

MSP calls for Holyrood to donate old computers to Africa

Gordon Macdonald MSP raised the matter of computers in his Members' Debate in the Scottish Parliament last week, when he thanked the innovative partnership work that the Rotary Club and Turing Trust has undertaken in assisting over 41,000 students to gain vital digital literacy skills.

Gordon Macdonald has written to The Scottish Parliament Corporate Body, calling on them to partner with the Turing Trust once their current contract ceases.

Every PC the Trust puts into a school in Africa has been wiped (in compliance with military data erasure standards), repaired and loaded with offline educational resources – with this work being done by a team of dedicated volunteers in Edinburgh.

Their work also is having significant environmental benefits, with none of the computer equipment ending up in a landfill. All equipment donated to the Trust is appropriately recycled at end of life both in Scotland and Africa and by reusing old computers they have offset 2,058 tonnes of CO2 emissions – the equivalent of planting over 5,000 trees.

The MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands said: “The Rotary Club of Currie Balerno are doing incredible work locally and on an international scale, alongside with The Turing Trust. I was pleased to welcome them to the Parliament for this debate. They have supported over 41,000 students in becoming computer literate and over 450 teachers to gain skills in basic computer maintenance and are using computers to support their teaching.

“The Currie and Balerno Rotary Club are showing the global

difference that can be created through local actions and I would encourage people to get in touch with the Rotary Club, if you would like to get involved with their brilliant work.

“In order for these organisations to continue this important project, it is clear that more companies and organisations need to donate their old computer equipment. I want to encourage every organisation to consider collaborating with The Turing Trust to help increase the positive impact they are making in Ghana, Malawi and other African countries.

“I believe it would be a brilliant use of resources if the old computers from The Scottish Parliament were donated to the Turing Trust and put to use in schools in Africa. I look forward to pursuing this with the Corporate Body and helping the Trust to continue their great work.”

Lothians MSP Gordon Lindhurst also contributed to the Members' Debate on 9 January. During the debate he said : “Gordon MacDonald has set out the work that the club has done with computers. Why computers? We live in a globalised world, and those who are cut off from it can often be left behind. Fundamental to tackling the issue of poverty in Africa is equipping as many people as possible with the technology and support to work in that global environment. That includes equipping young people with the tools and skills to be able to learn and work in a world that is IT and technology driven in a way that our own young people in Scotland take for granted.

“There is much to be done to help to build that capacity for Africa so that people there can enjoy the same access that we often take for granted. Computer access is of course essential to that, which is why this is so important, as is the generosity of those who donate their old computers to the club.

“I conclude by highlighting a quote from the club's website, which is from a volunteer working in Africa as part of the

project. This gives a flavour of the impact that the work has on the people receiving the computers:

“The emotions on the teachers and students’ faces as we were setting up the computers is something I will treasure forever”.

“I end my speech by saying a big thank you to all the Rotary club members involved in this vitally important work.”

The Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development, SNP MSP Ben Macpherson, who visited Africa during 2018, spoke in the debate. He said : “As members said, technology is a hugely important aspect of international development. It has the capacity to make a major, life-changing difference to many of the world’s most vulnerable people and communities. By making technology such as computers and mobile phones available to the most vulnerable, we can improve people’s ability to hold their Governments to account, increase economic opportunity, empowerment and productivity, encourage learning and even save lives, through the provision of healthcare and health information.

“Many of the projects that are funded from the Scottish Government’s international development fund use old and new technologies to assist some of the most vulnerable people and communities to lift themselves out of poverty and build better futures for themselves and their children.

“For example, in 2012, we funded an innovative project, through Onebillion Children, which helped more than 30,000 Malawian pupils to learn maths through the medium of Chichewa, using interactive apps on iPads. Through the 2015 to 2018 Malawi development fund, the Scottish Government provided funding to Voluntary Service Overseas, in partnership with Onebillion, for its unlocking talent through technology project, which built on the 2012 grant by equipping classrooms in Kasungu district with mobile tablet technology, to enhance

instruction and enable highly tailored and interactive learning.

“Unlocking talent is now a nationwide educational initiative across Malawi, partly as a result of the progress that the project made. The initiative is now institutionalised in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology’s digital education technology agenda, with the goal to embed it in all 5,300 primary schools, covering roughly 4.4 million children across the country. Building on the subject of the motion today, this highlights the power and importance of partnership working, supporting small organisations and harnessing technology to reduce poverty.”

Transcript of Members’ Debate:
[https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?
r=11873&i=107388](https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11873&i=107388)