine in today's context, but it is the heartbreaking truth about a dark moment in our history. That time must be confronted. There must be truth and the opening of doors to closure, reconciliation and on-going support.

Instead of trying to support women, society shunned them; instead of trying to understand, communities judged them; and instead of offering the care that they needed, people in positions of trust and in organisations where charity and compassion were supposed to be at the heart of their work took the children away, telling the women that it was for the best.

Many women were told that, if they truly loved their child, they would give them up. It is hard to

comprehend that level of emotional abuse and bullying, and the scars run deep. Constituents have contacted me—I am sure that many other members' constituents will have contacted them, too—to share their stories and make the case for an apology. For example, Jeannot Farmer from Bearsden has told me of the lifelong shame and grief that she has experienced and of the huge impact that the removal of her child has had not only on her life but on the lives of her loved ones.

Given that Australia, Canada and the Republic of Ireland have made apologies at state and national levels, it is time for the UK and Scottish Governments to make an apology. I commend the efforts of campaigners across the UK, and of Labour colleagues such as Harriet Harman, who are working to secure such an apology in the House of Commons. However, as Monica Lennon has said, we should not wait for the UK Government to act; we, in Scotland, should act.

I will now turn to the importance of an apology and the work that is required to underpin it. Trauma that is not transformed is transferred. The lack of closure and of a healing process leaves a huge void in the lives of many people, with pain relived every day. An apology in itself cannot take away the pain, but it can acknowledge it and begin a process of reconciliation that can lead to better long-term support for those who are living with trauma.

An apology must be accompanied by an inquiry that leads to better support, such as access to bespoke therapies and counselling services and sustainable funding for organisations that provide them. It cannot be acceptable, for example, that the only option for many women, when seeking counselling support, is to have it in settings where the walls are covered in posters that promote positive experiences of adoption. Bespoke services are needed and should be designed in line with the experiences and needs of those whom we have spoken about this evening.

I urge the Parliament and the minister to look at the outcome of the Australian Parliament's apology and inquiry—and, indeed, the Victoria state inquiry, which is due to report in August. That inquiry has already heard strong evidence from organisations that are calling for the provision of free specialist counselling and psychological services and a framework so that the services can be delivered independently. I think that there will be much in that report that we can learn from.

Saying sorry has power. This Parliament has power. In my first speech in the Parliament, I spoke about the power of the Parliament to make things right, and this is the place where an apology should be made. This is the place that Scotland looks to in times of joy and sorrow and in times of crisis and confidence. We have the power to say

sorry for the actions of the past, but we also have the power to take action to improve the present and the future. It is well past time for that to happen.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Clare Haughey. You have around seven minutes to respond to the debate, minister.

18:32

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I welcome you to your new position.

I thank Monica Lennon for bringing forward the debate, and I welcome the opportunity to make some closing remarks. In common with other members we have heard from during the debate, I am deeply saddened that, in the past, women felt forced to give up their children for adoption due to the prevailing moral and social norms of the time. The lives of the women, children and wider families who have been affected by the issue have been profoundly changed by the experience, and I offer my sincere sympathies for what they have endured. I thank the women for their commitment, courage and determination to come forward and have their voices heard. I do not for one minute underestimate how harrowing it is for them to revisit their experiences. Sadly, I am sure that doing so will have added to their pain.

The issue is complex and was influenced by many facets of society at the time. Those of us who have heard first-hand accounts or read research will have been moved, if not shocked, by the often heartbreaking experiences, such as mothers being prevented from seeing their baby during birth and birth mothers feeling pressurised into giving up their child.

The accounts that have been shared today have reiterated the terrible harm and long-lasting impact. The practices might well be historical, but the effect that they have had on the women is very real today. Sadly, we know from the numerous accounts of birth mothers' experiences that they suffered widespread social censure, condemnation, prejudice and stigma. Thankfully, those practices and morals have no place in our society today.

Two weeks ago, the First Minister agreed to look at the matter properly, fully and quickly, and I am equally committed to doing so. Having reached out to the Movement for an Adoption Apology, I am delighted that it has accepted my invitation to meet next week. I am actively working to establish future meetings with others who have been affected by the historical practices. No voice speaks louder on any issue than the voice of lived experience, and the opportunity to have discussions directly with women who have

suffered the trauma of separation and its lifelong effects is of paramount importance to me.

