

Letter from Scotland

We've been basking in high temperatures this week – up to 25 Celsius in Kinlochewe, 24 in Glasgow, 22 in Edinburgh. And there is an unreal air of summer, as if it's the holidays already. But we know that it's still exam season and that there is an election on. And our fate in Europe is about to be decided.

That air of unreality wafted into the Scottish Parliament at question time on Thursday when the Presiding Officer forbade anyone from talking about the European election, to be held next Thursday. The Church of Scotland's annual General Assembly, meeting in Edinburgh over the coming week, will be religiously avoiding divisions over Brexit. One is hardly allowed to mention the subject for fear of embarrassing friends or boring them. And yet it's the elephant in every room.



Lazing on a sunny afternoon...in the Meadows.

Another large shadow which has been crossing the country is the debate on climate change. Following the declaration by parliament last week that we face a "Climate Emergency", Friends of the Earth have called for an end to all subsidies and new licences for oil and gas exploration and production in Scottish waters. They say the money should be used for clean energy production.

The Scottish Government says it's already promoting renewable energy and has brought forward its zero-net-carbon target to 2045. Last week it announced it was cancelling its planned cut in air departure tax and this week it announced an independent Energy Consumers Commission which will handle the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

Lecturers at Scotland's 26

further education colleges have been on a two-day strike this week over

pay. It's the fourth strike this year in what is turning out to be a trial of strength between the EIS union and the national colleges organisation, Colleges Scotland. The union says the pay rise being offered is worth 2 per cent over two years. The colleges say it's 3.5 per cent over two years plus a straight payment of £400. And it says nine out of ten lecturers are now earning £42,000 a year which is a good salary.

Speaking of good salaries. I was shocked to learn this week that the new boss of the savings and investment firm Standard Life Aberdeen, Stephanie Bruce, is getting a salary of £525,000 plus a £750,000 sign-on fee. Her two predecessors earned over £1m each, both men by the way, who presided over a profit slump and share collapse after the merger between Standard Life and Aberdeen Asset Management. Of course it's par for the course these days in which the average chief executive of the top 100 companies has a salary 145 times the national average. Do they really work 145 times better than the rest of us ?

Perhaps they are like pop stars or football stars who live in the world of supply and demand. The average weekly wage of a footballer in the English Premier League was £50,000 in 2017, the last time it was calculated. The fact that this is twice as much as in Germany, Italy or Spain might explain why the "best" players go to English clubs which end up playing each other in the European finals. The same salary differences explain why Celtic and Rangers end up at the top of the Scottish premiership. Surely football's governing bodies can devise a more level playing field.

Meanwhile in Ladies football, several of the players in the Scotland side need a day-job as well as their football to make a living. Happily that hasn't stopped them qualifying for the

World Cup and this week [Shelley Kerr](#) named her squad for France.



A member of the Up Helly Aa Jarl Squad 2018 participating in Tartan Day in New York.

I reported last week that the Scottish Highland Games Association decided to break with tradition and allow women's events at the games. This week

however, Shetland Island Council upheld a decision by the organisers of the Up Helly Aa festival to exclude women from the all-men Jarl Squads. How long, I wonder, can the Vikings hold out ?

Finally, Ben Nevis, as we know, can be a very dangerous mountain. Three climbers were killed in an avalanche there in March. But it can also be a gentle giant and last year an estimated 160,000 people trekked to its summit. The number of these pilgrims is growing and now the owner, the John Muir Trust, is worried about the mountain becoming over-peopled. An increasing number of groups and charity events are causing traffic jams at certain points on the tourist path.

The broadcaster and mountaineer Cameron McNeish says the Ben is being "loved to death" and he suggests that a permit system may have to be introduced, as in American National Parks. The John Muir Trust is more cautious but has asked for walkers to make a donation towards the upkeep of the path. Perhaps what the mountain needs is a really wet summer.