As members will know, I am fairly new to my role as the Minister for Children and Young People. However, I understand that the Movement for an Adoption Apology has campaigned for many years on the issue and has called on the UK Government to issue an apology.

I am acutely aware that the group recently reported that the adoption apology that the Republic of Ireland Government made earlier this year has "not been well received" and has been "described as 'political waffle'". That is why it is so important for me to have direct discussion with those who have lived experience of adoption under these circumstances. It is right that we look at the issue properly, and for me that means listening to the voices of women, children and wider families whose lives have been profoundly changed by the experience. By doing that, we can work in partnership on the next steps.

**Monica Lennon:** I welcome the discussions and meetings that the minister is about to embark on, but women such as Marion McMillan had meetings in 2015 and told their story then, and we are telling it again tonight. Can we get a commitment that the First Minister will attend those meetings, too? As we have heard, the women and their families do not have time. As a mental health professional, the minister knows that it is traumatising for people to have to tell their story over and over again. Can we get a commitment to speed up the process? We have freedom of information requests that show that, in 2015, ministers were told what to say before the women had even opened their mouths. Let us get a commitment from the minister that that will not happen again and that we can move forward towards the meaningful apology and support that the women and families need.

**Clare Haughey:** I certainly give a commitment that I will speak to everyone who wants to raise their voice. We are looking at ways in which we can ensure that we have the widest range of voices to inform us of what the women and their children need and want.

The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 requires local authorities to provide those who have been affected by adoption with the support that they require. Adoption support services are available across the country. In certain areas, that includes specialist agencies such as the Scottish adoption advice service, which is run by Barnardo's, and Scottish Adoption. Those specialist agencies run extensive and well-established information, intermediary and counselling services, with provision available to local authorities.

The Scottish Government funds and works closely with the organisation Birthlink, which provides services to individuals and families who have been separated by adoption. That includes maintaining the adoption contact register for Scotland. If any women, adoptees or others who have been affected by the issues need support, their first step should be to contact their local authority adoption agency, which will be ready and willing to support anyone in that position.

Although those supports are in place, I recognise that they might not provide everything that those who are campaigning on the issue feel that they need. That is why it is critical for me to understand what really matters to the women and how they feel that they can best be supported, to ensure that they are treated with the sensitivity and respect that they richly deserve.

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I have a question about a point of principle. I accept that neither the minister nor the First Minister, the Government or indeed the Parliament was responsible for the horrific actions and tragic circumstances that we are discussing. However, does the minister accept the principle that the Parliament is representative of the nation and, if the nation is to accept the wrongs that we did as a nation, the Parliament should speak with a united voice, which means that the Government should speak with a united voice to make the public apologies in order to provide closure for the women and should then follow that with adequate support? Does she accept the principle of that role and the role of the Parliament?

**Clare Haughey:** I will work really hard with the women and their families to find out exactly what they want, because there is no one voice in this. We have one shot at getting this right, so I want to get it right. I give Mr Sarwar a commitment that I will do my level best to assist in making the Parliament's voice heard. I am mindful that, as Miles Briggs mentioned, the issue has had a huge impact on the children who were separated from their mothers all those years ago, so it is equally important that their voices and experiences are heard, too.

Given the importance of the issue, I have written to the UK Government to discuss historical adoption practices, as I know that the matter is being discussed south of the border, as members have said.

Major shifts have occurred in adoption practice as well as across society as a whole. However, we are not complacent, and we know that more can be done. That is why, this year, the First Minister committed to implementing the findings of the independent care review's promise. The promise recommends keeping families together where it is safe to do so, and says that families must be given

support so that, together, they can overcome the challenges that are experienced in their lives. Where it is not possible for a child to remain with their birth family, it is crucial that all parties are given the appropriate support, including therapeutic support, as well as support through advocacy and engagement.

I would not want to single out any one of the powerful speeches that we have heard. Members have spoken eloquently about the experience that their constituents have brought to them. I say to every member who has participated that I have certainly heard their words and will take on board their considerations.

I once again reiterate my deepest sympathies to all those who have been affected by historical adoption practices in Scotland. Earlier, I referred to the bravery of the women who have made their voices heard. I am committed to listening to those women, to their children and to others who have been affected, and I am committed to working in partnership with them to explore our next steps.

*Meeting closed at 18:41.*



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